

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, November 7, 2018

6:00 PM

Council Chambers

Members Present:

Janis O. Manwaring, Chair
Randy L. Filiault, Vice-Chair
Stephen L. Hooper
Gary P. Lamoureux
Robert B. Sutherland

Staff Present:

Thomas P. Mullins, City Attorney
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works
Director/Emergency Management Director
Beth Fox, HR Director/ Assistant City Manager
Tara Kessler, Senior Planner

Members Not Present:

Chair Manwaring called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM, welcomed the public, and explained the rules of procedure.

1) John Croteau, Jr. – Syds Carpet & Snooze Room – Request for Loading Zone – 41 James Street

Mr. Croteau was not present. The Public Works Director said he spoke with the Police Chief and the City Engineer. There is already a loading zone in the area that Mr. Croteau was unaware of; he is now aware it is available to him. Still, the Police Department and City Manager are exploring potential future ordinance changes regarding this loading zone that staff can work further on.

Councilor Lamoureux made the following motion, which Councilor Filiault seconded.

On a vote of 5-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee recommends that this item be accepted as informational and handled administratively.

2) Todd Tousley – Request for the Installation of a Sidewalk – Chapman Road

Chair Manwaring welcomed Todd Tousley (708 Roxbury Street, Keene), who said he lived on Baker Street for 24 years and now lives behind Robin Hood Park. During the summer months, he sees the volume (25-30 daily) of people who walk, run, or bike the Chapman Road loop to Robin Hood Park. On the eastern side of Chapman Road, there is only a narrow walking area next to the guardrail, where drivers speed around the corner dangerously. There is plenty of room for foot traffic everywhere else on Chapman Road. He wrote a letter to the City to inquire about the feasibility of a sidewalk or small

walking lane at that location; while he imagines a sidewalk would be an expensive undertaking for the City, he wanted to open the discussion.

The Public Works Director agreed there is little safe space for pedestrians from the intersection of Water/Roxbury Streets and continuing up Roxbury Street to Robin Hood Park. Roxbury Street was built in the late 1790s and has a 33' right-of-way; the east side has a sharp hill up to the roadway with an outcropping of bedrock. The west side of the street is Robin Hood Park and there is some walking space on that side because it is City owned. Creating a sidewalk there would be challenging and expensive, but he is working with the Director of Parks and Recreation to add additional gravel to the west side of the street; this will provide a few extra feet of walking space for pedestrians. Creating a new sidewalk could also be problematic because it would have to be accessible to plows. The Public Works Director will continue working on this and intends to implement the additional gravel walkway by spring 2019, when staff is already doing runoff work at that location.

Councilor Sutherland recalled City property, like the water tower and other trail networks nearby, could help connect a sidewalk there to City land for plowing. The Public Works Director agreed there are trails in that area and he will explore that option with the Director of Parks and Recreation.

Councilor Hooper thanked Mr. Tousley for beginning this conversation because his primary concern for the City is citizen safety; he supports any practical solution to enhance safety. Mr. Tousley agreed just widening the gravel shoulder will be a significant improvement.

In response to Councilor Filiault, the Public Works Director said he will work to implement the shoulder expansion in spring 2019. Because this is a maintenance solution right now (not a CIP project), this can be handled administratively moving forward and will report updates to Council as needed via memo.

Chair Manwaring recognized Councilor Carl Jacobs who also lived in this area previously and he echoed how popular it is as a walking area. He added there are also City owned trails on Beech Hill that connect to Chapman Road and Robin Hood Park. He hopes this trail network can be updated on maps to show those options to citizens.

Councilor Sutherland also suggested reviewing the speed limit in that area to determine if traffic can be slowed. He recalled an item in the CIP to install a new guardrail in that area. The Public Works Director replied yes, there is a guard rail project the City Engineer is working on and it is possible that project might widen the shoulder more at this location.

Councilor Filiault made the following motion, which Councilor Hooper seconded.

On a vote of 5-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee recommends this item be handled administratively until staff reports back to Council with updates as needed.

