

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AD HOC DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, December 5, 2017

9:00 AM

2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall

Members Present:

Councilor Carl Jacobs
Kevin Dremmel
Jack Dugan

Members Not Present:

Councilor Mitch Greenwald
Councilor Gary Lamoureux
Luca Paris
Shane Gormley
Cheryl Belair
Shannon Hundley
Katie Sutherland

Staff Present:

Elizabeth Dragon, City Manager
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works Director
Duncan Watson, Public Works
Medard Kopczynski, Director of Economic
Development, Initiatives and Special Projects

Kendall W. Lane, Mayor

1) **Call to Order**

Mayor Lane called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM.

2) **Approval of Minutes – October 13, 2017**

Minutes will be approved at the next meeting.

3) **New Business**

a. **Downtown Revitalization Forum – Report**

The Public Works Director stated this is the first report from the McFarland Johnson consultants. The intent of these initial workshops and surveys was to begin getting feedback from the community on their vision for Downtown to help guide this Committee and Council. 544 surveys were submitted by the public. The next phase of this project will be to determine where the desired activities could take place Downtown.

Jennifer Zorn, McFarland Johnson consultant, said this project has been a pleasure to work on and it is obvious people really love Keene, which is an amazing asset. Ms. Zorn provided an overview of how they captured a large audience in a short amount of time:

1. Online Survey – 544 people responded and she has an additional 126 pages of comments people took time to provide because they are invested in the process. The vast majority of responses were positive.
2. Banners on light poles throughout the Downtown.
3. Press – she, Mr. Watson, and Mayor Lane were on a local morning show.
4. Project fact sheet distributed around Downtown.

Community Vision Forums – took place over three days with focused discussions on mobility, use of public space, as well as open discussion and brainstorming. They created the feeling of an art gallery with high quality images of Keene so people could spontaneously respond.

Community members listed many things they want Downtown, which Ms. Zorn said are reflective of studies she has seen in other towns:

- More space for cultural events
- More outdoor dining space
- Outdoor market space
- More green space
- Public art
- More restaurant variety
- Easy mobility
- Landscaping
- Modernization
- Retain historical character
- New businesses
- More people
- More activity in general
- More things to do
- Wider sidewalks
- Better and free parking

Community members also listed things they do not want Downtown:

- Loiterers and panhandlers (a significant concern)
- Money spent unwisely
- Taxes raised
- Too many bars
- Smoking
- Vehicle traffic congestion

Ms. Zorn noted that 29% of survey respondents selected to keep Downtown as it is; this shows how much is already being done well in the City. She showed a map of how the public defined the boundaries of Downtown, which is a smaller area than the Committee identified. The general sense is that there should be a tight core Downtown area.

Jonathan Law, the landscape architect on the project, created photographic experiences of the possible future scenarios for Downtown. Community members were shown current photos of different parts of Downtown and drawings were created to represent the things the public want Downtown in the images. These are only conceptual images to visualize possibilities for Downtown, not final designs. None of these concepts consider space for parking; those studies will occur in a later phase of the project.

- Image A
 - Includes: widened sidewalks with premium materials (bump outs allow safer pedestrian crossing), social gathering areas and outdoor seating, enhanced street lighting, enhanced landscaping and greenery (which could aid in storm water management), parallel parking with a bike lane, new trash receptacles. This scheme would not change the center median.
 - Committee comments on this image:
 - Landscaping currently impedes pedestrian movement; this scheme adds sidewalk space to compensate for the increased landscaping. Landscaping and activity could conflict. The additional benefit of storm water management from irrigation should be considered.
 - No matter if the parking is angled or parallel, traffic will be slowed for parking. However, removing head-in parking will widen sidewalks. Parallel parking allows a designated bike lane.
 - Keep in mind the buildings on the east and west sides of Main Street are fixed, in between the City can do anything.
- Image B
 - Includes: widened sidewalk with premium materials, public art display areas (on temporary racks), enhanced street lighting, enhanced landscaping and greenery (small raised planters with a seating element), additional sidewalk space adjacent to parking so pedestrian traffic can keep moving, a bike lane, space for outdoor dining.
- Image C
 - Includes: pedestrian mall between Gilbo Avenue and Emerald Street, enhanced public gathering zones, enhanced street lighting, landscaping and greenery. An impressive pedestrian zone like no other in the US. Maintains a fire lane down both sides of the street and allows for delivery access at certain times of the day; the remaining portion of the street converted into a pedestrian mall. Significant pedestrian gathering space from small to large. Significant greenspace includes storm water management. Enhanced lighting could allow for after dark activities. This is not the entirety of Main Street, just a few blocks.
 - Committee comments on this image:
 - It is possible to reroute traffic but will require studies and finding a way to reroute traffic. We may not be able to eliminate traffic on Main Street but it could be feasibly reduced; this could include travel lanes only on one side of the street. There are many advantages but eliminating vehicle traffic could be a problem.
 - This could provide an excellent concert space.
 - Few other towns have something like this, which is exciting.

- This would provide amenities and greenspace for those who live Downtown.
- A space like this encourages people to walk and exercise more.
- This could be very successful.
- Image D
 - This is essentially the same idea as Image C, but shows new trees. We hope to save as many healthy trees as possible.

The Committee made the following comments on all the images presented:

- Parking and bike lanes will have to be a significant consideration moving forward.
 - There could be a cycle track instead of a sidewalk next to parking; this is likely the safest option for cyclists but eliminates some space for pedestrian traffic and requires a lot of extra curbing. Regardless, all these options are an improvement for cyclists.
 - Eliminating parking meters provides more space and makes Downtown more aesthetically pleasing.
 - The Fire Station will need to be a significant consideration moving forward as Main Street is its main route south.

b. Discussion on Next Steps

The Public Works Director said the consultants will finalize this draft report and in the meantime he can send the draft to Committee members via email. Once this report is finalized, it will be important to share the results with City Council after the first of the year; this is still only a report, not a recommendation to Council. It will provoke more thinking and discussion. This can also be shared with the public on TV and radio.

Project Phase 2: to conclude fall 2018.

- The City has funding to continue with phase two of this project and McFarland Johnson will remain as consultants. Phase two will involve identifying where these ideas could feasibly be implemented Downtown
- The goal of phase two is to define where things should be.
- Considerations of infrastructure limitations.
- Educate the public about the various options.

Project Phase 3: during calendar year 2019.

- Traffic and parking studies
- Preliminary design phase to recommend a design to Council by early 2020 (the actual design phase is not yet budgeted).
- Cost determinations.
- Storm water management and emergency services decisions.

The Committee agreed a short presentation to Council about this report would be prudent in February 2018. The City Manager expressed concern about not having cost ideas until phase three. The Public Works Director said there is no decision making process planned

for 2018; 2019 is for decision making but he can work with the consultants to revise the scope of work to get more accomplished in 2018. The City Manager agreed that would be helpful and thanked the consultants for their great work engaging the public and developing the conceptual drawings. Mayor Lane said this report exceeded his expectations about what would be accomplished with the survey and the program organization was great. Ms. Zorn said their work as consultants is easy when the citizens are passionate. The Committee agreed parking, traffic patterns, and emergency services will be priorities moving forward.

- 4) **Next Meeting Date – To Be Determined**
- 5) **Adjournment**

Hearing no further business, Mayor Lane adjourned the meeting at 10:06 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker