

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, February 18, 2026

4:30 PM

Council Chambers,
City Hall

Members Present:

Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Hope Benik, Vice Chair
Anthony Ferrantello
Louise Zerba
Councilor Edward Haas

Staff Present:

Evan Clements, Planner / Zoning
Administrator

Members Not Present:

David Bergeron, Alternate
Russell Fleming, Alternate
Peter Poanessa, Alternate

1) **Call to Order and Roll Call**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called the meeting to order at 4:34 PM. Roll call was conducted.

2) **Election – Chair and Vice Chair**

Councilor Haas made a motion to nominate Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos as Chair. Ms. Benik seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Mr. Ferrantello nominated Ms. Benik for Vice Chair. Ms. Zerba seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) **Minutes: November 19, 2025 Regular Meeting**

Mr. Ferrantello made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of November 19, 2025. Ms. Zerba seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote. Councilor Haas abstained.

4) **Staff Updates – New Historic District Rankings Map & Table**

Mr. Clements stated that Planning Technician Emily Duseau did a great job of updating the map for the historic rankings within the district, as well as updating the spreadsheet of properties within the district with some additional information. He continued that in the agenda packet, he included a portion of the most relevant information in the spreadsheet. There are more columns with more information, and if the HDC would like the Excel file that has everything, he would

be happy to send it to them, and they could reorganize it however they want. That additional information includes, for example, the Land Use Code and the tax map parcel number.

Mr. Clements continued that this stuff has not gone live on the website yet because there is one more tweak Ms. Duseau wanted to do on the map first. He thinks she updated that after he had sent out the agenda packet. Once it is up on the website, he will send the links to the HDC. This map and this list are what staff use to understand what ranking category a project property is and what level of Historic District regulations will apply to the project.

Mr. Ferrantello asked if this changes the information the HDC members have in their binders. Mr. Clements replied yes. Mr. Ferrantello asked if they could get updated hard copies. Mr. Clements replied yes, he will get that for them.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she is looking at the spreadsheet information in the agenda packet, and it seems to not be organized in a particular way – for example, not by street, by year, or by ranking. Mr. Clements replied that that is a good catch; it seems to be all over the place. He continued that when he posts it online, he will probably organize it by street. As an FYI, they will notice that some properties are listed as Non-Contributing with an asterisk next to them. That is because those properties are not yet 50 years old.

5) Joint HDC and Heritage Commission Meeting – Wednesday, May 13th at 4:30 PM

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the HDC is supposed to have one joint meeting per year with the Heritage Commission, and they are due for one. She asked if Wednesday, May 13 at 4:30 PM works for people. She asked for anyone who knows they cannot be there to let her and Mr. Clements know, so they can assure quorum. Mr. Clements stated that if the HDC does not have an application in May, it is up to the Chair whether they want to have a separate HDC meeting the week after the joint meeting or just count the joint meeting as their monthly meeting. He continued that if there is an application, they will need to meet. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that the odds are good that they will only need to meet once in May.

6) New Business

Mr. Ferrantello stated that he would like to discuss the status of the HDC's collaboration with Keene State College (KSC), because the end result of the initiative is to get interest in what the HDC does and the historic fabric Keene has. He thinks the presentation was received well. He does not want this to lose momentum, now that they have all the students geared up to give that presentation. The next step is to stay with the architecture department chair and ask him what his next step is, to keep the momentum going. The chair told him that his students would need new houses/buildings to canvas, maybe in the fall. He is curious to see at what level or for what time period they are going to use the existing assessment and bring it to different layers of information so that they have a way to get information out to the public about the significant architectural features. He does not know where things are at right now; he thinks they are at a standstill, since the presentation was a high point and now that is complete. He thinks he should reach out to the chair, check in, and try to keep the momentum going.

Ms. Zerba stated that Mr. Ferrantello had mentioned that the next step with the existing buildings was to have the students look at the history as well as write up all the architectural features. She asked if that would be the next step before they move on to new homes. Mr. Ferrantello replied yes, sequentially, that is what would happen. He continued that they would take the existing assessments and filter through different layers of more information, such as who has owned the house, whether the architectural features were harmed in any way through the years or whether they are still intact, the connections of that particular motif to wherever in history it originated from, and things like that.

Mr. Clements stated that his understanding was that the fall semester was an analysis of the built form of the existing homes, and the spring semester coursework was going to be more related to what Mr. Ferrantello was just describing. He continued that the HDC needs to figure out how they want to engage with the spring semester, and start thinking about new project properties for the next fall term. Mr. Ferrantello agreed, and added that the question is whether the previous students, who were juniors, will follow through with their initial assessments, or if they are moving on to different curricula and there will be different students taking on this task. Discussion ensued. Mr. Clements replied that he thinks students have some flexibility on their senior practicum and they might be able to self-select a project like that. Mr. Ferrantello stated that the students who did the presentation seemed really psyched. He continued that they talked about how they juxtaposed the old tax maps with what they found on site, and they were different, and they had to reconcile it. It made the students think about how things change over time. Mr. Clements replied yes, that kind of thing happens frequently.

Mr. Clements stated that the question is how they tie this all back. Mr. Ferrantello replied that they tie it back to how influential all this stuff can be towards citizens of Keene. Will it influence their awareness of what Keene has? Will they care? Is there an aesthetic element to all of this that people will appreciate? He thinks there is. He continued that it would be good to get this out to arts groups and various other groups in the city that will take it and run with it. They should also ask the chair of KSC's architecture department how he will involve the film department and other arts departments and make it multidisciplinary. That would be exciting. And again, how to turn this around and make it impactful to Keene so people are aware of it. That is the trick – a large volume of work is nothing if it is not publicized.

Ms. Benik stated that the last time the HDC met, they talked about maybe getting an article in the newspaper. She continued that Mr. Ferrantello had reached out to someone at City Hall, which she thinks was put on hold. As she recalls, this was born out of the idea of exposing the HDC to the public, so her thought was what they can do that they can put on social media or just media in general. The question is how to expose more people to what the HDC is doing, so that this is not just corralled to the students and professors. How can the HDC showcase that they are working with KSC, to get the attention on the HDC?

Mr. Ferrantello replied that the students are experts in social media. He continued that the students can do it, for the benefit of themselves, KSC, and the HDC. It would benefit all of them. Mr. Clements stated that they have communications and social media resources through the City. He continued that it is a matter of the HDC generating content that they can hand off to the City's social media team to publicize and promote. The City's social media team does not have

the capacity to help the HDC create the content, beyond limited editing. It is on the HDC to come up with a game plan, and then if they want to do, say, 5-second video clips, they could schedule with Asah Cramer to help shoot some video. It is the HDC's responsibility to do the thinking ahead of time, so they have a vision and plan.

Mr. Ferrantello replied that he likes that, and they could capture people's attention with a question like, "Did you know that this Corinthian column has references to such and such that this particular building showcases?" Ms. Benik replied that she was thinking, rather, the question should be, "Did you know Keene has a Historic District Commission?" She continued that they could first explain their existence and their work. Mr. Clements replied that coincidentally, Ms. Cramer and the Communications Team are doing just that – introductions to the boards. He continued that they can dig into that a little bit. Promoting what they have started, and the relationship between the HDC, KSC, and the City, is important.

Mr. Ferrantello stated that he saw a sign advertising a "Meet Your Councilor" gathering every Thursday morning, and he is thinking out loud, but a "Meet a Historic District Commission member" gathering could be good. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she thinks it would be possible to put together a two- or three-minute video of the students' work to put on social media. She continued that she does not know the exact terminology, since the HDC did not put any money towards this, but the initial video could say something like "Sponsored by the Historic District Commission," which would, as Ms. Benik suggested, let the public know the HDC exists. She continued that there could be one video for each student's project.

Councilor Haas asked if the students' presentation in December was the last time anyone from the HDC has been in touch with them. Mr. Ferrantello replied yes. Councilor Haas replied that he thinks it is incumbent upon the HDC to reach out to them as soon as possible, such as tonight or tomorrow, to reassure them that they are still loved. He asked if the presentations the students did at KSC exist in the form of a slide show or video, or some other format that can be shared. Discussion ensued. Mr. Ferrantello stated that he did not see anyone filming. Councilor Haas stated that he can think of many ways to publicize the students' work, and they should, but first, they should reach out to the students so they do not think it was just another forgotten thing from the City. Mr. Ferrantello stated that it would also be good to continue to keep the homeowners in the loop, the people whose homes were showcased in the presentations.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she is a big fan of action items. She asked who will take on reaching out to the students. Mr. Ferrantello replied that he will do it.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that regarding creating some videos for social media, the first step is probably to come up with a length and a basic format for content. She continued that the HDC is meeting next month. Mr. Clements stated that he, too, was going to suggest that they come up with some action items for building the frameworks for what they are envisioning. He continued that it would be great to nail those things down next month and come up with a game plan. Mr. Ferrantello spoke about how the students have photos of the buildings. He continued that if the students do not have those, the next task would be to go out and photograph and film the buildings.

Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the homework for next month is for each of them to brainstorm what they envision a two- to three-minute video about each of these projects would include, as a basic format. She continued that it is important to keep in mind that it is up to the HDC, with some help from Ms. Cramer, to actually execute this, so they should keep it doable and not get too carried away.

Ms. Zerba asked if they are talking about the houses' interiors or exteriors. Mr. Ferrantello replied mostly exterior, because that is what the HDC is all about – they are tasked with approving or disapproving external things like roof materials. Interiors are a different ball game, but it is part of the students' assessment if they are willing to go that deeply.

Mr. Clements stated that he thinks there is potential synergy involved with the work of the Heritage Commission. He continued that it might be worth combining forces a little bit with that group. Mr. Ferrantello replied that they met a woman from the Heritage Commission, Rosie Carey, who has been filming a few things already. He continued that maybe they should check in with her, and with KSC, to see how they could collaborate. Mr. Clements replied that he would suggest being conscious of "scope creep." Mr. Ferrantello replied that to get the excitement going, they have to really get the big picture and then hone it down.

Councilor Haas stated that he suggests the HDC members circulate their ideas amongst each other via email, without responding and without deliberating, so that when they come to the next meeting, they can be prepared to talk about the ideas and make some progress. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked Mr. Clements if it is correct that HDC members could email things to him, and he could share it with the whole group, and they should avoid hitting "reply all" so they are not discussing anything as a quorum. Mr. Clements replied yes, they need to comply with RSA 91:A, which means not discussing anything as a group over email, because that would be creating a meeting. He continued that he recommends setting a deadline for everyone to have their notes done by. Everyone can send what they have to him, and he can compile it into a document to share with the HDC ahead of time, so everyone can review everyone's thoughts and ideas.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the next HDC meeting is March 18. She suggested March 11 as the deadline for getting notes to Mr. Clements. She asked if that works for him. Mr. Clements replied yes, and then he will include the document in the agenda packet, which he will get out by March 13 at the latest. HDC members can start sending him notes and ideas as soon as they have them, with a March 11 deadline.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that the other action is that Mr. Ferrantello kindly offered to communicate with the architecture department chair. Mr. Ferrantello replied that he will do that tomorrow.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if there was any other new business.

Ms. Zerba asked if Mr. Ferrantello can, for the benefit of HDC members who were not at the presentations, explain how far along the students went with the houses. She continued that she is curious about that, as the HDC starts to think about how they would like to proceed. Mr.

Ferrantello replied that students put their posters and their work on the wall, and each poster had floor plans and elevation sections. He continued that that is the beginning of documenting the architectural arrangement of these homes. They went pretty far, because to get to that conclusion, they had to make an appointment with the homeowner, field measure everything, take photographs, then generate all these things. It took quite a while to get to that point, and he thinks there was an excellent result. Ms. Zerba replied that it would be nice if the students could display those at the Keene Public Library. Mr. Ferrantello replied that he can ask the chair if those posters are still alive and accessible, and whether they could be given to the Library to display. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that they would need to have the Library's buy-in on that. Ms. Zerba replied that she thinks the Library would be interested. Councilor Haas replied that the Library did display those models that the architecture students created for Gilbo Ave. redevelopment several years ago, so there is precedent.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if Mr. Ferrantello, since he will be communicating with the architecture department chair tomorrow, can ask whether those posters are still available and whether they would like to potentially display them at the Library. She asked if Ms. Zerba could communicate with the Library, if so. Ms. Zerba replied that she can do that. Mr. Ferrantello replied that if he finds out that the posters are available and the students and chair are interested, he will communicate with Ms. Zerba, and CC Mr. Clements on the email. Mr. Clements replied yes, Mr. Ferrantello should just email him and Ms. Zerba, not the whole group. He continued that he could also help with talking with the Library if they need that.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if there was any other new business. Mr. Clements stated that when the HDC meets in March, he will have more information available about that "meet your boards and commissions" initiative that is going on.

7) **Upcoming Dates of Interest**

A) **Next HDC Meeting: March 18, 2026 at 4:30 PM**

B) **HDC Site Visit: March 18, 2026 at 3:30 PM (to be confirmed)**

Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if it is correct that as of now, there is no site visit for March. Mr. Clements replied that is correct. He continued that currently, they do not have any regulatory applications.

8) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos adjourned the meeting at 5:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reid, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Evan J. Clements, AICP
Planner/Zoning Administrator