

Greeley Park Advisory Committee
Mines Fall Conference Room
848 West Hollis Street

Date: May 13, 2026

Call to Order: 5:03PM

Attendees: Stephanie Ballentine, Vicki Donchess, Alyson Galipeau, Kathy Lodi, Fran Murphy, Richard Smart

Superintendent Bryan Conant

Guest: Director Matt Sullivan, Community Development

Call to Order: 5:05PM

Approval of Minutes – apparently not posted until today – paper copies were distributed to the Committee members.

Public Comment: no public comment

Director Matt Sullivan provided enlarged tabletop arial photographs of the entire areas of Greeley Park for reference throughout the meeting, to help attendees identify areas of discussion.

- Discussion Topic: River Frontage, wooded areas and trails within and disposition of the Beazer creosote contamination site. Environmental constraints, monitoring wells, and riverfront access discussed.
 - The fenced area remains under active monitoring; long-term access to monitoring wells is required, likely with fencing for legal protection against tampering.
 - Beazer, a former industrial owner, may consider redevelopment but would likely be hesitant about residential use due to groundwater contaminants (creosote); coal ash is present at roughly 3–4 feet depth, more to the north away from the Greeley Park side.
 - Extent of contamination at wells is unknown; a comprehensive remediation plan is needed.
 - The railroad is a major obstacle to formal crossings; approvals are unlikely in the near term. Any crossing is a long-term phase. Alternatives include improving existing informal connections and access via Hills Ferry/boat ramp.
 - Ownership and narrow corridors complicate forming a continuous riverfront path; a self-contained riverfront park may be more feasible.

- Conclusion: Environmental and railroad constraints limit near-term changes; pursue safer enhancements to current connections, consider a contained riverfront park, and coordinate with regulators/owners to understand restrictions.
- Topic: Park Vision, planning framework, and consultant options
 - Revisited the need for a Master Plan: prescriptive guidance for Greeley Park is needed; the committee seeks a unified, professionally mapped vision to replace the current patchwork feel, especially on the east side.
 - Matt Sullivan provided a list of five nationally known open space consultants; most are top-tier and very costly. Barry Dunn may be more affordable. Discussion of considerations and how to move forward on various attributes, Master Plan of Greeley Park.
 - Consider the “low hanging fruit”: separate low-cost, near-term actions (e.g., signage on Manchester Street, cleaning up buildings by the gardens) from longer-term master plan items; develop a tiered plan with short-, mid-, and long-term components.
 - Longer-term/mid-term projects will likely require professional expertise; short-term items could be phased into budgets.
 - Conclusion: Define area-specific goals before issuing an RFP, determine consultant scope and budget, and build a tiered plan starting with low-cost wins.
- Topic: Defining Park “zones” and parcels for planning – as they may relate to public use.
 - Agreement to distinguish clear zones for planning; proposed and referenced zones with preliminary acreages:
 - Manchester Street Gateway (~8 acres)
 - West Side Woods (~28 acres)
 - Stonehouse Historic Area (stone house, pool, gazebo, grills, picnic) (~13 acres)
 - East Side Recreation (band shell, ballfields, gardens, sheds, tennis/pickleball) (~32 acres)
 - Railroad Buffer (east side along tracks, access across tracks, potential path) (~11.5 acres)
 - Riverfront (between tracks and river, includes boat ramp) (~32 acres)
 - Some debate on historical total acreage (original deed ~160 acres vs. current ~124–125 acres); verify authoritative records.

- Conclusion: Six zones and preliminary acreages were agreed for reference; move toward, consider establishing clear boundaries and naming conventions.
- Topic: Desired development intensity and current uses
 - Preference among some members for low-intensity, nature-focused character; maintain bucolic setting while considering modest improvements to paths and access.
 - Athletic fields see heavy use most of the year; cross-country skiing occurs in winter. Manchester Street side hosts LARP; tennis courts and horseshoe pits are active in summer. The boat ramp area is wooded with river views; paths exist but are rough.
 - Local schools use park areas for gym classes; need clarity on fees, agreements, insurance, and liability. Field usage data can be pulled from RecDesk; softball fields are also used for cricket; 10–12 4v4 soccer fields currently used.
 - Conclusion: Preserve low-intensity character; validate field scheduling and school use policies; consider modest path/access improvements.
- Topic Title: Horseshoe pits access, club use, and potential modernization, public vs private use.
 - Historical contention over club priority vs. public access; conflicting views on availability due to league schedules and locked facilities.
 - Membership is reportedly lower; idea to remove four elevated pits and add cornhole to attract younger users.
 - Need clarity on policies, dues, public access, and league schedules.
 - Conclusion: No decision; pursue fact-finding on governance and modernization options.
- Topic: Victory gardens demand and possible expansion
 - Two-year waiting list; intended for city residents, though some may circumvent residency rules.
 - Ongoing public desire for additional Community Garden Plots – there is additional space adjacent to the westerly plots that is currently covered with brush, vegetative debris; this could possibly be cleared to provide additional garden space. Some plots were reconfigured this Spring to allow for additional and more equitably sized plot sizes. Kudos for that endeavor.
 - DPW buildings will remain until a new facility is available; one back building likely needs to stay for operations and events.

- Conclusion: Expansion is possible if operational needs are addressed and space is freed, subject to DPW needs.
- Topic: Trails, connectivity, conditions, and wayfinding
 - Trails from Manchester Street to the riverfront exist but are rough and damaged, with four-wheel vehicles causing safety issues for pedestrians and bikers; disc golf elements are gone.
 - Existing path runs near railroad tracks; crossing is difficult and informal. Improve signage from Manchester Street to trails; near-term wayfinding can increase awareness and use.
 - Long-term aspiration for a more direct, safe connection between park areas and the riverfront.
 - Conclusion: Implement near-term wayfinding and explore barriers, signage, and enforcement to deter off-road vehicle damage; plan for long-term safe connections.
- Topic: Historic features and sensitive areas
 - Interest in highlighting historic elements (Stone House parcel, original land grant, Cotton family philanthropy, Thoreau's Merrimack River ties.
 - A large rock/monument on a hill may mark a mass gravesite of early settlers; recommendation to investigate and further highlight the history in the future (discussion of ground-penetrating radar) before any development or clean up.
 - The area is used informally for weddings and activities (axes, archery lessons), raising sensitivity and safety questions.
 - Conclusion: Improve historical highlighting and undertake formal assessment of suspected gravesite boundaries prior to changes.
- Topic: Forestry management and tree safety
 - Noted lack of forestry management historically; safety concerns from dangerous trees (e.g., post-Barker property development) and hazardous paths related to falling branches/trees.
 - Proposal to hire a forestry company for selective cut, prioritize removing white pine, preserve hardwoods, improve safety and habitat health, rejuvenate growth, and potentially generate \$30–50k in revenue.
 - Anticipated public resistance; need strong PR emphasizing safety and access. Parks department capacity is limited; selective forestry would be a first step to avoid later disruption.

- Conclusion: Broad support for safety-led selective forestry and PR framing; formal decision and process to be defined.
- Topic Title: Safety, dumping, and homelessness along the riverfront
 - Historic issues of crime, dumping, and drug activity prior to the boat ramp; some issues have reoccurred.
 - A contractor recently cleaned an old homeless encampment; additional cleanups are being considered across riverfront areas.
 - The city owns extensive riverfront property, seen as a major opportunity.
 - Conclusion: Continue monitoring and cleanup to support safe public access and future improvements.

Future Considerations:

- Compile and share a list of all Greeley Park user organizations and their usage details; assign ownership and deadlines.
- Confirm horseshoe pits access policy, dues, public availability, league schedules, and facility locking; review agreements and governance.
- Identify and evaluate potential consultants (including Barry Dunn); define scope, budget ranges, and selection criteria for an open space plan. Consider funding options.
- Draft preliminary short-, mid-, and long-term goals for each of the six zones to inform an RFP and tiered plan.
- Propose and agree on official zone names, boundaries, and labeling; GIS (Sam) to produce six individual parcel maps.
- Verify current total acreage and boundaries of Greeley Park against historical deed; document changes.
- Map existing trails; design near-term wayfinding/signage from Manchester Street to riverfront paths; outline measures to deter off-road vehicle damage (barriers, signage, enforcement).
- Outline potential improvements to existing connections toward the riverfront; assess feasibility of a self-contained riverfront park and long-term railroad engagement.
- Assess feasibility of expanding victory gardens, including clearing brush/debris and coordinating with DPW operations.
- Coordinate with environmental regulators/owners to understand monitoring well restrictions, contamination constraints, and fencing requirements.

- Pull detailed field usage schedules from RecDesk for soccer, softball, and cricket; clarify school use policies (fees, agreements, insurance, liability).
- Investigate the hill monument area with appropriate methods (e.g., ground-penetrating radar) to confirm gravesite boundaries before development.
- Explore hiring a forestry company for selective cut; establish bid process, timeline, and community outreach; develop a safety-focused PR plan.
- Plan periodic riverfront cleanup and safety measures to deter dumping and encampments.
- Gather information on the Beazer property and retrieve DES information as requested; clarify specific permits/data needed.

Next Meeting will be on June 10, 2026

Meeting Adjourned at 6:07PM

Submitted by Stephanie Ballentine