

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ASHUELLOT RIVER PARK ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, May 9, 2023

8:15 AM

Room 22,
Recreation Center

Members Present:

Arthur Winsor, Chair
Ruzzel Zullo, Vice Chair
Councilor Bettina Chadbourne
Suzy Krautmann
Thomas Haynes, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks,
Recreation & Facilities

Members Not Present:

Stephen Hooper
Paul Bocko
Dian Mathews

1) Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Winsor called the meeting to order at 8:17 AM. He designated Mr. Haynes as a voting member for the meeting.

2) Approval of April 11, 2023 Minutes

Ms. Krautmann made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 11, 2023 meeting. Vice Chair Zullo seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

3) Finance Report

Mr. Bohannon reported that the trustees approved the budget.

4) Report from Friends of Ashuelot River Park Arboretum

Leslie Casey reported that the Friends have started to clean up the park and monitor it for weeds. They had a couple work days. Mike Breshears gave the Friends a “shout out” in The Keene Sentinel’s ELF publication. He reported that the Friends would be working at the park at 9:00 AM on the first Saturday of the month and were looking for volunteers. No volunteers showed up. Chair Winsor suggested having a recurring request for volunteers in the ELF publication.

Ms. Casey reported that using a tarp and mulching were helping with the weeds, although knotweed was coming up around the edges of the covered area. She wondered about using a tarp to cover the area on the other side of the bridge, where the Friends hand pulled bittersweet. She reported that the park is looking good. The soil is getting healthier. There are more worms in the soil. The plants seem happy. She expressed that the Friends are off to a good start this season. The trees are doing as well as they expected.

The Friends pulled the barberry shrubs from along the bridge. Rainey Carlson lopped off some branches from a large barberry shrub near the entrance of the park, near the conifers, to see what the structure would look like without the shrub there. The Friends are considering removing the stump and root and replacing the shrub with an ornamental conifer. They are considering what to do with the bed near the handicap parking along the wrought iron fence by the Mascoma parking lot. There is a Jerusalem artichoke and some ornamental grasses in the area. There are a lot of vertical elements and then a squat conifer shrub that is past its prime and looks out of place. They would prefer it be removed. The rain garden is a work in progress. They have ordered plants for it. Chuck [Sweeney] has returned and may be working on getting it ready for planting. Ms. Casey noted Ms. Mathews planned to “man” a table at an upcoming volunteer recruitment fair.

Councilor Chadbourne arrived at 8:23AM.

Ms. Krautmann asked whether a tree on the adjacent property, possibly Mascoma’s, that is bent over into the park is dangerous. Mr. Bohannon said he would take a look.

Mr. Haynes asked whether there was any follow-up on the vandalism the Board discussed at the last meeting. Ms. Krautmann responded that she reported the vandalism to Eric Kress, [Franklin Elementary School principal,] who reported it to Forrest [Bencivenga, a teacher at the school]. Ms. Krautmann said that she and Ms. Mathews dismantled the damaged sculptures and put the pieces in the shed. It remains to be seen what pieces need replacing. She said that the school did not announce the vandalism to the students who worked on the sculptures. Chair Winsor said he told one of the students’ moms. The school plans to replace the damaged pieces eventually. Mr. Bohannon said his department would offer financial support for repairing the sculptures. Ms. Krautmann said she would let Ms. Bencivenga know. Ms. Krautmann suggested installing security lights or cameras. Mr. Bohannon indicated that the City is discussing security for all its parks. Mr. Bohannon said three sculptures remained. Mr. Kress told him students might be able to work on the sculptures on an ongoing basis.

Ms. Casey reported that the Friends’ first park cleanup day coincided with Green Up Keene day. They will try to schedule the first cleanup day next year on Green Up Keene day again. The first week of May is a prime time to get volunteers to help with weed management.

Rainey Carlson arrived at 8:27 AM.

Chair Winsor skipped ahead to agenda item 6 (New, Other Business) to accommodate a guest, Alyssa Bender, youth services manager for the City of Keene. Ms. Bender announced that, for the third year, they are hosting a Mental Health Awareness Day event in July. They want to expand the focus of this year's event from mental health to general wellness. Everglow and Yoga Space will be there. She would like to hold the event at Ashuelot River Park this year. The event was at Fuller Park last year, so they could coordinate with Movie under the Stars. There is more space to hold an expanded event at Ashuelot River Park. It is a more open, inclusive, vibrant space. There is better foot traffic. Only community members will be allowed to have tables, where they can provide information about resources in the community. Ms. Bender asked if the Board would like to be part of the event. It will be a day for positive energy, for people to get resources if they need them, and for focusing on wellness and mental health. The Mayor will declare it Mental Health Awareness Day.

In response to a question from Ms. Casey, Ms. Bender said the event would take place on Friday, July 14, likely from 4:30 PM to 7:00 PM. In response to a question from Chair Winsor, she said each participant would set up a table outside and have a self-care activity or another activity that would help the participant organization and others. They would also have yard games.

Ms. Krautmann wondered if there could be guided hikes through the park. Ms. Bender said yes. Mr. Bohannon noted the Serenity Center Recovery Rally would be the day after the event and would include hikes. The two events are totally separate.

Ms. Casey wondered if there could be a painting area, noting that Ms. Mathews is a watercolorist. Ms. Carlson said that was a great idea. She also noted how important gardening is to mental health. Chair Winsor said the Board is very supportive of the event. Ms. Bender said it is very important for mental health to stay active doing what you love, and the event would focus more broadly on various ways to provide self-care. Ms. Krautmann wondered if the library could host a story walk or story hour. Chair Winsor invited Ms. Bender to the June meeting to see if the Board has anything else to contribute.

Returning to the subject of the Friends, Ms. Carlson reported that she received a call from George Foskett, advising her that the Kiwanis Club has funds available to support the Friends. Mr. Bohannon echoed that they are looking for a project to support. He said he gave them a list of projects. Ms. Carlson suggested they could support work on the Rachel Marshall area. Mr. Bohannon said they want to support a specific project. He suggested they could donate a bench in memory of Brian Matson, who was a Kiwanis Club member. Mr. Bohannon said he is meeting with them later in the day and would discuss potential projects for the park with them. Mr. Bohannon said Mr. Haynes was instrumental in a significant project at Goose Pond, and another \$10,000 might help the project significantly. There are many potential projects. He wondered if they could support more art in the park.

5) Park Discussion – Master Plan Implementation
A) Rachel Marshall Area

Mr. Bohannon said Mr. Bocko wanted further consideration of creating a bird sanctuary with observation areas. Chair Winsor said that was just one idea. Ms. Carlson suggested installing nesting boxes. Chair Winsor noted there is a lot of potential for the area. Mr. Bohannon wondered if there are target species. He can speak with a local Boy Scouts troop about working on a simple project. Chair Winsor said he saw an osprey at Swanzy Lake. Even bald eagles are returning. Ms. Carlson said there are heron in the area. Ms. Krautmann said there are ducks.

Mr. Haynes noted Antioch University used to have a bird club, and if the club is still operating, students might be able to work on ideas or even a project for a bird sanctuary. Chair Winsor wondered about building an osprey platform like he saw in Rhode Island. Ms. Casey noted there might be an opportunity to get resources for eliminating the glossy buckthorn shrubs, as their berries are poisonous to birds, and replace them with native shrubs with good berries for the birds. Mr. Bohannon suggested the Audubon Society might have grants available. Ms. Casey said she would look into it. Mr. Bohannon noted what a good educational tool a bird sanctuary would be. He further noted that a bird sanctuary would meet the master plan. He wondered if the Keene Middle School's woodshop class might be able to do a project. He suggested they could make a donation to its Learning Lab.

B) Kiosk Information

Chair Winsor said Mr. Bocko put together a really well-written history of the park. A timeline has also been put together. He said he is counting on Steve Hooper to get some photographs from the Historical Society. Otherwise, the content for the kiosk is almost ready to submit to Peter Poanessa, who will lay everything out and provide them with a proof to review. As soon as he gets written materials from Ms. Mathews, he can get everything to Mr. Poanessa.

Mr. Bohannon said Mr. Poanessa installed the kiosk over the weekend. Ms. Carlson wondered if it was installed too close to a tree and suggested the tree would need additional trimming. Mr. Bohannon noted there might have been a misunderstanding between him and Mr. Poanessa about where to install the kiosk. Mr. Bohannon said the tree could be trimmed or removed and some adjustments made to some rocks and plantings, if necessary. Ms. Carlson noted that some large branches of the tree have already been removed. Several individual discussions about the placement of the kiosk ensued.

C) Bartlett Tree

Mr. Bohannon had nothing new to report.

Ms. Carlson reminded Mr. Bohannon to send her Beth Brantley's email address. Dr. Brantley is a research botanist or something similar for Bartlett. Ms. Carlson wants to talk to her about a couple trees in the park.

6) New, Other Business

A) Pollinator Palooza – June 22, 1:00 PM–3:00 PM

Ms. Casey reported that the Friends are putting together posters and other materials for a table at the event.

Mr. Bohannon noted that Amanda Littleton with the Cheshire County Conservation Commission put this event on for the first time last year. The event will be bigger this year, with more vendors, as well as plant sales. His department is providing some tables for the event, but Ms. Littleton and the Commission are organizing the event.

B) Keene Serenity Center Recovery Rally – July 15, 9:00 AM–5:00 PM

Mr. Bohannon said the Serenity Center is looking for partners for the rally. They will have a recovery walk through the Ashuelot trails. Southwest Community Services, Cheshire Medical Center, and the library will also be in the park.

He noted local organizations have started returning to holding events in the park. They promote the purpose of the park. The events do not impede the gardens in the park. There is more positive foot traffic. Ms. Carlson said the Friends are trying to keep the area behind Mascoma free of knotweed, so people can't hide out there. She noticed a chain link fence there was broken, then down, and now gone. Mr. Bohannon noted it was on private property. He said he would notify the property owner, in case it was an act of vandalism.

Chair Winsor said the Keene Senior Center contacted him about giving a presentation about the park. He said he would work with Mr. Bohannon on a presentation about the history of the park. This is a good way to do outreach about the park.

Mr. Bohannon advised the Board that the City Council is reviewing City meeting times. The Council may want all City meetings to be scheduled after 5:00 PM on weekdays or on weekends in order to accommodate more public participation. He thinks committees will have some flexibility to adjust meeting times, but it isn't clear. He asked for feedback from the Board to bring to the City Council. Councilor Chadbourne said the issue might have come up because many constituents expressed how upset they were that some of the public meetings about the Downtown Infrastructure Project were scheduled in the middle of a weekday. She noted most Councilors can't sit on this Board because of the morning meeting time, but because she is a professional gardener, the time works for her. Mr. Bohannon indicated the Board might have to change its meeting time.

Ms. Carlson said she doesn't think the Board's meetings generally attract a lot of citizens. She and Ms. Krautmann expressed that the Board should be able to schedule meetings for a time that works best for the Board, and a post-5:00 PM meeting time does not work well for the Board. Councilor Chadbourne noted many employers, like C&S, are very pro community and give

employees flexibility to attend City meetings. Chair Winsor noted post-5:00 PM is rough for retired people. He asked Mr. Bohannon to let the City Council know that the Board does not want to change its meeting time. Councilor Chadbourne said she believes the City Council's intent is not to target regular committee meetings but only special project meetings. She will convey the Board's position to the City Council.

Hr. Haynes said there is going to be a bird walk at Goose Pond on Sunday, May 28. He said a press release would be going out. Anyone interested in going can sign up with Mr. Bohannon's department.

Ms. Carlson suggested the Board check out the Rachel Marshall area to see the environment and the birds in it. Mr. Bohannon will see if any studies have been done in the past. Chair Winsor said he thinks Keene State College did a wildlife study at some point.

7) Adjourn – Next Meeting Tuesday, June 13, 2023 at 8:15 AM

There being no further business, Chair Winsor adjourned the meeting at 9:04 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Wendy Chen, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation and Facilities Director