3) Nancy Gillard & Suzanne Butcher – New Energy Goals for the Community

Chair Manwaring noted the Mayor referred this matter to the Energy and Climate Committee. She would like to hear from that Committee before taking any further action.

Councilor Hooper made the following motion, which Councilor Filiault seconded.

On a vote of 5-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee recommends this item be placed on more time while awaiting a recommendation from the Energy and Climate Committee.

4) West Street Dam – Public Works Department

Chair Manwaring welcomed the Public Works Director back along with Tara Kessler, Senior Planner. The Public Works Director reported that the City received a letter of deficiency from NH Department of Environmental Services (DES) in 2008 about many dams in the City that needed maintenance or capital items for repair. The City assessed and handled immediate dam concerns and staff continues routine maintenance for the state. In 2012, Council authorized staff to work with West Street Hydro – a citizen group exploring a hydroelectric plant on the West Street/Ashuelot River Dam. They primarily wanted it to be an educational site and to produce enough power to pay for itself. West Street Hydro conducted feasibility studies with staff support from 2012 until July 2018; studies such as wetlands and aquatic life reviews along with other regulatory agency studies (e.g., EPA). In July, West Street Hydro withdrew their proposal because the project is no longer feasible because of changes in the renewable energy market. Now, the City will begin again to determine a solution for the West Street Dam. There is a CIP project for 2025 to address this dam. NH DES is comfortable with how things are moving forward because the City has taken action on other deficient dams (Robin Hood, Babbidge, Goose Pond).

Ms. Kessler explained a unique opportunity for the City from the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). Several months ago, Dr. Vogler from RISD approached the Conservation Commission to discuss her multi-million dollar (National Science Foundation funded) and multi-year project called The Future of Dams. She and an interdisciplinary team of scientists, engineers, etc. are collaborating to investigate different methods (video, art, photo, etc.) to solicit community preferences for dam solutions. The team is working in communities throughout New England. They are not interested in the outcome/chosen alternative for the West Street Dam, but the process of selecting alternatives. The research team thinks Keene is an ideal study location and now that West Street Hydro has backed-out, staff is embracing the opportunity to work with this research team. This would involve a one-time community workshop in spring 2019 based on data the City has collected about the dam since 2011 in addition to the research team's expertise. Ms.

Kessler was careful to qualify that this is not a decision making effort, but a way to explore options for the dam, knowing it could still be several years before any decisions are made about the dam.

The Public Works Director said he thinks this is an excellent opportunity for the City and for Council to gauge public opinion on the dam before moving forward. He looks forward to starting engagement on the dam again. This discussion is just informational for the Committee at this time because they have been the lead on this project historically. If the Committee has reservations about moving forward with this RISD project, staff wants to know before moving forward. Ms. Kessler added there is no cost to the City to participate; the researchers are just using Keene as a case study site. Still, there will be some staff involvement to help advertise and facilitate the event.

Councilor Filiault asked if DES has come back to look at the dam since the letter of deficiency 10 years ago. The Public Works Director replied yes, every two years. Councilor Filiault said he doubts much has changed at the dam since then and in his opinion is that this is, "something to do about nothing for DES." If there is no cost, he is supportive; he thinks the dam is so well-built it will still be functioning in 50 years without action. For the record, he will not support spending a penny on the West Street Dam. The Public Works Director replied it is a large impoundment and the main concern is not the visible structure, but the dyke upstream where dam failure could impact businesses or residences. This dam is low on the high hazard scale. He said this is part of a process for Council to understand public opinion before any action on the dam. Councilor Filiault said he is more concerned with City Hall collapsing than the West Street Dam failing.

Councilor Hooper said, as a member of the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board, he is interested in this dam and the adjacent park, which is a gem for the people of Keene and surrounding nature. He supports this RISD project as a good approach to find a good purpose for the dam.

Chair Manwaring recalled meeting and being impressed with Dr. Vogler when she spoke to the Conservation Commission. She is in favor of this project moving forward.

Councilor Sutherland made the following motion, which Councilor Lamoureux seconded.

On a vote of 5-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee recommends this item be accepted as informational.

5) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Manwaring adjourned the meeting at 6:32 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker