

ADOPTED

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AD HOC DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, September 13, 2017

4:00 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall

Members Present:

Councilor Gary Lamoureux
Councilor Carl Jacobs
Councilor Mitch Greenwald
Jack Dugan
Katie Sutherland
Shannon Hundley

Staff Present:

Medard Kopczynski, City Manager
Duncan Watson, Public Works

Members Not Present:

Luca Paris
Shane Gormley
Cheryl Belair
Kevin Dremmel

Kendall W. Lane, Mayor

1) **Call to Order**

Mayor Lane called the meeting to order at 4:06 PM.

2) **Approval of Minutes – August 23, 2017**

Councilor Greenwald made a motion to accept the minutes of August 23, 2017, which was seconded by Ms. Hundley and carried unanimously.

3) **Board Business**

a. **Review of Downtown Survey**

The Committee discussed possible changes to the meeting time. They decided to explore the possibility of the first Tuesday of the month at 9:00 AM further.

Mayor Lane began discussing the Downtown survey; he asked what “Downtown aesthetic” means in question one (Q1, etc.); the phrase is currently written in quotes. He said there are many different environments and images within Downtown and is unsure what this is intended to mean. Councilor Jacobs said it is the word “aesthetic” that is

confusing. Councilor Greenwald thought Q1 was asking about buildings, trees, sidewalks, etc. Mayor Lane replied that Downtown is not limited to three-story brick buildings, for example. This question may make sense for Main Street, but not the entirety of Downtown; Ms. Sutherland agreed noting she thinks the diversity of sizes, ages, and facades of buildings distinguish our Downtown. Mayor Lane agreed some of the questions are confusing. Ms. Sutherland suggested stating, "Where do you think the Downtown look/feel/footprint should be applied?" She said the word "aesthetic" complicates it, and quotations are unneeded. Councilor Greenwald agreed this Committee defined Downtown as a big area with a variety of looks/uses/feels, and while it is the center of economic activity, a broad range of things fit into it.

Councilor Greenwald asked if the word "Downtown" should be changed to "central core" to include everything. Councilor Jacobs noted the Committee had discussed everything south of the College. Councilor Greenwald replied yes, but in Downtown there is the central core and peripheral. Ms. Hundley said Q1 is about the map and where Downtown should extend. Mayor Lane said an "all of the above" option should be included.

The City Manager suggested swapping Q1 and Q3; the new Q3 would be Q1, incorporating what is in Q1 and Q2 and still eliminating the word "aesthetic." Mr. Watson agreed because this question is really trying to ask if the central core of Downtown should expand further. He added this is not a standalone survey; the consultants will combine it with the ideas from the visioning forum. Councilor Jacobs said that when defining Downtown, the Committee noted it can be defined in terms of both appearance and function. That is why the Committee broadened the scope of the map to include where people live, work, and what makes it vibrant and different.

Mr. Watson also recalled the consultants concern that the questions not be leading or biased, which is why some are more generic. Mayor Lane noted another word of caution is that this is about revitalization and we do not want to only hear the popular decision. He said this project needs to be creative, innovative, and forward thinking beyond the current perspective of most on the street; once that idea is developed, it will be promoted to the public. Many responses will be driven by what people want right now, not necessarily with the thought of 15-30 years from now.

Councilor Jacobs said there are people interested in what is happening Downtown and this survey does not cover activities. He said activities dictate the appearance, and appearance dictates activities; he noted Mr. Dremmel's interest in small-scale, desirable performance spaces. He asked how we can create these spaces for people to come Downtown and support businesses. He said it is a balancing act between appearance and function. Mayor Lane agreed that balance is not currently represented in the survey.

Ms. Sutherland noted Keene's Downtown does not have cohesive architectural features; the survey should ask about intriguing architectural features that will inspire people to do something interesting with their properties.

The City Manager said the whole survey is currently about appearance and asked if the survey should aim to be 50% appearance/50% utilization. Ms. Hundley noted Q4 started to address utilization from an amenities perspective. Councilor Jacobs said it is more about space than activity; he also suggested asking if there are activities people want to see Downtown like concerts, etc. Mayor Lane noted a primary activity that grew Downtown in the last 30 years is outdoor dining; there is no question asking if people want that to continue or expand. The survey talks about space for outdoor dining but Mayor Lane would like a specific question about it because the public have never been surveyed about it.

