

A regular meeting of the Keene City Council was held on Thursday, January 7, 2021. The Honorable Mayor George S. Hansel called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. Mayor Hansel read into the record the Emergency Order #12, issued by the Governor of the State of New Hampshire pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04. He continued that the members of the City Council would be participating remotely. The Mayor asked that during the roll call for attendance, each Councilor identify their online presence and whether there are others with them in the room. Roll called: Stephen L. Hooper, Michael J. Remy, Janis O. Manwaring, Michael Giacomo, Randy L. Filiault, Robert C. Williams, Philip M. Jones, Gladys Johnsen, Terry M. Clark, Raleigh C. Ormerod, Bettina A. Chadbourne, Catherine I. Workman, Mitchell H. Greenwald, Kate M. Bosley, and Thomas F. Powers. A motion by Councilor Powers to accept the minutes from the December 17, 2020 regular meeting was duly seconded by Councilor Bosley and the motion passed on a roll call vote with 15 Councilors present and voting in favor. The Mayor led the Pledge of Allegiance.

CONFIRMATIONS

The Clerk reported that the following individuals were re-nominated by the Mayor to City boards and commissions, all with terms to expire on December 31, 2023. To the Airport Development & Marketing Committee: Brian Johnson, Richard Blood, and Curt Hansen to continue serving. To the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board: Paul Bocko to continue serving. To the Bicycle/Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee: Todd Horner and Drew Bryenton to continue serving. To the Conservation Commission: Eloise Clark and Steven Bill (alternate) to continue serving, and Brian Reilly to move from regular to alternate member. To the Energy and Climate Committee: Paul Roth to move from alternate to regular member and Jake Pipp to continue serving. To the Historic District Commission: Russ Fleming to continue serving. To the Housing Standards Board of Appeal: Donald Flibotte to continue serving. To the Partner City Committee: Mari Brunner to continue serving. To the Planning Board: Emily Lavigne-Bernier to move from alternate to regular member and Tammy Adams (alternate) to continue serving. To the Trustees of Trust Funds and Cemetery Trustees: Michael Forrest to continue serving. To the Zoning Board of Adjustment: Michael Welsh to continue serving, and Arthur Gaudio to move serving from alternate to regular.

A motion by Councilor Powers to confirm the nominations was duly seconded by Councilor Bosley and the motion passed on a roll call vote with 15 Councilors present and voting in favor.

CONFIRMATIONS

The Clerk reported that the following individuals were newly nominated to City boards and commissions. To the Planning Board: Roberta Mastrogiovanni to serve as a regular member with a term to expire December 31, 2023. To the Keene Housing Authority: Robert J. Elliot to serve as a regular member with a term to expire December 31, 2025. To the Energy & Climate Committee: Claire Oursler to serve as an alternate member with a term to expire December 31, 2023.

A motion by Councilor Powers to confirm the nominations was duly seconded by Councilor Bosley and the motion passed on a roll call vote with 15 Councilors present and voting in favor.

NOMINATIONS

The Mayor nominated the following new members to City boards and Commission, with terms to expire December 31, 2023. To the Human Rights Committee, Marti Fiske to serve as the Ex-Officio Staff member for the Library. To the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board, Diane Matthews. The nominations were tabled until the next regular meeting.

COMMUNICATION – HANSPETER WEBER – RESIGNATION – HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

A communication was received from Hanspeter Weber, resigning from the Historic District Commission after 16 years of service. A motion by Councilor Powers to accept the resignation with regret and appreciation of service was duly seconded by Councilor Bosley. The motion passed with a unanimous roll call vote in favor.

COMMUNICATION – COUNCILOR TERRY CLARK – RELATING TO SMALL WIRELESS FACILITY DEPLOYMENTS IN PUBLIC RIGHTS-OF-WAY

A communication was received from Councilor Clark requesting the City Council revisit the proposed ordinance in light of the final report from the Commission to Study Environmental and Health Effects of Evolving 5 Technology. The Clerk noted a Scribner's error in the background noted provided to Council and stated that the correct Ordinance number was O-2019-18-A. The Mayor referred the communication to the Planning, Licenses & Development Committee.

