

City of Keene
New Hampshire

COLLEGE / CITY SPECIAL COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, January 25, 2016

4:00 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room

Members Present:

Co-Chair Chris Cusack
Dick Berry
Chris Hrynowski
Marcia Kayser

Paula Jessup
Phil Jones, Councilor
Dottie Morris
Kelly Ricaurte

Members Not Present:

Staff Present:

Andy Robinson, KSC Liaison
Tara Kessler, Planner

1) Call to order –

Co-Chair Cusack called the meeting to order at 4:08 p.m. and roll call was conducted.

2) Review Minutes – December 7, 2015

Councilor Jones made a motion to adopt the minutes of the December 7, 2015 meeting with the following corrections/changes:

- Page 4 of the minutes, last full paragraph, second sentence states, “Currently, the College does not [have] a point person focused on stormwater infrastructure.” Co-Chair Cusack noted that Frank Mazzola, KSC Director of Physical Plant, would be the point person at KSC to address the topic of stormwater.
- Remove Dick Berry from the section, Members Present, and add to the section, Members Not Present.

Ms. Kayser seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

3) Commission Membership –

Co-Chair Cusack mentioned that President Huot would be meeting with a few students to discuss potential interest in serving on the Commission. President Huot is also in the process of trying to find a replacement for Mr. Sapeta, who resigned from the Commission at the end of 2015. Ms. Kessler mentioned that the Mayor has identified a few individuals to fill recent vacancies on the Commission. However, he has yet to share these nominations with the full City Council. The Mayor will be meeting with President Huot in the near future to discuss the future Commission structure and charge.

4) Discussion on Recommendations for Parking/Infrastructure, Property/Tax Base

Ms. Kessler stated that a draft set of recommendations were included in the packet for this meeting. These recommendations were developed based on previous discussions had by the Commission around the theme areas of parking/infrastructure and property/tax-base. She asked the Commission members to share their thoughts, questions, or suggested edits to these recommendations.

Ms. Kayser stated that she thinks an important recommendation would be to install a flashing beacon on Winchester Street near the intersection with the bike trail and Foundry Street. Ms. Jessup stated that it is very dark in this location and lighting is important.

Ms. Kayser asked about the project to reconstruct Winchester Street. Ms. Kessler responded that it is a project included in the NH Department of Transportation's (DOT) Ten Year Plan to reconstruct Winchester Street in the area between Island Street and the NH Route 101 roundabout. The design phase for this project is scheduled for this year and there will be the opportunity for a Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) approach to the development of this project, as this project will be administered locally. CSS is a process that involves all stakeholders including community members, elected officials, interest groups and any affected local, state and federal agencies. Councilor Jones noted that the NH DOT sometimes utilizes City Council meetings as a forum for gathering input on proposed transportation projects. Councilor Jones recommended that representatives from the City, including Kurt Blomquist, Public Works Director, and Don Lussier, City Engineer, meet with representatives from the College, including Frank Mazzola, Director of the Physical Plant, and Daniel Petree, Interim Vice President for Finance and Planning, meet to discuss the project. Mr. Berry noted that the area along Winchester Street east of Island Street is not included in this project and that there may be opportunities to address potential improvements to this corridor.

The Commission discussed concerns about the prevalence of bars in Keene's downtown and in areas near the College campus. Questions were raised about a recent proposal to develop a bar on Ralston Street near the Mills student housing. Commission members questioned whether it is possible to restrict bars from being located in neighborhoods near the College campus. Mr. Berry mentioned that the concern for substance and alcohol misuse in Keene and Cheshire County was addressed at the NH Listens Forum. Ms. Kessler asked the Commission to consider and share their thoughts a potential recommendation to address this concern. Ms. Jessup addressed her concern regarding the abundance and prevalence of bars in the downtown and the impact it has on the area.

Mr. Berry encouraged the Commission to consider developing a recommendation to create a vision for the area around Ralston Street and between Winchester Street and Gilbo Avenue. He continued noting that this plan should present ideas for what this area should look like and propose relevant zoning recommendations that support this vision. Councilor Jones noted that Ralston Street needs to become more pedestrian friendly. Ms. Kayser stated that Complete Streets demonstrations similar to the one conducted on Marlboro Street might be an opportunity for this area to show-case potential ideas for improvement.

The Commission spoke about the need to fix lighting and improve or install crosswalks along Winchester Street in the area between Main Street and Island Street. The Commission also discussed the importance of pedestrian safety improvements along Main Street between NH Route 101 and the Main/Winchester/Marlboro Streets roundabout. Ms. Kayser asked if KSC has an issue with pedestrian safety. Mr. Robinson noted that the Safety Director identifies areas of darkness on campus. He commented that the installation of flashing lights at the crosswalks along Winchester Street have significantly improved pedestrian safety in this area.