Councilor Greenwald said he could check every box on every page of the survey. Mayor Lane agreed they should all say "all of the above." Councilor Lamoureux suggested having the responses ranked instead of just choosing. Mr. Watson said he thinks this is trying to engage people and get their opinions; these topics will be discussed in more depth at the visioning forums, which he noted will take place at the old Ingenuity Country Story.

Councilor Greenwald asked if there will be discussion about where money for this revitalization will come from and implications for private property. Mayor Lane said that is a legitimate question the City will have to address at some point but until we know what we want to create, we cannot know the cost or timeframe. He anticipates this being phased in over a long time period once the ultimate goal is realized, whether through City money, federal grants, etc. Mr. Watson said there will be a number in the upcoming Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) that this Committee can weigh in on. He included some numbers for infrastructure, like drainage, and next steps could be aesthetics as it is put back together.

Mr. Dugan noted there is nothing in the survey about why or why not people come Downtown right now; followed by asking what would change their mind. He said this leads into use and utilization; the real question is about getting people on Main Street, with money, and this survey is not asking them why or how. Mayor Lane agreed this Committee has assumed Downtown is transitioning from a retail to cultural center but we do not really know why people do or do not come Downtown. He said if this survey provides insight as to why, there will be opportunities to overcome those objections with their suggestions and this Committee's plan. He does not think the answer will be clock towers or historic materials.

Councilor Jacobs suggested the following responses should be removed from Q4: green infrastructure (such as porous pavement); bicycle facilities and bicycle lanes; traffic calming; and additional parking. He said doing so would leave space for more cultural responses. Mayor Lane suggested greenspace is important and to leave that in the list and add recreational space; everyone agreed. Councilor Greenwald said he is more interested in taxable space; for example, if developable space on Gilbo Avenue is turned into parking, a building, or greenspace. Ms. Hundley said a park could still draw revenue; Councilor Jacobs agreed the arts can be a real economic driver. Councilor Greenwald noted he is coming around to that idea. Mayor Lane said the value of green/recreational

space Downtown is that the number of apartments Downtown is increasing dramatically. He said if we want apartments full and paying taxes, the amenities Downtown must be appealing; amenities may not pay taxes, but they contribute to those who do pay taxes.

The City Manager and Mr. Watson summarized suggested changes and asked for any additions:

- Add an explanation of the reason for the survey, inviting participants to the visioning sessions
- Make the survey two parts: appearance and utilization
 - Remove Q9-Q15
 - Keep Q16-Q18
 - Change the order of Q7 & Q8
 - Add a sub-question to Q16 asking if people will walk further for free parking (the Committee agreed the maximum time it would take to walk through Downtown is 10 minutes)
 - Remove and add options to Q4
- A specific question about peoples preference for outdoor dining
- Ask why people do or do not come Downtown
- Ask what amenities would encourage existing, new, or potential apartment dwellers
- The questions about benches/trashcans, etc., are too specific and very low level at this point

Ms. Hundley asked how long the survey will be available. Mr. Watson replied until the end of the visioning forums on September 28. There will then be a follow-up review after the consultants have analyzed the data before it goes to Council. He will notify the Committee when the survey is live so they can share and promote it. Mayor Lane said it can also be sent to Chamber of Commerce, who will share it with their membership. Mr. Watson continued that the visioning forums will be like a design collaborative with open-ended idea sharing. He will send the finalized survey to the Committee before it goes live for only very important changes and comments.

Mayor Lane noted this survey does not address parking meters. Councilor Lamoureux recalled his idea from the last meeting that because Council is already moving forward with the parking kiosks, he does not think this Committee should challenge that because there have been no complaints about the change. They are a part of the Downtown aesthetic now and they streamline parking enforcement. The City Manager noted there needs to be another presentation to Council on parking and he will get that on the agenda.

The survey will be live on Monday, September 18.

4) New Business

Mayor Lane noted the Committee will need to talk soon about traffic lights Downtown. A petition recently arose that was referred to this Committee about the length and time of traffic lights that allow people to cross the street. He asked everyone to start paying

attention to the lights Downtown and that will be the primary topic next meeting; the Traffic Light Technician will attend the next meeting to try to make temporary recommendations. Councilor Greenwald noted the need for a left turn Lane from Central Square onto Roxbury Street; Mayor Lane agreed the signage is confusing if you are not a resident.

5) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Mayor Lane adjourned the meeting at 4:49 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker