

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HERITAGE COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, March 11, 2020

4:00 PM

**2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Susan D'Egidio, Vice Chair
Rose Carey, Co-Chair
Cauley Powell
Christine Houston
Kelly Ballard
Louise Zerba, Alternate

Staff Present:

Tara Kessler, Senior Planner
Brett Rusnock, Public Works Department

Members Not Present:

Charlotte Schuerman, Co-Chair
Erin Benik

1) Call to Order/Roll Call

Chair Carey called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Minutes of January 8, 2020

Ms. D'Egidio made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of January 8, 2020. Ms. Schuerman seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Marlboro St. Corridor Improvements Presentation and Discussion – Dubois and King

Nick Sceggell from DuBois & King stated that he is here with Brett Rusnock, Project Manager from the Public Works Department (PWD). He continued that Marlboro St. is a NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) Transportation Alternatives project, and has local and federal funding. DuBois & King has completed the study phase and are in the preliminary design phase. They prepared a Section 106 request for project review through the NH Division of Historical Resources. The response back was that inventory does not appear necessary, based on the scope, and they should coordinate with the public and the Heritage Commission. They are here today to explain the project and get feedback and answer questions.

Mr. Sceggell stated that the corridor improvements are to accommodate different types of traffic – pedestrians, vehicles, and bicycles. The improvements will be within the existing limits of the curb. They will do restriping to create two vehicle lanes, two bike lanes, and parallel parking on one side of the street. Currently it is pretty wide with wide shoulders used for parking on both sides, and bike lanes are shared with the vehicle lanes. The school crossing at Wheelock School will get improved. Finally, there will be a connector through the PWD parcel between Marlboro St. and the Cheshire Rail Trail. That is the part they thought the Heritage Commission would be most interested in, so they brought a map showing this. He continued that they came up with a couple of alternatives – one would have gone through the parking lot and required some additional crossings. Their preferred alternative, from a safety standpoint and accommodating bikes and pedestrians, is to run along the exterior of the existing parking lot and create some green space. There will be pole lighting there. He showed the location on the map of the existing ramp. He continued that in order to keep ADA-compliant grades on that hill, they will start climbing “here” (he showed on the map) and make a new intersection at the rail trail.

Chair Carey asked if the City owns that section. Mr. Rusnock replied yes, the City owns the Rail Trail there. Chair Carey asked how wide the easement is. Mr. Rusnock showed the PWD property on the map and what HCS owns, an area with a small wetland, and where the approximate property line is. He does not know the exact width of the bike path, but there is an area where the fence line is relatively close to the side of the bike path.

Mr. Sceggell stated that the next steps are to go through the preliminary design and present it to the City Council, probably the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee, and submit it to the NHDOT for approval. Then the NHDOT would tell them when the money is available to do construction. They are in a delay pattern, with the funding being shovel-ready, and they are progressing through the design with the expectation that once they have plans that are good to go they have the potential to move up on the NHDOT’s list.

Chair Carey stated that she favors the extended trail, not going through the parking lot. Mr. Sceggell replied that it is more expensive, but it meets the purposes and needs more. Chair Carey replied yes, it would be better aesthetics for the community and be better for people using the trail.

Ms. Kessler stated that since there are federal dollars attached to this project the Section 106 review process is triggered, through the State’s Division of Historical Resources. She noted that the process involves local review and comment on a proposed project, and the comments of the Heritage Commission are shared with the State Division of Historical Resources. The Heritage Commission’s primary role is to share comments, questions, or concerns with the Department of Historical Resources. If they have significant concerns or feel it is warranted, there is the option of requesting local mitigation. She reminded the Commission of the Hillside Village project, where local mitigation was requested of the applicant.

Ms. Kessler noted that it appears that no buildings are being impacted by this project. Mr. Sceggell replied that is correct.

A commission member asked if it is correct that the bike path in this area is not lit. Mr. Rusnock replied that is correct. The commission member replied that it looks like the plan's lighting would be near it. Mr. Sceggell replied that they are working with a confined budget, with a limited number of LED lights. Mr. Rusnock replied that it would be relatively easy to run conduits to power those lights, but it would be a much bigger project to have lights along the whole trail because there is no existing utility along there. A commission member asked about making it vandal-proof. Mr. Sceggell replied that there is no way to make it completely vandal-proof, but it helps that it is a high visibility area. A commission member asked about the length. Mr. Sceggell replied that it is probably 300 to 500 feet.

Chair Carey asked if they need to give approval of some sort. Ms. Kessler stated that it is not necessary, but if they want, they can forward something along in support of the project. Chair Carey replied that she likes what she sees. Others agreed.

Mr. Sceggell added that DuBois & King is making commitments to federal agencies to not cut big trees.

The commission thanked Mr. Sceggell and Mr. Rusnock. Ms. Kessler stated that she will forward the feedback to the Department of Historical Resources.

4) Section 106 Review for 197 Water Street and 105 Maple Ave – Installation of additional telecommunication antennae and equipment

Ms. Kessler distributed packets of information, including images, from Edge Consultants, regarding the telecommunication tower on Maple Ave. She stated that 197 Water Street is not moving forward at this time. She continued that 105 Maple Ave is primarily forested and not really visible from the road. It's an existing tower with six antennae on it currently. It looks like a tree, for camouflaging. The clients are out of state. She thinks the information contained in the packet is fairly straight forward, but the Commission has the option to call the client if needed. The clients proposes to add six additional antennae. The tower height would not extend. The projection/distance from where the tower is located and where the antennae would be placed would not change. It would not be expanded any further out. But each antenna would be 96 inches by 19 inches by 7 inches. There would be support braces added. The height and width of the structure would not increase. The area developed for this tower will not be expanded or altered. The client is US Cellular and the reason is for "expanded telecommunications." They will do a full study of impacts to historic resources within a half mile of the structure. That has not taken place yet but the City will be copied on that.

Chair Carey stated that she has a couple questions. Will it be within that artificial tree look, with no additional height? And could those antennae be a dark brown or dark green instead of silver,

so they would not be as noticeable? Ms. Kessler replied that she can include those questions. A commission member asked if US Cellular is still constructing these towers even though with the advent of 5G technology, in the future they might not be necessary. Ms. Kessler replied that construction of towers is not that common; it is actually fairly difficult to do in Keene. But the addition of equipment on existing ones, called co-location, is common. It is about taking advantage of the existing tower. The regulations are much less stringent if you are just adding to a tower instead of building a new structure.

Ms. Kessler summarized that the comments she heard are: painting the new equipment a dark color to better blend in with the existing array, confirm that no additional height would be added, and have everything take place within the artificial tree equipment. Commission members agreed.

5) Section 106 Review for 29 Elm Street and 32 Water Street – Keith Thibault, Southwestern Community Services

Ms. Kessler stated that Keith Thibault is here to present on this application. Mr. Thibault stated that Southwestern Community Services (SCS) runs the facilities that shelter persons who are homeless. He continued that they have been working with Keene Housing and Cheshire Housing Trust to purchase these properties. For the past 20 or 30 years SCS has been leasing these properties for a men's shelter, women and family shelter, and "permanent housing" for people who are chronically homeless. For two of the three properties, they will be rehabilitating windows, floors, doors, kitchens, heating, and so on and so forth. The rehabilitation needs are large and they are all in need of updating. They were fortunate to receive the funding, and as a result of utilizing the Community Development Block Grant funds, they need to do an exhaustive environmental review. One property is 139 Roxbury Street, which does not need work because it had major rehabilitation a few years ago. SCS is looking to purchase (from Keene Housing) and rehabilitate/significantly upgrade 29 Elm Street and 32 Water Street. They are not in the Historic District. They will not be doing major work to the facades. The slate roof on 29 Elm Street will stay. It is mostly interior systems and finishes that need to be replaced or renovated.

Discussion ensued. A commission member asked if SCS will paint the structures. Mr. Thibault replied on Elm Street, yes, but the other property has vinyl siding. Someone asked for further clarification of the location of the Water Street property, and Mr. Thibault explained. He continued that they will be able to spend about \$350,000 between the two properties, so it will be a significant amount of work. Commission members stated that SCS does a great job. A commission member asked if this project involves help from the community members, like Habitat for Humanity. Mr. Thibault replied no, the conditions of the grant require licensed contractors. It will be put out for bid. The Block Grant program helps local contractors and suppliers; the money goes into the local construction industry.

A commission member asked what the difference will be between SCS owning the properties instead of Keene Housing owning them. Mr. Thibault replied that SCS has been operating the properties, leasing them from Keene Housing for 20 or more years, so the general public will not notice a difference in operations. He gave more information about what SCS does. He stated that housing authorities generally do not involve themselves in homelessness issues. They felt that having the properties in SCS's portfolio makes more sense, and their commissioners approved. He continued that for SCS, from a financial standpoint, the rent they have been paying to Keene Housing will be a significant reduction. It will be a net benefit for the program, and works well for everyone. He spoke about work SCS is doing with other properties, too.

A commission member asked if the replacement windows will try to complement what exists already. Mr. Thibault replied yes. A commission member asked if there are plans for salvaging interior components. Mr. Thibault replied that he likes doing that, when possible. He continued that they can talk with the architect and contractors. A commission member asked how the floors are. Mr. Thibault replied pretty beat up; none are original hardwood. A commission member asked how many people the buildings serve. Mr. Thibault replied that the Elm Street facility has four people at a time, and there are 18 beds at the Water Street facility. He spoke about the length of time that people stay, and how that varies, and how the program works with a "Housing First" approach and what that means. A commission member asked if the heating system upgrades involve switching to mini-splits. Mr. Thibault replied no, and explained 32 Water Street's "unique and innovative" heating system.

Ms. Kessler stated that the feedback she has heard from commission members are requests to SCS to replace the windows in kind, and to try and preserve interior architecture elements when possible.

Commission members thanked Mr. Thibault.

**6) Historical Society of Cheshire County Historic Home Tour – Rick Swanson,
Development Director for the Historical Society of Cheshire County**

Chair Carey asked Rick Swanson to speak.

Mr. Swanson thanked the commission. He stated that the Cheshire County Historical Society has been talking about doing a fundraiser of a historic home tour and they think it would be a nice way to raise a small amount of funds, and it fits their mission. It might be a good way to engage the public. He continued that Ms. Kessler and Chair Carey were a good resource to get them started on investigating this topic. They are thinking of Court and Washington Streets, along the model of what the Commission has done previously, such as a walkable tour with music, refreshments, and talks along the way. They are thinking of early June. He talked with the Board President and Alan Rumrill, who would be happy to do talks.

A commission member asked if they have picked which houses they would like included. Mr. Swanson replied that they have not approached any homeowners yet. They kind of have an idea of which homeowners might be open to the idea, though. That would be the next step. If they move ahead with the idea they would have to talk with homeowners pretty soon. A commission member asked if the speakers will talk outside of the houses, or if they are thinking of having people go inside houses. Mr. Swanson replied that they hope to have a couple houses with activities indoors. He continued that Chair Carey suggested the Sumner Knight Chapel would be a good place for a talk, but maybe a home would be a good place for that. It could go a couple different directions – you could walk along the tour with a guide, or it could be self-guided with certain things happening at certain times. A commission member asked if it would only be houses on Court and Washington Streets. Mr. Swanson replied that he would not rule out something in between, but they want to make it manageable so it is walkable. A commission member asked how it would be different from what the Heritage Commission did. Chair Carey replied that she thinks he is trying to combine a lot of the facets of what the Commission did with the Sunday Socials and the tours and talks. A commission member stated that she thinks there is definitely interest in the town. Others agreed. A commission member asked if it would be the same houses that the Commission had on their tour. Chair Carey replied that she does not know. Discussion ensued about possible houses. Chair Carey stated that she offered to meet with Mr. Swanson again and share about what the Heritage Commission has done. She continued that they also talked about perhaps making this an annual fundraiser they collaborate on. It could feature a different neighborhood each year. Others replied that that is a great idea.

Mr. Swanson stated that it sounds like the Commission supports this. Chair Carey stated that she and Mr. Swanson would like to meet again, if commission members are in favor of her sharing materials with Mr. Swanson. Mr. Swanson replied that collaboration would be great, and they could recognize the Commission as a sponsor or partner. Chair Carey stated that she wants to acknowledge that the Cheshire County Historical Society has helped the Commission tremendously in the past with projects, and it would be great to help Mr. Swanson and the organization with this one.

A commission member stated that Mr. Swanson said this was a fundraiser. Will there be fees or tickets? Mr. Swanson replied yes, there will be a fee.

The commission thanked Mr. Swanson.

7) CLG Grant FY 2020 Urban Barn Survey

Chair Carey stated that she and Ms. Schuerman reviewed and scored the various proposals for the Urban Barn Survey. She continued that there were four applicants. They agree that Lynn Monroe of Preservation Company seems to be the most qualified of the four, for various reasons, including the requirements of the proposal. Chair Carey asked if the group is okay with going with Lynn Monroe, or if they want to talk about it. Others replied that they are fine with Ms. Monroe.

8) Updates:

a. CLG Grant FY 2021 Application

Ms. Kessler reported that they applied for another grant, for next year's CLG program, to have a website to institutionalize the walking tours in an online format. They applied for \$10,000 but have not heard back yet. She will keep the commission updated.

b. Stone Arch Bridge Improvements/Proposed Keene Transportation Heritage Trail

Chair Carey asked Ms. Kessler to speak. Ms. Kessler stated that this is becoming a standard agenda item and she/staff is continuing to work on this, but there is nothing new to report. She has not done research yet on an L-Chip grant. She thinks that would be the next step – to do the final work on putting in capstones, to get a design contract for estimating what the work would be and what the cost would be. That is in conjunction with the proposed Transportation Heritage Trail. She asked Chair Carey if she went to the meeting about that.

Chair Carey replied that yes, she went to the Bicycle Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee (BPPAC) meeting this morning. She continued that the BPPAC is asking for help, two people from the Commission that would work with three people from the BPPAC to form a subcommittee to research the history of the area and help with promotional work, perhaps some event planning, and ideas that would contribute to bringing this trail to the public's awareness. There has been talk about creating a pocket park by the Stone Arch Bridge. They hope to get this underway this month, before the BPPAC's next meeting in April. If anyone is interested they need two people for the subcommittee. Ms. Kessler stated that she will coordinate the communication between the two committees, regarding the creation of the subcommittee.

c. Demolition Review Subcommittee

No report.

9) New or Other Business

a. Neighborhood Planning

Chair Carey that she, Ms. Schuerman, and Ms. Kessler met last week and talked about a response to the Mayor's request that they begin to generate ideas for promoting neighborhoods and neighborhood gatherings. One idea she was thinking of is doing it through art, such as a photographic display in City Hall and other places that would begin to illustrate features of the neighborhoods – style of houses, the architecture, any particular building or gathering place of significance, etc., that would begin to identify the neighborhoods in Keene. Neighborhoods could have names – “Firehouse Neighborhood,” for example, for the Court/Washington Street neighborhood. Another neighborhood could be “the South Lincoln Street Neighborhood,” or

“Beaver Mills,” even though not many people know what that means. Discussion ensued and someone said that it is a fun task. Chair Carey stated that it does not all need to be done in one year. But they could begin by taking photographs around Keene of whatever people find of interest. She took some from the roof of her house, for starters. She is looking for ideas and concepts. A commission member stated that they could also look for historical photos, and have side-by-side photos of “before” and “what it looks like today.” People love seeing that. It makes history come alive. Others agreed.

A commission member asked if there are any oral history accounts/collections in Keene. She spoke about a friend who told her long stories about their family’s history in a house in Keene, and how great it is to collect these types of stories. Others replied that maybe they could incorporate that as they move forward, and discussion ensued. Someone mentioned that the Historical Society is collecting oral history accounts/narratives to accompany each of the Wall Dogs murals.

A commission member asked if the Commission defines the neighborhoods, or if someone from the City officially decrees the neighborhoods, or how it works. Ms. Kessler replied that the Commission is approaching this from the historic perspective, which is an important angle. She continued that there is a parallel effort happening from the Mayor, to try and define neighborhoods based on other factors. However, there are no official designations or distinctions for neighborhoods in the City.

10) Next Meeting – May 13, 2020

Ms. Kessler asked if they want maps, for the neighborhood planning conversation at the next meeting. The City has aerial photographs if that would help. Commission members replied yes.

11) Adjourn

There being no further business, Chair Carey adjourned the meeting at 5:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by Tara Kessler, Senior Planner