Paula Jessup mentioned that Pathways For Keene might have an interest in installing lighting along the bike path. Ms. Kayser questioned whether there are grant opportunities, such as LCHIP or the Conservation License Plate Grant Program, that might be available to help support Complete Streets recommendations in the area near the College. Mr. Berry mentioned that there is federal funding available through NH DOT for these types of transportation improvement projects. Ms. Kessler will speak with Mr. Schoefmann in the City Planning Department to discuss proposed improvements to the City's trail

networks. A question was raised as to how the recently adopted surcharge to the motor vehicle registration fee is being used.

Ms. Jessup noted that the earlier phase of this Commission's work around the themes of housing and citizenship had involved extensive public outreach. She asked the Commission whether a public forum should be held to discuss the themes and proposed recommendations for this phase of the Commission's work. Mr. Berry suggested that the setting of a Council Committee meeting might be appropriate for the public to review and comment on the recommendations proposed by the Commission around the themes of parking/infrastructure and property/tax-base. Mr. Robinson explained that the reason for the extensive public involvement process was the controversial nature of the earlier theme areas. Ms. Jessup responded that she feels the issue of property/tax-base could potentially be a controversial issue that warrants more public involvement. The Commission members discussed options for holding a community forum or information meeting. Ms. Ricaurte noted that she likes the idea of more public input, however she is concerned that the focus of any meeting or forum might shift to the issues addressed in the first phase of the Commission's work, specifically, those related to Pumpkinfest and student behavior. Ms. Jessup noted that the meeting(s) would be focused on the issue of property/tax-base. Mr. Berry noted that he thinks the focus of such a meeting would end up being on the future use of the Gilbo Avenue property, which is currently owned by KSC. Councilor Jones stated his concern that such a meeting or conversation could be redirected to topics or issues that are outside the focus of the Commission.

Ms. Ricaurte suggested having a presentation on the second phase report and offering a period for public comments and input. Mr. Robinson suggested the idea of placing an advertisement in the Sentinel seeking public comments on the second phase report, which could be posted online. Mr. Berry noted that not everyone has internet access. Co-Chair Cusack suggested utilizing other media outlets such as the radio stations and the local cable channel. Mr. Berry noted that there is a process established by the City for addressing information or recommendations produced by the Commission. The City Council would receive a copy of the draft report and refer it to a Council Committee. The Council Committee meeting addressing this topic would be a time for the public to learn about the report and to provide comments or ask questions.

Ms. Jessup mentioned that it is important to address these issues and the report in a positive and productive manner. Ms. Ricaurte noted that the process for addressing these issues and the work of the Commission has been positive; however, she feels the specific issue areas will inevitably cause negative reactions. Ms. Kessler noted that there is an opportunity to address many of the positive outcomes of the Commission's work. Some of these successes include the recent hiring of Robin Picard, the new KSC Coordinator of Student and Community Relations, which is the position left vacant by Alison Riley.

Councilor Jones recommended that the Commission wait to have full membership before any public forum might be held or scheduled. Ms. Kayser suggested that a forum similar to the one held by NH Listens in early 2015 could be considered for the Commission's future work on a new charge.

Co-Chair Cusack suggested the second phase report consider potential sources of funding to support some of the recommendations.

Ms. Kessler noted that the discussion on how to further engage the public on the second phase report would continue at the next meeting.

5) Next Steps

Co-Chair Cusack noted that he recently spoke with President Huot about the next phase of the Commission's work and its future charge. He noted that President Huot identified the topic of housing as an important area to continue discussion and focus. She is specifically interested in the opportunity to

help guide a transition from student rental housing in the Southeast Keene neighborhoods to housing that is occupied by families and professionals. Ms. Kayser mentioned a program in Utab that is a rehabilitation home for the homeless population. Mr. Berry asked if there is funding available for transitional housing. He also inquired about the status of the Mills and Arcadia private housing for students (i.e. how many units are occupied). There was a comment made about the importance of wayfinding and having mobility options available for helping students get from off-campus neighborhoods to campus.

Ms. Kessler noted that she would speak with Mayor Lane about his thoughts about the future work and focus of the Commission.

A number of Commission members emphasized the importance of highlighting the positive work that has come out of this Commission as well as from the City and College.

Councilor Jones mentioned the importance of raising awareness of KSC's work in the community and of collaborating with the KSC to enhance opportunities for community involvement. He asked if the City Information Technology Department might be able to help with this effort. He mentioned potential ideas for such partnerships including collaborating with the College to paint a water tower in the City that needs to be refurbished, having the track team work with youth, having the dance troupe work with the Recreation Department, etc.

6) Next Meeting

Commission members agreed to meet next on Monday, February 29, 2016.

7) Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 5:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tara Kessler, Planner
March 22, 2016