FOP REPORT – BULLETPROOF VEST PARTNERSHIP GRANT PROGRAM – 2020

A Finance, Organization & Personnel Committee report read recommending that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept \$4,540.25 from the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program funds of the US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Programs. A motion by Councilor Powers to carry out the intent of the report was duly seconded by Councilor Hooper and the motion passed with a unanimous roll call vote in favor.

CITY MANAGER COMMENTS

The City Manager began by addressing the Capital Improvement Program (CIP). She said that throughout the month of January, she would be meeting with department heads and the Finance Department via Zoom to review the CIP adopted in 2020 to determine the need for any revisions, which would be considered as a part of the 2021 Operating Budget process. At the beginning of February, she said that departments would receive their Operating Budget instructions to begin establishing their budgets for FY-22.

Next, the City Manager discussed housing and homelessness, stating that affordable, accessible, and quality housing of all types is vital to the health of any community, and Covid-19 has highlighted some housing challenges facing some of Keene's most vulnerable residents. She had been participating along with several other Staff members, in an existing homeless coalition group of all agencies serving homeless in the region that meets monthly, currently via Zoom, which the City Manager said had been a great forum to discuss challenges and seek solutions.

In addition, the City Manager said she is now co-leading (with the Executive Director of Cross Roads House, which is a shelter located in Portsmouth, NH) a workgroup of the State's Council on Housing Stability. This Council is tasked with addressing a broad set of challenges and providing short- and long-term recommendations to support planning, policy, and resource allocation for statewide, regional, and local community-based efforts that create housing stability for all citizens in NH. Her workgroup is diverse, representing organizations from across the State of NH, and is charged with making recommendations on regional leadership and coordination as reported in the initial report and action plan of the Housing Stability Council. Her workgroup would be reviewing housing needs across the State and making recommendations for coordinated and consolidated efforts; considering whether current continuums of care are balanced throughout the State (one currently in each Nashua and Manchester), funding streams, the current case management model in the State for those experiencing homelessness, better integrating local, regional, and State resources. This work is planned for the next several months and she was concerned with not having enough time to complete the work given but said it is important work and is glad to be participating.

The City Manager reported that the Hundred Nights Shelter put in a request to place a bus in the Cheshire County parking lot near the shelter to be used as over flow. The request was necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting reduced capacity at the Lampson St. shelter; the request is temporary, terminating at the end of April 2021. The County approved this request and signed a memorandum of understanding with Hundred Nights, of which the City has a copy for review but additional questions should be directed to Hundred Nights and/or the County Administration.

The City Manager continued providing updates on Covid-19, noting that Keene State College announced an in-person student return date of February 15th with a later graduation of May 29. They have also started Covid-19 testing with a new provider using Appian Way for a drive-thru Covid-19 testing process for returning staff and students. This new testing provider is getting results much faster, with a maximum 36-hour turn-around time. She noted that the local Covid-19 positivity rate remained high (she had heard anywhere from 7-9%). However, the rate and testing numbers this week were a little lower than before Christmas. The positivity rate peak (for our region) was expected to arrive the week of January 25 and the hospital peak the first or second week in February. At the time of this meeting, Cheshire Medical Center was at capacity with seven people in ICU and 11 Covid-19 patients in the hospital, and they were prepared to expand if necessary. Dr. Caruso told her it was still manageable. The hospital had administered 800 vaccines to their Staff to date and PPE/testing capacity was still holding. The hospital was talking to the State about their community vaccination plans and would like play some role. She continued that the Superintendent reported that local schools still planned to return January 19. County Administrator, Chris Coates, had reported that this week they did their first round of vaccinations at Maplewood for their 110 residents, 125 staff members, and 18 other residents in independent living units; second doses would be administered on January 25. The City Manager concluded that the City was making good progress with first responder vaccinations and eagerly awaited the opportunity for more people to be vaccinated in the next phase.

The City Manager reported good news on the drought in the Monadnock region, with Keene and Cheshire County having returned to normal precipitation amounts. The U.S. Drought Monitor on January 7, 2021 had moved Keene and Cheshire County out of drought conditions. The Woodward Dam Project was at a point where the State was allowing the City to begin refilling the reservoir. The Stage 1 – Water Conservation Alert had been lifted per the Public Works Department's recommendation and The Public Works Director reminded everyone that smart water use is important all the time. Water is a valuable resource and smart water use would keep it available for today and into the future. If residents have a question, they can contact the Public Works Department at 603-352-6550.

