

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES, AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

**Wednesday, September 23, 2015 6:00 pm City Hall, 2nd Floor, Council
Chambers**

Members Present:

Philip M. Jones, Vice Chair
Sheryl A. Redfern
Janis O. Manwaring
Robert J. O'Connor

Staff Present:

Public Works Director Kürt Blomquist
Assistant City Manager Med Kopczynski
Planner Tara Germond

Members Absent:

James P. Duffy, Chair

Others Present:

Councilor David R. Meader

Vice Chair Jones called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and explained the procedures of the meeting.

1. COMMUNICATION – Tom Link/Partner City Committee – Placement of Signs at the Entrance of the City

Tom Link, Chair of the Partner City Committee (PCC), stated that the PCC has been in existence since about 2000. He continued that they have been very involved in exchanges with their partner city, Einbeck, Germany. A delegation visit to Einbeck will happen in early October. The PCC has been talking about having signs at a few of the entrances to the city saying something to the effect that Keene has a partner city and it is Einbeck, Germany. Einbeck has similar signs stating that it has a partnership with Keene. The committee has talked about what the signs might look like. Public Works Director Kürt Blomquist attended a meeting and he recommended that they talk to the MSFI Committee tonight. Some students and teachers from Einbeck will be visiting Keene in late October, coming to Keene State College (KSC) and the Keene High School's (KHS's) Cheshire Career Center. It is not terribly important that these signs are up by the time they get here, but it would be nice. Mr. Link continued that Mr. Blomquist says these signs can be two to four feet and put in places that are strategic and would comply with the City's ordinances. He asked for the committee's questions and their blessing.

Vice Chair Jones asked if Einbeck has three sister cities. Mr. Link replied at least three – in Austria, France, and Poland. He continued that they used to have one in Colorado. Vice Chair Jones asked if Einbeck recognizes all of their partner cities with signs. Mr. Link replied yes. He continued that a large plaza across from Einbeck's City Hall has been designated "Keene Plaza." The partnership seems quite important to them, as it is to Keene. Putting up these signs would be

another reminder to people that Keene has this relationship with a European city and maybe it is something they would want to know more about. The PCC is doing more with local media to reinforce this partnership, too.

Vice Chair Jones asked if the sign would have image or just words. Mr. Link replied that there has been talk of having the two cities' seals along with some words. Vice Chair Jones stated that it would be nice to have a second line of text in German. Mr. Link replied that that is a possibility, and those are the type of things they talk about at their committee meetings.

Vice Chair Jones asked if the PCC wants the signs up by late October. Mr. Link replied that they do not have a deadline, but if the City is going to put up the signs anyway, it would be nice to do it by the time the people from Einbeck get here. There will be a visit from their mayor in 2016.

Vice Chair Jones stated that Walter Secord resigned from the PCC last month. He continued that he did a great job with the soccer exchange. He asked if that is over now. Mr. Link replied no. He continued that Mr. Secord relocated to Charleston, SC. They will continue to try and use his expertise. There was conversation about rolling this over into a program with KHS's soccer program, where Mr. Secord had many soccer compatriots. To continue the program would be wonderful. Vice Chair Jones stated that maybe they want other cultural symbols on the signs, representing music and soccer, for instance.

Councilor O'Connor stated that this summer he was in Ireland and he saw several signs for sister cities and took photos to share. He continued that he thinks this is a great idea. He saw flags, not seals, but he likes the seal idea.

Vice Chair Jones asked Mr. Blomquist to speak. Mr. Blomquist stated that he had a discussion with the PCC about their interest for doing some signage to recognize the partnership. He continued that he talked with them about the possibility of two levels – the Public Works Department produces the standard road signs and their sign shop could produce something similar, like traditional, metal road signs, with typical lettering. He likes the idea of two seals, which they do not have now and would have to acquire. The department suggests they look at something like these traditional signs. These signs could be put in a few locations that are the gateways of the community.

Mr. Blomquist continued that the next level of signs are the type like the "Welcome to Keene" signs, which were designed and paid for by several groups through the Chamber of Commerce. An example is the one on Route 9 coming in. They have the city seal and raised lettering. Peter Poanessa at Signworx created those. Those would be long term, if they look at having a more fancy/formal sign that integrates with the "Welcome to Keene" signs. These signs would take more effort. There would be many options for symbols on them. These signs probably could not be created and installed by late October. There are also circular, "Downtown Keene" signs created by Signworx, placed in various locations leading to the downtown area, approved by the City Council. He talked with the PCC about signs like this being the long term vision, but in the meantime; the Public Works Department has the budget for the more traditional signs, such as blue or black with white letters. The PCC can work with the language, something simple like "Keene is a Partner City with Einbeck," to be visible to drivers. These signs could be done by

late October to welcome the folks from Einbeck. If the MSFI Committee is comfortable with the department working with this, they could make a motion to support having signs at the city's main entrances, and recommend that staff handle it administratively by working with the PCC.

Vice Chair Jones stated that some of the city's entrances are State-owned right-of-way. He asked what it would take to get signs put there. Mr. Blomquist replied that his department would have a conversation with the District Engineer at the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT), and most likely NHDOT would send a form saying it is okay, with the City recognizing that if the signs ever got in the way they would have to take them down. Lower Main Street is a Class IV highway and the City previously received permission from NHDOT to put signage there. He does not envision putting these signs on State highway. Maybe there would be a sign on upper Washington Street, and maybe four or five signs in total, throughout the city at the main gateway entrances. He envisions these Partner City signs on Washington Street, Court Street, lower Main Street, and possibly West Street and/or Winchester Street.

Vice Chair Jones stated that he is trying to think of a motion saying staff can move along without having to come back to the MSFI Committee for further recommendations. Mr. Blomquist replied with suggested wording for a motion.

Vice Chair Jones asked if members of the public had questions or comments. Hearing none, he asked for a motion.

Councilor Manwaring made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Redfern.

On a vote of 4 to 0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee recommends that the request from the Partner City Committee to have signs erected on gateway streets be granted and that the Public Works Department be authorized to handle the installation of the signs in cooperation with the Partner City Committee.

2. DISCUSSION – Complete Streets Policy

Mr. Blomquist stated that he and the MSFI Committee have been working through the Complete Streets policy and design guidance documents. He continued that at a previous meeting, he and Tara Germond, Planner, brought a draft resolution for the MSFI Committee to review. He did not receive any feedback on it, so he assumes the committee is comfortable with it. Tonight they will talk through the design guidance document. Through the City Code's section on street utility standards, the Public Works Department is authorized to issue more detailed standards. Through a City Code amendment standards would be developed so individuals looking to develop new streets would have standards to incorporate into their design. Also, this is guidance for staff and the City Council when they are reviewing projects.

Mr. Blomquist continued that the Complete Streets demonstration happened during the previous week. He cannot say enough about Ms. Germond, Mari Brunner, and their efforts with this. He was unable to attend, but heard that it was fantastic. There are photos online.

Ms. Germond reported that they will be giving the City Council an update on the demonstration event, including pictures and comments received. She continued that it was a one-day demonstration on September 19, on Marlboro Street between Grove Street and Adams Street. They transformed the block to have more crosswalks, and took away parking on one side to show what is possible in the right-of-way beyond parking, such as a “parklet.” The southeast Keene neighborhood group did a great job with the parklet, and Monadnock Maker Space did a great job putting green. There was yoga, bike maintenance, and more. It was a fun event and helped people see the possibilities. There were about 37 volunteers, 33 sponsors, and many organizations helping. The Public Works Department staff did a great job providing support so volunteers could safely work in the right-of-way. She continued that Mr. Blomquist has been wonderful from the start in making sure they were prepared. There was great support from Healthy Monadnock 2020, Friends of Public Art, Hannah Grimes, KSC’s geography students and Green Bikes program, Monadnock Buy Local, Monadnock Cycling Club, local businesses like the Monadnock Food Co-op, Pedals for People, and more. The Southwest Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC) took the lead; this was their event in partnership with the City.

Ms. Germond continued that they received about 50 comments from attendants, all very positive. City staff can consider the feedback as they continue working on Complete Streets. They hope to continue engaging the public and getting feedback. That was the goal of the event – to showcase ideas and see what people thought. They wanted constructive feedback, and were successful in that. They will provide a more formal report to the MSFI Committee.

Vice Chair Jones thanked Ms. Germond and Mr. Blomquist and stated that it sounds wonderful. Mr. Blomquist recognized that the Police and Fire Departments were also involved. He continued the City does a great job working together across departmental lines. This area was chosen as a result of the Marlboro Street Rezoning Committee’s work to develop a direction for the street. This was a teaser, helping people to envision the Marlboro Street corridor in the future. As projects come forward, folks will be much more receptive to ideas such as making the travel lanes narrower and using the space in a different way.

Mr. Blomquist returned to the design guidance document, stating that it was previously provided to the MSFI Committee and the City Council, and is on the City’s website. He continued that Ms. Germond has been instrumental in putting this together, and was working at SWRPC at the time. The acknowledgements are in the beginning. It references the Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP) and how important Complete Streets is to the community. Page 3 defines Complete Streets. He likes the term “all-inclusive” better, to clarify that streets are for users of all types. Page 4 gives design considerations, regarding bicyclists, pedestrians, rural streets, neighborhood streets, and so on and so forth.

Mr. Blomquist continued that they sat down and looked at the city and its street network and divided the streets into five categories – one is slow streets. Ms. Germond explained that slow streets are the ones in the downtown core. She continued that gateway streets are another category, and those are the ones in the outer perimeter leading to downtown, like West Street, Court Street, and Washington Street. The third category is bike streets, and they determined those through collecting data and also by looking at the connections to the railtrails.

Vice Chair Jones asked for an example of a bike street. Ms. Germond replied Arch Street, Hurricane Road, North Lincoln Street, and Roxbury Street, are examples of a bike street which transitions into a slow street. She continued that a street can change mid-way. Neighborhood streets are the fourth category, and most of the streets in the city, over 300, are of these type. They do not list them all because there are so many, but they are streets in medium to high density areas, and examples are all of the streets between Washington and Court Streets and the side streets, and the streets near Wheelock School and the Ashuelot Street neighborhood. The fifth category is rural streets, such as Hurricane Road or Wyman Road. These are streets in low density areas, where houses are set further back from the right-of-way, and where the houses are spaced further apart.

Ms. Germond continued that finally there is a transit category that is an overlay, recognizing that in addition to being designated as a slow street, gateway street, etc., a street might be currently serviced by the City Express bus and has specific considerations, such as bus stops or curb cuts for safe unloading. Some of the places are not served by transit currently but would be logical places for transit to go.

Mr. Blomquist stated that now that they have identified these streets, then they set up the structure for each type of street. They tried to represent in pictures what those streets are and are used for. They did mapping that indicates the streets. On page 9, for example, are the considerations for slow streets. They considered what amenities should be considered when work is going on? They want to tie together new street construction, reconstruction, road rehabilitation, and maintenance. They are tying together the CIP and operating budget. They are trying to infuse this concept as not just something to be considered at the design or Planning Board level, but ultimately into the Highway Division. For example, they talked about, what do they want to consider for slow streets? Maybe wide sidewalks, because there are many users and activities. Downtown there are sidewalk cafes, many pedestrians, folks who are older, younger, maybe have mobility issues, and so on and so forth. Probably they want sidewalks on both sides, if possible. There is the question of how far from the edge of the street pavement the sidewalks should be – five feet is the standard here. They look for green buffers about five feet side, since there are larger trees and more elements like benches. They want enough space for snow removal operations. On slow streets they talk about having benches, bike racks, parking devices/meters, waste receptacles, and lighting. The City standard is to have a light every 400 feet, but this goes deeper, looking at lighting that is on a pedestrian scale, and maybe having fixtures only 14 to 20 feet high. Vehicle travel lanes on slow streets should be between 10 and 12 feet. There should be many pedestrian crossings, that are visible, and maybe have different types of materials (instead of the standard paint) to highlight them. There are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) considerations to consider as well. There should be medians and refuge islands. Then, there is the issue of parking – it could be angled, or back-in, which is a new concept that has a lot of benefits, particularly in mixed-use areas. The design guidance identifies elements to consider for each area.

Mr. Blomquist continued that there is a checklist so anyone, such as a developer, City staff member, a City Councilor, or a member of the public can look at it, consider things, and talk about it. The document does not say “thou shall” do this or that. They will have to make compromises. For example, with the Court Street project there was much discussion of bike

lanes but that would have required taking too many trees down. The compromise was additional space so bicyclists could use the street, but not designated bike lanes. The checklist gives people a way to walk through and see if they have considered everything.

Councilor Manwaring asked if bike lanes are not a recommendation for slow streets. Mr. Blomquist replied that that is correct. He continued that the idea is, conceptually, is that people are driving at a slow enough speed that bike lanes are not needed. Plus, there is so much other activity happening on slow streets. Nothing prevents you from asking if bike lanes can be put in a certain location. On Main Street, they cannot widen the travel lane(s) because of the buildings there. To have bike lanes, they might have to give up a travel lane. It is okay to choose that option if the implications are understood, but the traditional guidance is that bike lanes are not needed when traffic is slow. The City does, however, have comments from people asking for bike lanes or sharrows on gateway and bike streets. If they can include a bike lane, great, but if not, how else can they accommodate bicyclists? They want to encourage multiple users.

Ms. Germond added that safety is a focus, too. She continued that with angled parking downtown and two lanes of traffic, a bike lane might not be safe right now – they would need to study it more. Since bike streets feed into downtown, further examining how to consider bike safety in the slow streets should be a priority. Mr. Blomquist added that they encourage people to stop downtown to do activities, and maybe for people to get off their bikes. It is important to create room for discussion. He is moving away from the term of “Complete Streets” because it is really “all-inclusive” streets. Some activities are in conflict. For example, it is wonderful to have cafes, but they use sidewalk space that could be used for other purposes, but they want the cafes. There are compromises. The point is that when someone asks, “Why didn’t you do bike lanes?” they can show the checklist to show that they had the conversation, and show why they chose what they chose.

Ms. Germond stated that these design guidelines can change over time. She continued that many communities are adopting Complete Streets policies with national guidance documents that are not specific to their local areas. The City wanted this document so the guidelines are more specific to Keene and relevant to the community’s needs.

Vice Chair Jones stated that 20 years from now, someone might want to know about certain streets, which is why he asked Ms. Germond to list some streets out loud. Mr. Blomquist replied that he cannot guarantee that every street is listed in this, but they have listed enough to give a flavor. If a developer comes in with a project for a street that is not listed, they can consider which streets it is similar to and categorize it then. It is fascinating how different the neighborhood streets are in different neighborhoods. For example, Maple Acres has approximately 50 feet of pavement, compared to other neighborhoods that have about 30 feet of right-of-way. Some neighborhoods have houses with porches right up to the sidewalk, while others have houses set further back. It is interesting that even in neighborhood streets there is such variation and not all road treatments will be the same in each neighborhood. They wanted flexibility and to be able to recognize the differences. They want to be inclusive and make sure as many people as possible can get around.

Ms. Germond noted that the design guidelines only apply to city streets. She continued that private ways will not be impacted.

Vice Chair Jones stated that he loves that they use the word “inclusive,” and the fact that they want these elements to be considered for every project. He continued that they considered Complete Streets elements on Court Street, Washington Street, and Marlboro Street. When Complete Streets elements were an option for the work on Bradford Road, citizens were against it. Sometimes these things are good on paper but hard in reality, which they discovered with Court Street and Washington Street, but they are always trying.

Mr. Blomquist replied that it helps the communication process. He continued that there are more users than maybe one thinks about. People tend to just be familiar with the mobility of their own families, neighbors, and friends, but there are many more users – maybe you do not realize that someone is now using an electric scooter to get around. You might not realize how many families do not have cars and rely on walking, biking, or the bus service. People are familiar with the people around them but this design guidance allows the City Council and community to walk through and ask these questions. Sometimes they cannot fit certain elements. Sometimes there are other priorities, like trees conflicting with space for bikes.

Vice Chair Jones stated that he is thinking of past projects, like the sidewalk project on River Street when they realized the sidewalks they planned would be right up against people’s windows and thus put them across the street instead. He continued that on Hastings Avenue they had to shorten the buffer to keep residents happy. Mr. Blomquist replied that hopefully this puts Complete Streets into the City’s lexicon whether he or Mr. Lamb are here or not. It becomes just something the City does, not something dependent on certain people.

Vice Chair Jones asked if Mr. Blomquist is looking for the resolution to go to the City Council for a first reading. Mr. Blomquist replied yes. Vice Chair Jones replied that this issue is complex. He thinks changes will be made and it will be sent back here and they will have A, B, and C versions. He asked if they should have a draft to look at. Mr. Blomquist replied that the MSFI Committee already looked at a draft policy in a previous meeting. Vice Chair Jones replied that they accepted that as informational. Mr. Blomquist agreed. He continued that they can place this on more time if they want. Vice Chair Jones replied no, he just wants to see the draft, so they do not end up with multiple versions. Mr. Blomquist replied that in that case, the committee can place this on more time. He continued that they have already reviewed the draft, but can review it again if they want, before forwarding it on for a first read. Vice Chair Jones asked if it was placed on more time because they did not have the time to prepare, or if someone was missing. Mr. Blomquist replied that he had recommended it be placed on more time because of the process. He continued that the committee had three steps – first, the development of the policy resolution (for which he gave them the draft), second, the draft of design guidance (which they went through tonight), and third, public education – the Complete Streets demonstration and the workshop this Friday. When the committee went over the draft policy resolution approximately two meetings ago and placed the Complete Streets subject on more time in order to go through the design guidelines at a future meeting (tonight), he did not get any feedback regarding changes the committee wanted to make to the draft resolution. If the committee feels that it is okay, they can submit it for a first read. They can still adjust it at the next meeting, or

recommend that it be adopted. The design guidance is informational, because the policy references it. These documents are available on the City's website and anyone can give feedback. There is no formal way of giving feedback – people can just contact him or Ms. Germond. He will be using his administrative authority to issue the detail for the design standards – for example, What to do right now is up to the committee: either pass a motion asking him to send the draft resolution to the City Clerk for a first read at the next City Council meeting, or place it on more time and go over the draft resolution again at the next MSFI Committee meeting.

Vice Chair Jones asked if the policy could be much shorter, without having to go through all the details. Mr. Blomquist replied that it could, but the draft reflects the guidance he and others working on Complete Streets were given when they first started talking about it. He continued that the MSFI Committee did not want an 8-page document but they wanted something explaining why Complete Streets is important and how to implement it. They wanted something about design guidance and a statement about how to monitor the goals and objectives. They can place the subject back on more time, and go through the resolution at the next meeting and tweak it or shorten it if the committee wants to.

Vice Chair Jones asked if members of the public had questions or comments.

Darryl Masterson, of 44 Willow Street, stated that he thinks the Complete Streets demonstration was fantastic. He continued that like Vice Chair Jones said, you can look at things on paper and still not be able to visualize it, and that is what was great about the demonstration project – you can see what works and what does not. He was involved with that project and with the Marlboro Street Re-zoning Committee. He saw that on Marlboro Street, people were using the temporary crosswalks within an hour of them being added. So it works. What he found positive, even though it is a negative, was the island added on the eastern side of Grove Street was a bad idea. It narrowed the street in front of Romy's and the bank parking lot and put a divider in the street right after, so cars get spread apart and then come closer together. Because they took the time to put it out into the street, he could see that it did not work. He recommends adding to the checklist, "Is this an opportunity to do a re-think event [Complete Streets demonstration project]? Is it feasible?" You cannot put down tape to try out a roundabout, of course, but there might sometimes be an opportunity to do a re-think event. Thanks to Ms. Germond, Ms. Brunner, and others, the project went off without a hitch. Set-up was great, and take-down only took 90 minutes.

Vice Chair Jones stated that he makes a good point. He continued that maybe if residents on Bradford Road could have visualized the road changes they would have understood it better.

Assistant City Manager Med Kopczynski stated that he also thanks Ms. Germond and other City staff, for doing a great job, as usual.

Councilor Manwaring stated that she wishes they had the resolution in front of them to look at. She continued that she wants it brought back to the next MSFI Committee meeting so they can look at it again and pass it forward.

Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee meeting minutes,
September 23, 2015

Mr. Blomquist replied that they can place it on more time. He continued that the background notes would reflect that the committee wants to review it again at the next meeting.

Councilor Manwaring made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor O'Connor.

By a vote of 4 to 0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee places the topic of Complete Streets on more time until their next meeting.

3. Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Vice Chair Jones adjourned the meeting at 7:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted by
Britta Reida, Minute-taker