

City of Keene
New Hampshire

PLANNING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, February 24, 2020

6:30 PM

Council Chambers

Members Present:

Douglas Barrett, Chairman
Chris Cusack, Vice-Chair
Pamela Russell Slack
Michael Burke
Mayor George Hansel
David Orgaz
Gail Somers
Councilor Michael Remy

Staff Present:

Rhett Lamb, Asst. City Manager/Community
Development Director
Tara Kessler, Senior Planner
Mari Brunner, Planner
Merri Howe, Finance Director

Members Not Present:

Andrew Weglinski
Tammy Adams, Alternate

I. Call to Order – Roll Call

Chair Barrett called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM and roll call was taken. The Chairman welcomed the two new members to the Board, David Orgaz and Gail Somers.

II. Minutes of Previous Meeting – January 27, 2020 Planning Board Meeting

A motion was made by Mayor George Hansel to accept the January 27, 2020. The motion was seconded by Pamela Russell Slack and was unanimously approved.

III. Election of Vice-Chair

A motion was made by Mayor George Hansel to nominate Chris Cusack as Vice-Chairman of the Planning Board. The motion was seconded by Pamela Russell Slack and was unanimously approved.

The Chairman noted the terms for Chair and Vice-Chair terminate at the end of this year and stated should anyone be interested in those leadership roles to let City staff know.

IV. Capital Improvement Program FY 2021-2027- Presentation by Merri Howe, City of Keene Finance Director

Asst. City Manager/Community Development Director Rhett Lamb and Finance Director Merri Howe were the next two speakers. Mr. Lamb explained the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is prepared by City staff and is introduced to the City Council through the City Manager. This puts the Planning Board in an advisory role, to offers recommendations to the Council as to how

the CIP meets the goals of the Comprehensive Master Plan. With that, he turned the presentation to the Finance Director.

Ms. Howe began by stating the City is moving to a bi-annual CIP process, the current document is through FY27, there will not be a document prepared in January 2021. Any changes made to the current document will be presented in some sort of a memo format to City Council.

She stated the preparation process began last August with departments developing their projects focusing on the needs of the community as well as the goals and future vision of the 2010 Comprehensive Master Plan.

This CIP book includes proposed projects that incorporate improvements to the City's infrastructure, flood plain and storm water management, parks and recreation, and trails.

Ms. Howe stated she would like to spend a moment highlighting some of the projects in this year's CIP book that focus on these goals and visions.

On page 89, the Arts and Culture Corridor project is being introduced in FY21. This project addresses the design, replacement, and upgrade of the City's infrastructure to support the Arts and Culture Corridor. This project addresses storm water, wastewater and water infrastructure by proposing to replace old and inadequate systems; some, which date back to the early 1900s. The downtown reconstruction and revitalization project is described on page 90 and is also slated to begin in FY21. This project proposes to replace and upgrade the existing infrastructure in the Downtown that has exceeded its useful life and capacity over the past 30 years.

Ms. Russell Slack asked when the last time the Master Plan was updated. Mr. Lamb stated it was back in 2010. Ms. Russell Slack asked for an explanation of the Arts and Culture Corridor project. Mr. Lamb explained the project is being proposed by MEDC along with many other partners to make improvements starting at Water Street and going through the bike path corridor, to include Gilbo Avenue, where it meets School St. The infrastructure work being proposed in the CIP anticipates the Arts and Culture Corridor will be occurring simultaneously.

Ms. Russell Slack asked should the project not be approved by the Council whether proposed construction work would need to be done either way. Mr. Lamb answered in the affirmative.

Ms. Howe continued with her presentation - on pages 108-110, projects are proposed that will continue to address flood and stormwater management in areas that have been identified with repetitive localized flooding issues. Ms. Russell Slack asked to which areas in the City Ms. Howe was referring. Ms. Howe referred to the list on page 107 and outlined the different areas for each year. She noted these areas are subject to change as demands and needs change. Ms. Russell Slack noted Gilbo Avenue is not slated to be completed until 2022 and noted there is a flood management project listed in FY21 for \$770,000 and in FY22 for \$560,000 and asked for clarification. Mr. Lamb stated he would check on this with Public Works to make sure these are not over-lapping projects.

Ms. Howe went on to say the other projects that tie into the Comprehensive Master Plan are those that are parks and recreation related that benefit neighborhoods and encourage outside activities such as walking and bicycling. On page 45, the construction of the Patricia T. Russell Park will begin in FY22 on the east side of the City along Beaver Brook and the Cheshire Rail

Trail. The park will be multigenerational with a playground, athletic field, pavilion, and a connection to the rail trail. Mr. Lamb stated the planning for this project is underway and a consultant has been brought on board.

Councilor Hansel referred to Page 46, and suggested a similar exercise with the Robin Hood Park Pool, noted the refurbishment of this pool is listed in the back of the book, and stated he wasn't sure how those two would work together. Mr. Lamb stated this is something he would follow-up with the Parks and Recreation Director.

Ms. Howe stated on page 49 continued maintenance and trail improvements are planned beginning in FY23. On page 52, the Transportation Heritage Trail will begin its next phase with the adaptation of three historic bridges. Mr. Lamb stated this project would extend the Cheshire Rail Trail further towards Swanzey from Eastern Avenue crossing Route 101. The City will be applying for grants to cover some of the funding for this project.

On page 53, scheduled in FY27 is Robin Hood Pool Improvements project. This project is in line with the Master Plan recommendation of developing a comprehensive capital equipment and park asset replacement plan. The Robin Hood Pool was gifted to the City by the Keene Lions Club back in 1964 and has exceeded its useful life. This project will include a redesign and rebuild of the Robin Hood Pool, decking, bathhouse and general repairs to bring the facility up to current industry standards. Vice-Chair Cusack noted the reports talks about structural integrity issues and asked whether there is concern about safety. Ms. Howe stated this would be a question for Andy Bohannon and Mr. Lamb stated he has not heard anything about pool closure.

Ms. Howe encouraged the Board to take some time to review the many other projects in this CIP book that focus on not only the current needs of the community but the vision for the future. Ms. Howe reminded the Board about a few other dates with reference to the CIP Presentation: Thursday February 27 at 5:30 at the FOP session, Thursday March 5 at 7:00 pm, City Council will be voting and adopting the CIP, Saturday March 7 at 10:00 am there will be the CIP Tour.

Mayor Hansel noted each of these projects has a reference to the Comprehensive Master Plan and how it would relate to the Plan.

Vice-Chair Cusack stated it is nice to see these projects in print and then come to fruition and referred to the project on Main Street, across from Elliot Street. He stated this change has been a great advantage to the area.

A motion was made by Mayor George Hansel that the Planning Board recommend to the City Council that the Capital Improvement Program FY 2021-2027 is consistent with the Comprehensive Master Plan. The motion was seconded by Councilor Remy.

Ms. Russell Slack stated she was apprehensive about voting in favor of this motion without having answers to the question she raised previously. She added the item won't come back to the Planning Board once it has been voted on. Chair Barrett asked if this item is not voted to be recommended to the City Council, how that would affect the scheduled for the CIP. Mr. Lamb stated the next Planning Board meeting is not until after the date scheduled for the Council to vote on the CIP. He stated there are a few options the Board has; in the motion, language could be included about the unanswered question. Another way would be to schedule a special meeting before or after the Joint Committee session on March 9 to address the question.

Mayor Hansel stated the way to make a change to the CIP is to present something at the public hearing and have the City Council make an amendment. He indicated today's vote is to say that the CIP overall is consistent with the goals of the Comprehensive Master Plan. He stated he does want to hear the answers to the questions raised. Ms. Russell Slack stated she cannot vote in favor of this item as the vote is recommending this item to the Council. She stated she agreed with the options offered by staff.

Chair Barrett explained the role of the Planning Board is to recommend that this plan is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. The Council's role however, is to approve the Capital Improvement Program. The Chairman suggested if the Board was to move forward to recommend adoption of the CIP to perhaps include conditions to go along with it and this will be something the Council could take under advisement.

Ms. Slack stated she understands her position on the Planning Board and stated she will vote on this motion if conditions are added.

Mayor George Hansel retracted his motion. Councilor Remy retracted his second.

A motion was made by Mayor George Hansel that the Planning Board recommend to the City Council that the Capital Improvement Program FY 2021-2027 is consistent with the Comprehensive Master Plan and recommend that the City Council pay close attention to any duplication of projects with the Robin Hood Park Pool project and infrastructure work for the Arts Corridor. The motion was seconded by Councilor Remy.

Councilor Remy stated as a member of the Finance Committee he will make sure these items are addressed at the next Finance Committee meeting and added that he did raise the pool issue at the last session.

The motion made by the Mayor was unanimously approved.

**V. Community Development Director Report
NH Annual Planning and Zoning Conference - May 30, 2020 at the Grappone Center
in Concord, NH**

Mr. Lamb welcomed the two new members to the Board. Mr. Lamb stated he would like to talk about Planning Board members attending the training session offered by the state. The state's Office of Strategic Initiatives hosts an annual planning and zoning conference. The date this year is May 30 in Concord, NH. He indicated staff will be sending out an email to coordinate and help pay for members to attend this conference.

He also asked for ideas Board members have for training opportunities for the Planning Board.

The Chairman suggested a training session to go over rules and responsibilities of Board members. Mayor Hansel suggested training on site plan review and walking through some of the typical situations the Board encounters. Ms. Russell Slack stated she would be interested in attending these sessions but daytime hours would be difficult for her.

Mr. Lamb stated they could work with the attorney's office and come up with different options for the Board to work with.

Ms. Russell Slack agreed with site plan review and asked to focus on the development standards as some of these standards can be difficult to understand.

Ms. Somers asked for review of the Comprehensive Master Plan.

VI. New Business

VII. Upcoming Dates of Interest – March 2020

CIP City Council Public Hearing – March 5; 7:00 PM

Joint PB/PLD Committee – March 9; 6:30 PM

Planning Board Steering Committee – March 10; 11:00 AM

Planning Board Site Visits – March 18; 8:00 AM – To Be Confirmed

Planning Board Meeting – March 23; 6:30 PM

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

Reviewed by: Tara Kessler, Senior Planner