<u>City of Keene</u> New Hampshire

AD HOC COMPRENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, July 16, 2019

1:00 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room

Members Present:

Mitchell Greenwald, Chair

Keith Thibault, SCS

Bill Hutwelker, Swanzey Selectman (until 1:51 PM)

George Hansel, Councilor

Mayor Kendall Lane

Rod Bouchard, Assistant County Administrator – Cheshire County

Timothy Murphy, SWRPC

Dr. Melinda Treadwell, Keene State College President

George Foskett, BHG Masiello Real Estate

Jack Dugan, MEDC

Dominic Perkins, Savings Bank of Walpole

Joseph Walier, Walier Chevrolet

Chris Coates (arrived at 1:21 PM)

Members Not Present:

Elizabeth Dragon, City Manager

Staff Present:

Med Kopczynski, Economic Development, Initiatives, and Special Projects Director Jordan Benik, People's Linen Gary Lamoureux, Councilor

Phil Suter, Chamber of Commerce

Rebecca Hamilton, Machina Arts

Chris McIntosh, Clark Mortenson

Chair Greenwald called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM. He read the committee's charge out loud.

1) Introduction of Guests and New Members

Roll call was conducted.

2) Approval of Minutes – 4-16-2019, 5-21-2019,

Mayor Lane made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of April 16, 2019 and May 21, 2019. Councilor Hansel seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Specific Topic(s) – Review and Adoption of Draft Committee Report

Chair Greenwald stated that the committee members have the draft report. He asked for discussion and feedback.

Mr. Walier stated that he has questions. He continued that at a previous meeting way back, someone said that Keene is greatly influenced by Springfield, Hartford, New York, and so on and so forth down that corridor. This report heavily compares the region instead to the New Hampshire coast. It also says Keene is "isolated." Keene is 25 miles away from I-91 and two hours from I-95. He continued that the report is very well done and he does mean to change it, but it hit him that the report compares Keene to things that are a long way away.

Mr. Murphy stated that Keene has a lot in common, demographically, with southeast Vermont and northwest Massachusetts, more than it does with southeast New Hampshire. He continued that that said, a lot of the data this committee was exposed to was from the NH Policy Institute so obviously the focus is NH. They could find a way to add to the document some statement about the ties Keene has with adjacent areas of VT and MA.

Mayor Lane stated that Mr. Murphy is right. Cheshire County has the same issues as Franklin County in MA and Windham County in VT. There is a fairly large population base – 90,000 to 100,000 people. He continued that Keene is isolated in the sense that there is no east/west highway in NH and it is not easy to get to Concord, but Keene is only 20 miles from I-91. It is just as easy to go to Hartford or Springfield as it is to go to Manchester. There is a significant population base close by.

Mr. Thibault replied that he agrees that "isolated" is a negative term. He suggested the term "separated" instead.

Chair Greenwald asked Mr. Kopczynski for his thoughts. Mr. Kopczynski replied that in the context of these discussions and in recognizing that they are trying to set a tone, he understands. The area is isolated from the NH coast. The committee can use whatever term makes sense to them. But Temple Mountain does separate this region from the coast, and in terms of what takes place in the NH legislature and on the coast, it is a fact that this area is isolated in the state. If the committee wants to say that Keene is not isolated from MA and VT counties, they can.

Mr. Walier asked, isn't the report an attempt for Keene and the Monadnock region to sell itself, and make people think about the area? Mr. Kopczynski replied that the point of this was: what made Keene was the transportation network, and the isolation in this case is in regards to the transportation network. The railroad is no longer. Today, they do trucking, and highways, but really, the railroad is the Internet. He continued that he is fine with re-wordsmithing the report as the committee wishes.

Chair Greenwald stated that Mr. Kopczynski is talking about the coast. He asked, but what about Manchester and Nashua? Mr. Kopczynski replied that to him, those are coastal. He continued that he is okay with changing the wording of this to connect the region to other adjacent counties and not use the term "isolated," but he wanted the committee to understand why he wrote it the way he did.

Councilor Hansel suggested an addition to "areas that need development" – "collaboration with other regional economies." Mr. Kopczynski suggested "connection."

Mayor Lane stated that the big thing that separates Keene from the seacoast is how the money flows. He continued that on the coast it flows in and out of Boston, and the coastal cities have a connection with Boston that Keene does not. They have to look in terms of where the money is flowing in and out of Keene, and that is primarily to the south and west.

Dr. Treadwell stated that she wonders if that is the pivot. She continued that it distinguishes the area from the north/south corridor established by I-93. Acknowledging that, and leveraging the connections and corridors south and west, distinguishes the area by saying "We are unlike the rest of the state," without saying they are "isolated." It is about focusing their energies to the south and west as they pivot into the next steps. Everyone in the state looks to I-93, but for Keene it is incumbent to look to I-91, to find the way to leverage future growth.

Mr. Kopczynski stated that the "areas that need development" section of the report comes out of the work done by Fourth Economy. Those are their bullet points. He continued that when he revises the introduction he will pivot it more towards the regional connections.

Mayor Lane stated that page 21 references agencies and organizations that can provide support to Keene's economy. He continued that he would like to add that Keene is now part of the Northern Border Commission and thus has a number of grants available. Also, the free trade zone from Manchester has recently been expanded to include Keene. A simple example of how that could make a difference is: if a company like Unity Homes imports products from Germany,

they can now bring it to Keene duty free, build homes, and sell them in the US at a cheaper cost than they could otherwise. The expanded free trade zone potentially has a significant impact. Those both should be added in as considerations for companies looking to come here.

Mayor Lane stated that the report (page 20) references the creation of internships, and he would like to see that expanded. He continued that working with Keene State College (KSC), Franklin Pierce College, and Antioch University to an extent, the City needs to take the initiative to expand. KSC is making a strong effort to encourage internships. Expanding the internship program is important in order to keep a lot of local students here to provide a future workforce. He continued that related to that, #5 references encouraging companies to offer progressive benefit packages to help with student debt, and he very much wants to encourage that. If he were running for re-election he would get 10 or 15 companies together to work with KSC and Franklin Pierce to develop a benefit package that includes student debt reduction if students commit to working for the companies for a certain amount of time. Recent college graduates are more concerned with student debt reduction than with retirement funds.

Mr. Kopczynski asked for clarification: the list of items that the City Council would support says "the creation of work internships such as the C&S scholars program." He asked if Mayor Lane wants more than that. Mayor Lane replied yes, he wants the City to take the initiative to further the internship programs and develop them more extensively.

Dr. Treadwell stated that the report could say that "The Community College System of NH, KSC, Franklin Pierce, and Antioch would form a coalition to commit to working with the business and industry sector to develop a robust internship program," or something along those lines.

Mr. Foskett stated that he does not remember seeing Franklin Pierce mentioned in the report. Mayor Lane replied that it is mentioned in passing and should have more. Mr. Foskett agreed. Dr. Treadwell stated that those institutions together could make a real difference.

Councilor Hansel stated that they should look at what sets Keene apart and focus on that. He continued that people are most likely to read the beginning. This list seems long. He thinks they should choose some highlights and make it kind of punchy, since members of the public will mostly read just the first two pages. Mayor Lane agreed and stated that he would like to see a summary of actions the City will actually take. Not just "The City Council will support." What will the City Council do?

Mayor Lane stated that he is concerned to not see anything in this report about high speed internet/broadband.

Chris Coates arrived at 1:21 PM.

A few voices replied that broadband is referred to in the report. Mayor Lane stated that he wants to see a commitment to it, so that whenever the City digs up the street, they put in a conduit that can be used for high speed internet in the future.

Mr. Walier replied that that is a very good point. He continued that when Winchester St. was dug up, he asked the City Engineer if there was anything in there [for broadband], and he replied no. That would have been a perfect opportunity.

Mayor Lane stated that it is not being done because it has to be a certain distance from the gas lines. When they are digging for the gas lines it requires a bigger hole. He continued that when Liberty Utilities requested a permit, the City should have said no, not until Liberty Utilities digs a big enough hole to also put in conduits.

Councilor Hansel asked if they can add to the report that Keene needs an overall utility or connectivity plan. He continued that they do not have that now, which makes it hard to push for those changes.

Mr. Kopczynski replied that he drafted the report based on the conclusions he drew from the minutes and general discussion. He continued that broadband was not a discussion of the committee. He thinks they had said they should put in a plan to do that; maybe he can find a place to reamplify that in the report. There might be other topics the report did not cover because the committee had not covered them, but they could add topics.

Dr. Treadwell stated that page 5 does list broadband as an area that needs to be developed, so she wonders if that is just captured as a connectivity plan. Mr. Kopczynski replied yes, but as a subject, the committee did not have a speaker on broadband or talk much about the topic. He has to find where to put it in the report. Dr. Treadwell asked if they can reference the other committee's work. Mr. Kopczynski replied yes, he will find a place for that. He continued that he will find the original report, which he did a status on about a year ago.

Chair Greenwald stated that regarding making the trenches big enough, what he hears from the City Engineer every time is that they have to put in the money for the pipe. Mayor Lane replied yes, they have to invest.

Mayor Lane stated that they need to set up a specific fund to support economic development – for example, for marketing, travel, branding, and other smaller items specifically related to economic development. He continued that currently the City does not have a specific fund for that. Obviously this fund would not pay for broadband, but it would pay for smaller items necessary to making a serious effort on economic development.

Mr. Coates asked if Mayor Lane would be okay with allowing future city councils and mayors to direct those funds towards current programs happening and make decisions about how to use it. Mayor Lane replied absolutely. It would be a reserve account for economic development.

Mayor Lane stated that he did not see anything in the report about downtown redevelopment, which will be critical. If they are going to apply for federal funds, the grantors will be looking for documentation showing that downtown redevelopment is supported by the community as an economic development activity.

Mr. Walier stated that what Mayor Lane brought up is great. He continued that they have talked about the funding of marketing. He asked where that effort starts – the Mayor's Office? Mayor

Lane replied that it starts right here with this committee, making this a concrete recommendation to the City Council. He continued that once the City Council adopts the report, it will become a program of the City Council that the City Manager will have to incorporate into her budget.

Mr. Murphy stated that it might be interesting to weave the concept of "growing younger" in this community into the document. He continued that they might want to play up the housing choices, transportation choices, the lack of the inner city bus, and the lack of a robust local transit system. When deciding where to put down roots, young people expect broadband. Also, he did not see much in the report about diversity. Immigration is the future. Capitalizing on that is the community's tolerance for diversity.

Mr. Kopczynski asked Mr. Murphy to be more concrete. He continued that the report reflects the work the committee did, so it would be helpful if Mr. Murphy had an idea of where to put his additions.

Councilor Hansel stated that in the spirit of growing younger, he points back to what sets Keene apart. He continued that they should eliminate the remark about Keene looking like a Hallmark movie, because that sounds "old." They could add bullet points to that section that highlight features of Keene attractive to people in every age group – e.g. is there something in here that will resonate with a student, a recent retiree from MA, a young professional?

Mr. Coates stated that there is a balance. He continued that they can say it is an old New England town but has vibrancy, too. It is not one or the other. Mr. Kopczynski asked if that is where "cultural diversity" would go. Mr. Murphy replied yes, it makes sense to put it right up front. Mayor Lane stated that the state tries to brand the Keene area as "the Currier and Ives section," which is not a good brand for the city.

Mr. Kopczynski asked that the committee go through the list of "What sets Keene apart" (on page 5 or 6, depending on your version of the draft) line by line, and strike or edit as necessary.

"A high quality of life attractive to younger professionals."

Councilor Hansel suggested it somehow be more specific, like "a place that has active and vibrant entrepreneurs" or "a place with an active and vibrant food scene." Dr. Treadwell added that it could just be "An exciting place to live, work, and play," if that is not branded or too simple. Councilor Hansel replied that he wants it to be specific enough so that there is a takeaway, such as Keene being a foodie place, or a place with a lot of emphasis on entrepreneurship. Dr. Treadwell asked, didn't Keene start "Radically Rural," regarding rural entrepreneurism? Should they leverage that? E.g. "We are the national leader in rethinking rural entrepreneurism."

"Education, three higher education institutions, a first-rate school system."

Mayor Lane stated that education should be before higher education institutes. He continued that they really need to include Franklin Pierce.

"Aviation – regional airport."

Members of the committee nodded.

"Significant, high-tech manufacturing based in Keene."

Dr. Treadwell asked if it should say "expanding" instead of "significant." Others replied that it could say both. Councilor Hansel agreed and stated that if they want to give people the impression of a progressive city moving forward, they should use more active language, not just "we have."

"A very dense arts community."

Committee members expressed dislike of the term "dense," and suggested something like "vibrant and energized."

"Keene, known as a safe place to live and one of the nation's top communities to raise a family."

Mr. Coates stated that he would change "raise a family" and get it closer to some of the first bullets. He continued that they want to attract not just young people who are not married, but young people anywhere between 28 and 40 who are trying to raise families and come here for the quality education and a strong school system. They do not talk about the elementary education system in here. When he was the Keene Board of Education chair, C&S asked if they could do a video, looking to recruit young families to move to the area.

Mayor Lane agreed that they should say something positive about the school system. Chair Greenwald stated that they should split higher education and public education. Dr. Treadwell replied that they could say "first rate K to 12 education."

"A parks system that provides quality community services and amenities, balanced environmental stewardship, and diverse programming. A modern ice rink (Keene Ice) located near the downtown, and connected by the Keene Trail system."

Mr. Kopczynski asked if they want to put in anything about the park system. He continued that he thought that was part of the recruitment package. Mayor Lane replied that it talks about the trail system, which really is world class. Others agreed.

"Cheshire Medical Center Dartmouth Hitchcock-Keene (CMC/DHK), a modern 169-bed regional hospital and clinic."

Mr. Kopczynski asked if they should take this out. Mayor Lane replied that it is good, but they should also say that Keene has the largest municipal library in the state. Mr. Kopczynski replied that that is in the report in a different place. Councilor Hansel stated that it would be good to condense the various facilities and infrastructure items into one, well-crafted bullet point.

"A vital and active Main Street and downtown."

Mr. Dugan stated that active words are important, but everything can't be "exciting" and "vibrant." He continued that they need synonyms.

"Several large national retailers to complement its successful buy-local movement."

Chair Greenwald stated that the comment about national retailers is not necessary. Mayor Lane added that it conflicts with buy local. Mr. Murphy replied that they balance each other. Mr. Thibault suggested they lead with "buy local."

Keene has a modern, well-functioning, non-partisan, stable government not subject to political swings and crises.

Councilor Hansel suggested they add something like "community capacity for philanthropy." Someone else suggested "vibrant nonprofits," which might be a separate bullet.

Mr. Kopczynski stated that they will delete the bullet points about Keene being listed as a must-visit by "House Beautiful" and about "Visiting New England" saying it is like a Hallmark movie.

Councilor Hansel stated that what does resonate is "Central Square named 'One of the Great Places in America' by the American Planners Association." He continued that that one has some heft behind it.

Mr. Kopczynski stated that they can puff up the "A vital and active Main Street and downtown" bullet point using Mr. Dugan's idea of a thesaurus. Mr. Thibault suggested "vital and vibrant."

Mr. Walier asked if that is where they would talk about the entrepreneurs. Others replied, it is not just downtown, it is general.

Mr. Perkins stated that the thought of family friendly businesses, for recruitment and retention, might be good to add.

Councilor Hansel stated that it is the idea of applying big ideas on a relatively small scale. He continued that that is something important that resonates with people. Mayor Lane replied yes, that resonates with people outside of Keene more than with people in Keene. He continued that several communities around the country are aware of Keene and see Keene as successfully doing things that big cities would try to do. They want to know how Keene is so successful at doing things that big cities ought to be trying. Leadership across the country keeps an eye on Keene.

Councilor Hansel replied yes, Keene is good at achieving big ideas on a smaller scale. Mayor Lane stated that regarding Mr. Walier's earlier question about how to make these things happen, whoever the future mayor is, is someone at this table, and someone who supports this. This will not die when he steps down as mayor.

Mr. Coates stated that he recently talked with someone who just moved here a year ago, and when he asked why, they gave all the reasons people here are talking about, but also said it is because in Keene they are within driving distance of wherever they want to go, like ski resorts, Boston, Hartford, and New York. They like the idea of coming home to a rural setting with the ability to drive to where they want to go. Mr. Kopczynski replied that that fits into the introduction. Brief discussion ensued. Dr. Treadwell stated that they can highlight that they are centrally located in New England. Mr. Thibault stated that it is an interesting dynamic that one can get to Boston from Keene easier than to, say, Concord.

Mr. Walier replied that they could also say something about it being easy to get to two major international airports from Keene.

Bill Hutwelker left at 1:51 PM.

Mr. Perkins stated that they have undersold the airport in this report. Brief discussion ensued. Someone stated that there are huge opportunities here.

Mr. Dugan stated that as someone mentioned earlier, people are likely to just read the first couple pages of the report. He suggested beginning with an introduction or executive summary, moving into "What sets Keene apart," followed by "Areas that need development" (with more positive verbiage), and then slide into the positive side that Councilor Hansel mentioned – how everyone comes together to tackle big projects like these. He continued that then, the report could go line by line with concrete recommendations from each topic. The "more boring" material, such as information about loan programs, and all the graphs and lists of programs that most people would not know how to access anyway, could be in the back in an appendix. The format would be, "This is who we are, this is why we're doing [what we're doing], here's what makes us great, here's what will make us better, and here are the concrete recommendations [the committee] is passing to the City Council for how to make us better."

Mayor Lane stated that they will send this report to the City Council so the City Council can adopt it as a working outline of what to accomplish. He continued that it will also be a public document, and as such, Mr. Dugan is right – they need to make it shorter, interesting, and not too full of detail. However, the details need to be in it, for the City Council, so there is a framework.

Mr. Dugan stated that they know what is being proposed at KSC and other venues for workforce development, [so they can recommend] resolutions to support that. For housing, they can come up with recommendations, and if someone wants to refer to the statistical part of it, it can be in the back.

Mr. Kopczynski stated that the committee will be making recommendations to the City Council to adopt, so they need to have the background information somewhere. He continued that councilors have not sat in this room, and do not know. Mr. Coates stated that he agrees with Mr. Dugan about having a community document, but they need to have this core document, too, which anyone from the public who wants to have a deeper dive could get.

Mr. Kopczynski stated that there will be an executive summary. He continued that he sees two possible ways to do this: 1) transmit the report along with a 1.5 page executive summary, or 2) condense the report itself down to an executive summary and have all of this material from the current report behind it.

Mr. Foskett asked if they want to say that it would be good to get behind natural gas, and recommend that to the City. He continued that they want to grow economically, and natural gas is something people from other parts of the country ask about. People hang up on him if he says Keene does not have natural gas. Mayor Lane replied that Kinder Morgan got shot down badly when they proposed natural gas here. He continued that it is just not realistic. They will have compressed natural gas that gets trucked in.

Mr. Coates stated that this report is for future city councils. He asked if they should make a global statement around energy. Mayor Lane replied that as the City Council has gone on record saying a number of times, Keene really supports alternative energies more than it supports natural gas or oil. Chair Greenwald asked if there is anything in the report about that. Mr. Kopczynski replied that it does talk about energy use and supply. He continued that Mayor Lane is right – the City's focus has been about carbon reduction and increasing energy efficiency, instead of supply.

Dr. Treadwell stated that page 17 is all about green energy. She continued that if the City Council is going to be asked to embrace something, it should be a progressive element that sets Keene apart, and they should highlight the fact that Keene is purposefully doubling down on alternative energy sources in order to meet its regional needs. Mr. Thibault stated that it is one of those big ideas they are achieving on a small scale.

Mr. Kopczynski stated that the City has an adopted greenhouse gas emissions plan. He asked if the City adopted the 2050 plan. Mayor Lane replied that the City adopted the outline of what they want to achieve with that plan, which is energy self-sufficiency by 2050. The plan is still being developed. Dr. Treadwell stated that many people would want to be a part of that. She continued that commitments like that do not exist in many places. Mayor Lane replied that young people are especially interested.

Mr. Dugan stated that on page 22, regarding new market tax credits, it says there are two "severely distressed tracts," but now there are three. Brief discussion ensued. Mr. Dugan suggested wording like "powerful community development tools that utilize federal tax credits."

Mr. Murphy stated that a transportation center is important. He continued that the current one is underutilized. They cannot hide their heads in the sand. The Southwest Region Plaining Commission has uncovered some data recently that it was a more robust facility just a dozen years ago. Mayor Lane replied that that is correct.

Mr. Kopczynski stated that transportation as a subject was not discussed by the committee. He asked where they would put that into the report. Mayor Lane replied that the Southwestern Regional Planning Commission is doing a transportation study now.

Mr. Murphy replied that he will give some thought about where it would fit in; maybe page 17, item 10 – it speaks to economic development and branding at the county level. Similar to the Monadnock Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)'s being in the conceptual stages of the arts and culture corridor, which is a great idea, the Greater Keene Chamber of Commerce is doing a feasibility study on marketing the region. Should that be added to the list? He continued that the Comprehensive Economic Strategy for Southwest New Hampshire plan recognizes several programs in Keene as priorities. That is important to coordinate with because it puts programs in line for federal funds by virtue of being in the document.

Mr. Kopczynski asked if he means, add the Chamber of Commerce to "Coordinate with MEDC and Cheshire County to advance the concept of county-wide economic development and branding." Mr. Murphy replied yes. He continued that items 9 and 10 are under "arts and

culture," but they are ubiquitous to a lot of initiatives other than arts and culture. They could add an item that speaks to coordination with a comprehensive economic development strategy with southwest New Hampshire.

Mr. Kopczynski replied that that is referred to a bit in the beginning. He continued that the committee itself never talked about that, so he will have to figure out how to put that in. He is trying to keep the report to subjects that the committee discussed, instead of just things people throw into the mix.

Mr. Murphy replied that that is a little limiting. He continued that just because they did not have guest speakers present about broadband or transportation does not mean they cannot include the topics. Mayor Lane replied that committee members are very familiar with transportation and broadband, and not having had a guest speaker on a topic does not make the committee oblivious to a topic. Mr. Kopczynski replied that he does not know what the committee wants to put in the report unless they tell him what they are thinking.

Mr. Thibault stated that regarding the "What sets Keene apart" section and thinking about what Councilor Hansel said about active words, the line "three higher education institutions" should use an active word so it is not static, such as "contributions from three higher education institutions." He continued that also, regarding the region, it is important to say that they have invested in Keene's first rate educational system. They have really *invested* in the middle school and high school.

Mr. stated that regarding the "buy local" bullet point, they should mention the Monadnock Food Coop by name, because of its vibrancy and incredible success. Councilor Hansel replied that using some synonym for "vibrant," they could say something about the downtown local food scene with the coop as its hub. Mr. Perkins added that they should include the farmer's market. Councilor Hansel added that they could say "...anchored by..." instead of "as its hub."

Dr. Treadwell thanked Mr. Kopczynski for the visual layout of the report. She continued that the report is visually appealing.

Mr. Kopczynski stated that he will put together another draft, using his notes and the meeting minutes. He continued that committee members can forward him anything they want to, with specifics. This is not his report, it is the committee's. He did his best to synthesize the committee's thoughts, based on meeting minutes and conversation.

Chair Greenwald stated that they will meet again before they release this report, based on the amount of edits. Mr. Kopczynski replied that normally they would not meet again. He continued that he expects the front part of the report will require fairly extensive remodeling, but the rear part of it, not too much.

Mr. Walier stated that Mr. Kopczynski did an outstanding job pulling all the pieces together from this year and a half. He continued that they all agree that this document, going to the City Council and then off to the world, needs to portray a very positive and energetic branding. Mayor Lane stated that this is their vision for the future and how to achieve the vision.

4) Topics Discussed and Parked

- a. Arts and Culture
- b. Energy, Use and Supply
- c. County Economic Development Efforts
- d. Current and Future Airport Economic Efforts
- e. Current and Future MEDC Economic Development Efforts Workforce Development Training and Education
- f. Financial Resources Available for existing or potential businesses Opportunity Zone, 79E, NMTC, CDBG
- g. Housing programs and availability of housing...including workforce
- h. Economic Trends New Hampshire Keene, Monadnock Region

5) <u>Draft Report Goal – Workforce Development</u>

- I. Training and Education
- II. Housing
- III. Culture
- IV. Compensation

The meeting adjourned at 2:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,

Britta Reida, Minute-taker

Edited MK Kopczynski 07-24-2019