Finally, the City Manager was proud to announce an incentive program developed jointly by the City of Keene Parking Services Division of Economic Development and ParkMobile. This program was created to incentivize parking on Main Street to assist businesses and help discourage the use of coins, which are a Covid-19 concern. The program would run through the months of January-February and would apply to the meters on Main Street, between Emerald Street and Central Square. With an incentive code, anyone utilizing the ParkMobile app to park at these meters would be able to park in increments of 30 minutes free up to two hours for four uses. The usual transaction fee charged by ParkMobile would also be waived when using the code. Parking Services would begin the notification process immediately through City media outlets and ParkMobile would modify the app for use in Keene, with messaging about the program. The City would be doing outreach to businesses and visitors of Downtown through Facebook, radio advertisement, and trifold pamphlets; Beth Wood would visit businesses to let them know how it works and provide window signs and the trifold pamphlets with information about this program for businesses to share with their clientele. The City Manager said this was an exciting venture and she thanked Beth Wood and Med Kopczynski for bringing this forward, as well as ParkMobile – Abby in particular – for their willingness to work with our businesses

Councilor Clark asked how much the parking incentive would cost the Parking Fund. The City Manager replied that the original intention was a longer incentive period but stated that in communication with Mr. Kopczynski, the duration was shortened due to slightly lower parking revenue at present. She could not provide an estimate at present but would do so as meter use was observed. Both to support downtown businesses and help the community transition to more touchless technologies, which would ideally result in less Staff time collecting/processing coins.

COMMUNICATION – RELATING TO USE OF FUND BALANCE SCBA MASKS – RESOLUTION R-2021-01

A memorandum was received from the Fire Chief relating to the use of Fund Balance for Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus Masks and for first reading Resolution R-2021-01, Relating to an appropriation for the purchase of items not included in the 2019 Federal Assistance to Fire Fighters Grant. The memorandum was filed as informational. The Resolution was referred to the Finance, Organization & Personnel Committee.

RESOLUTION – AUTHORIZING THE CONDEMNATION OF LAND FOR THE WINCHESTER STREET RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT – RESOLUTION R-2020-36-A

A Finance, Organization & Personnel Committee report read recommending on a vote of 4-0 the adoption of Resolution R-2020-36-A. Councilor Ormerod abstained. Provided to the Council was Resolution R-2020-36-A, Authorizing the Condemnation of Land for the Winchester Street Reconstruction Project. The Mayor filed the report and recognized that Councilors Chadbourne, Ormerod, Williams, and Johnsen were unable to attend the statutory site visit and would therefore not participate in the discussion or vote.

A motion by Councilor Powers was duly seconded by Councilor Hooper to adopt Resolution R-2020-36-A. Councilor Powers summarized the Committee report and then Mayor Hansel opened the floor for discussion.

Councilor Clark stated that this project has several public benefits, including that it would save hundreds of thousands of pounds of carbon dioxide from entering the Keene valley over the next decade, which is important from his perspective.

Councilor Jones thanked Mayor Hansel, former Mayor Kendall Lane, the Council, and City Staff because of the many Keene construction projects over time, this project had more public input and transparency of any other he had witnessed.

City Council unanimously adopted Resolution R-2020-36-A on a roll call vote with 11 Councilors voting in favor. Councilors Chadbourne, Ormerod, Williams, and Johnsen abstained.

TABLED ITEMS – CITY COUNCIL GOALS

The Mayor removed this item from the table for vote. If the goals were adopted, the City Manager would work to schedule another workshop to discuss what – within those broad goals – the City is working on already; while prioritizing remaining goals, and determining how to handle the goals process moving forward.

A motion by Councilor Powers was duly seconded by Council Bosley to adopt the presented City Council goals for the 2021-2022 fiscal year. Brief discussion followed. The motion passed on roll call vote with 15 Councilors present and voting in favor.

ADJOURNMENT

Hearing no further business, Mayor Hansel adjourned the meeting at 7:43 PM.

A true record, attest:


Patricia C. Smith
City Clerk