

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

5:30 PM

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Members Present:

Janis O. Manwaring, Chair
Michael Giacomo, Vice Chair
Randy L. Filiault
Robert C. Williams

Members Not Present:

Bettina A. Chadbourne

Mayor George S. Hansel

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager
Thomas P. Mullins, City Attorney
Patty Little, City Clerk
Bill Dow, Deputy City Clerk
Terri Hood, Assistant City Clerk
Rebecca Landry, IT Director/Assistant City
Manager
Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks,
Recreation & Facilities
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works
Director/Emergency Management Director

Chair Manwaring called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM, welcomed the public, and read the authority to hold a remote meeting: Emergency Order #12, issued by the Governor of the State of New Hampshire pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04. Pursuant to this order, Councilors Filiault & Giacomo reported that they were calling alone from their home addresses, Councilor Williams was calling from his home address with his son present, and Chair Manwaring was calling from City Hall with City staff present.

1) Patrick Cannon/Eclipse Management Group – Construction on City Property

Chair Manwaring welcomed Patrick Cannon of Eclipse Management Group, who was calling alone from his home address in Scarborough, ME. Mr. Cannon said that Eclipse Management Group is proposing to develop a space in the Keene ICE facility to operate a tier three juniors hockey club in the eastern hockey league. To ensure their operation would not encroach upon any other entities that use the facility and with new precautions needed related to Covid-19 moving forward, Mr. Cannon's proposal is to establish temporary locker rooms in the currently empty storage space behind the bleachers in the arena. He shared a memo and updated designs from the proposal architect, Tim Sampson of Keene. Mr. Cannon explained that establishing the hockey club at Keene ICE would occur in three phases, given the uncertainty of how players will be able to use the facility moving forward due to Covid-19. In phase one, temporary locker rooms are proposed in the empty space, with self-contained bathroom and shower areas (approximately 46 by 20 feet), to be ready for the fall season. If the City approves in the long-

term, Mr. Cannon said the second phase would involve moving the locker rooms to the same footprint on the second floor and establishing two office spaces on the first floor with limited access to equipment in those rooms for sanitation. He welcomed questions.

Councilor Williams asked how ventilation would be established to these new spaces. Mr. Cannon's understanding was that ventilation would be through the roof. Existing facilities would be leveraged as much as possible and a mechanical engineer had already begun plans.

The City Attorney, Tom Mullins, suggested that Mr. Cannon explain the community outreach planned for this proposal. Mr. Cannon said that public outreach sessions would occur via zoom at 7:00 PM on Tuesday, June 16 and Wednesday, June 17. Mr. Cannon hoped the sessions would be an opportunity for Eclipse Management Group to introduce themselves, talk about the program they hope to bring to Keene ICE, explain their work with Rink Services Group to minimize impact, demonstrate the goal to not replace but add to hockey offerings at Keene State, and to provide an opportunity for questions/answers. Information about the sessions was submitted to the Keene Sentinel.

Chair Manwaring asked about the age group of the hockey club. Mr. Cannon said that participants in the tier three junior league cannot be under age 16 or over age 20 as of December 31 each year. He said that most of these players aspire to play college hockey, for example Wesleyan University and University of New England are interested in a few of the club's players. Chair Manwaring asked where the players come from. Mr. Cannon said that most are from the New England region, some are from states outside the region like Tennessee and North Carolina, and the club is allowed three players born outside the US including a current player from Canada.

Vice Chair Giacomo asked the towns with which this hockey club would be competing. Mr. Cannon said they would compete against other teams in the northern division like Worcester, MA, and several from Vermont, among others. Mr. Cannon said this makes Keene an opportune location relative to other teams, limiting the club's travel for games to 99 miles or less.

Councilor Filiault noted that he heard constituent and arena user concerns about ice time being divided fairly if this club were established in Keene; he asked whether this would be discussed at the public sessions. Mr. Cannon said the plan is to take much of the ice time unused currently, with practices on weekday mornings and most home games also during the daytime on weekdays. Mr. Cannon said he has been up front with the Keene ICE Rink Services Group and other City Councilors he has spoken with to date by telling them that the club's intention is not to displace anyone in the community. Rather, he hopes that buying unused ice time will help to manage tuition for other large time ice buyers.

With no further Commission questions, Chair Manwaring heard the next agenda item regarding this matter before accepting a motion.

2) Eclipse Hockey at Keene ICE – Parks, Recreation & Facilities Director

Chair Manwaring welcomed Andy Bohannon, the Director of Parks, Recreation & Facilities to speak about the possibility of Eclipse Hockey Group establishing at Keene ICE.

Mr. Bohannon was at the meeting to provide an informational report on this possibility and he thanked Mr. Cannon for providing details. Mr. Bohannon said that Mr. Cannon initiated this conversation with the Board of Keene ICE in late spring 2019; Mr. Bohannon is a City staff liaison to that Board because it is a City facility. The Board of Keene ICE requested more information from Eclipse Management about the league's structure and other aspects of bringing the franchise to this location. Ultimately, Mr. Bohannon said the matter went dormant for some time because Mr. Cannon needed more clarity from the league. Mr. Cannon returned to the Board in 2020 with some things resolved to begin conversations again. Mr. Bohannon said that the Board considered the work that would be required in the arena, whether anyone would be displaced or have ice time challenged, and what the club would bring to the arena. Mr. Bohannon explained that Keene ICE was designed to be a community rink and so the Board considered current programs and was able to find a niche for Eclipse. However, the Board wanted to ensure public sessions were offered allowing community members who use the ice currently to participate in an open dialogue with Eclipse about varied concerns. Still, Mr. Bohannon was optimistic that Keene ICE could host a program like Eclipse and said that there seemed to be solutions for ice time and locker room buildouts; there were still housing matters to resolve. He said hosting a club like Eclipse would benefit the Keene community regarding things like realtors already interested in potential workout space. Eclipse is drawn to Keene ICE because it is a nice, new facility. Mr. Bohannon said that most in the community seem cautiously optimistic but he wanted to ensure public sessions occur before Council makes a decision. He said that Mr. Cannon has done his due diligence and that the Board of Keene ICE thinks that Eclipse would be a positive addition to the City.

Chair Manwaring recognized Jason Smart, who was calling from his home address. Mr. Smart said he was involved heavily with developing Keene ICE from the beginning and he was getting many questions about Eclipse coming to Keene, so he hoped to get more information at the public sessions. He asked how to access the sessions. Mr. Cannon said that details for accessing the public sessions were available through the Keene Sentinel, the Rink Services Group, the Board of Keene ICE, Mr. Bohannon, the City Manager, and other City Councilors. He offered to email the details directly to Mr. Smart.

Vice Chair Giacomo made the following motion, which Councilor Filiault seconded.

On a vote of 4-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities & Infrastructure Committee placed the request from Eclipse Hockey on more time so that they can conduct public outreach efforts and to allow City staff an opportunity to perform its due diligence with respect to the proposed project.

3) Emerald Ash Borer – Main Street Tree Removal – Public Works Director/Emergency Management Director

Chair Manwaring welcomed Kürt Blomquist, the Public Works Director & Emergency Management Director, who shared information about the emerald ash borer, which is an invasive insect species that kills all 16 species of ash trees. Otherwise known as the “green menace,” the emerald ash borer is believed to have come to North America from Asia via hardwood pallets. It was first discovered in the US in Detroit in 2002 and in New Hampshire in 2013. The emerald ash borer has two life stages, the flying emerald green insect that bores and lays eggs in ash trees and then the subsequent more destructive larvae, which hatch under the bark and attack the tree’s innards, disrupting the flow of nutrients and water through the tree. Once infested, it takes two or three years for the ash tree to perish, during which time damage to branches becomes evident. By 2020, 106 communities in NH have confirmed infestations, including Rindge, Sullivan, Swanzey, and Keene in Cheshire County.

The Public Works Director said that he forwarded a memo to City Council on May 1 informing them of ash tree infestations discovered on Main Street. He explained that the State has had small purple triangle emerald ash borer traps in Keene trees for five to eight years trying to capture the insects and monitor local conditions. A forester was traveling through the area this spring who confirmed infestation of a tree near Margaritas and recommended evaluating the remaining downtown ash trees. As a result, the City hired an arborist to assess the 39 downtown ash trees, of which 20 were identified as infested and 17 need to be removed. There is no cure once a tree is infected. The Public Works Director showed photos of trees to demonstrate the tree conditions and locations downtown; for example, the leaves should be out fully right now and many have no leaves, having perished this past winter. Most of the 17 trees are in the Main Street median between Emerald Street and Central Square.

The Public Works Director said that this presentation was to inform the Committee of the need to remove the 17 trees. He explained that the borer transitions from larvae to insect in mid-late June and so the plan is to remove the trees before the adult insects emerge and can infect more trees. Mr. Blomquist stated the plan for the remaining trees is to treat them with chemicals at a preliminary cost of about \$5,000. The chemical treatment will protect the remaining trees that are unaffected, while also extending the life of the two that appear to have some infection by controlling how quickly the infection progresses. When the Main Street medians were established in 1988, the goal was a uniform appearance, and the vulnerability of single species plantings was unknown. Therefore, the Highway Superintendent recommended replacing the trees removed in the Main Street median with a mix of red maples and honey locusts to prevent an issue of single-species vulnerability to death that resulted in the current situation. The current ash trees downtown are much larger than those species that will replace them; smaller species are needed to fit well in the medians. The new species will reach 10 to 12 feet high. Work on the 17 trees is planned in-house because City equipment can accommodate the smaller trees. Only 11 trees will replace the 17 to be removed because the grassy medians are restricted by five-foot widths. The Public Works Director said that the plantings would take time and the highway crew

had already begun preliminary excavation work to understand what is in the ground there, like roots that will cause significant preparation work. He recognized that this was not good news but said that the longer the trees remain in place, the greater chance of spreading the infestation further through the community. Next, the Public Works Department must begin assessing the degree of ash tree infestation throughout City forests. He welcomed questions on this informational presentation.

Chair Manwaring asked whether the public could access information about the emerald ash borer on the Public Works Department website. The Public Works Director said that information would be added soon. He noted that part of planning is to keep public awareness of this invasive species high to help with the City and NH Forest office tracking efforts. He said that older members of the community would recall when the Dutch elm disease similarly caused elm trees to be replaced with ash varieties in the 1960s.

Councilor Filiault asked if the emerald ash borer had any chance of invading other related tree species. The Public Works Director said that the borer could only infect the 16 varieties of ash tree species, which are pervasive throughout Keene, and so it would be a challenge to locate large areas of concern and plan to replace them over the next decade. He said that communities in the Midwest like in Minnesota are already dealing with this problem and are paying more than \$1 million annually to treat the disease and replace trees.

Councilor Williams referred to the Dutch elm disease stating that the ash trees are not the first large-scale death of street trees. Since that time, he noted that there was an effort to breed disease-resistant elms and he asked if there was a way to procure those for replacing the ash trees. The Public Works Director said he was quite familiar with the Dutch elm disease-resistant liberty elm tree, saying that he installed many throughout City projects. He said that the Dutch elm disease strike trees at 10-15 years-old, which is the age that the liberty elms are reaching, and it would become clear whether they are truly disease-resistant. He said that many liberty elms could be seen at Winchester and lower Main Streets as well as the roundabout at Winchester Street and RT-101. Unfortunately, the Public Works Director said that the five-foot medians are too restrictive for the large liberty elms and the trees are not salt tolerant. He said there is a science to selecting street trees. He thinks the red maples and honey locusts will reach a 20 to 30 foot canopy width, and the honey locusts will flower. He hopes one day to bring elms back to Main Street again as Councilor Williams suggested, as this is the Elm City. Councilor Williams applauded the choice of red maples and honey locusts because they are native species that will benefit native pollinators. The Councilor asked about the hemlock woolly adelgid, which attacks hemlocks after a mild winter such as the one we just had. The Public Works Director was aware of the invasive species but said that at this time, the City does not have a significant budget for proactive tree management and it is usually not until a tree poses an unhealthy public hazard and requires removal that management begins.

Chair Manwaring recognized Councilor Mitch Greenwald, who was calling alone from his home address. Councilor Greenwald said that he was there in 1988 when the ash trees were selected

carefully to not be oversized and he said that the ash trees should also be replaced with trees sized modestly. The Councilor hoped that the City Manager and Finance Committee would consider the Downtown Tree Fund and he asked how much was available in that fund for this work. The Public Works Director said that the Downtown Tree Fund has over \$100,000 in principal, but that only interest is accessed typically, but because the majority of these trees fall within the rules for Downtown Memorial Trees he thought the principal would be available and the intention is to use the Fund. The only possible action of which he was aware would be to have the Trustees of the Trust release the funds. Councilor Greenwald expressed his desire that the principal of the Downtown Tree Fund also be considered because planting trees was the intention. The Councilor also asked the City Manager how this tree replacement fits into the upcoming downtown rebuilding project, stating that many trees downtown need to be replaced in addition to sidewalks with overgrown tree roots. The City Manager said that any construction for the downtown project would not begin for many years still and so staff did not feel the Main Street medians could be left bare that long. Councilor Greenwald asked how many years before construction. The City Manager said that the budget is phased over many years. The Public Works Director said that construction is set to begin in three years, followed by three or four years of phased construction moving from Central Square toward Emerald Street. He agreed with the City Manager that downtown is known for trees and it did not seem prudent to leave the space completely bare. Councilor Greenwald said that staff should expect a letter from him about sidewalk and median replacements now that he knows it will be three to five years before this downtown work, but he agreed with the Public Works Director that downtown could not be left bare without trees for that long.

Vice Chair Giacomo made the following motion, which Councilor Filiault seconded.

On a vote of 4-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities & Infrastructure Committee accepted this communication as informational.

There being no further business, Chair Manwaring adjourned the meeting at 6:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katrinya Kibler, Minute Taker
June 14, 2020

Additional Edits by,
Terri M. Hood, Assistant City Clerk