

City of Keene
New Hampshire

FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, October 14, 2021

6:00 PM

Council Chambers

Members Present:

Thomas F. Powers, Chair
Bettina A. Chadbourne
Michael J. Remy
Raleigh C. Ormerod (via Zoom)

Members Not Present:

Stephen L. Hooper, Vice Chair

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager
Thomas P. Mullins, City Attorney
Natalie Darcy Human Services Manager
Rebecca Landry Asst. City Manager/IT
Director
Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation and
Facilities Director
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works Director

Chair Powers called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

1) Solicitation and Acceptance of Donations - Holiday Family Sponsorship Program - Human Services

Human Services Manager Natalie Darcy addressed the Committee and stated annually the Human Services Department contacts sponsors who will provide gifts and holiday items for families and older adults. The sponsored families and older adults are clients who have received assistance from Human Services within the past year. She stated families who have children with special needs and persons who have been struggling to make ends meet, are considered for sponsorship. This is so they can pay their household bills while still being able to provide a holiday for their children.

Ms. Darcy stated they usually begin this program in early September/October timeframe and it runs through the end of the year. Because of concerns with Covid 19, a revised version of the program is being recommended to allow for safety of clients, staff and sponsors. Staff is planning on drop off and pick up of gift items and gift cards, curbside to allow for social distancing; everyone will be required to wear a mask during drop off and pick up.

Ms. Darcy extended her appreciation to the Council and noted the families are humbled by the generosity of the community. Last year the City was able to supply gifts for 244 individuals, despite the pandemic.

Councilor Remy made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Chadbourne.

On 3-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the City Manager be authorized to solicit and accept donations associated with the City's 2021 Holiday Sponsorship Program.

2) Land and Water Conservation Grant - Acceptance of Award - Russell Park Renovation Project - Parks, Recreation and Facilities Director

Parks, Recreation and Facilities Director Andy Bohannon was the next to address the Committee. Mr. Bohannon stated this item is in reference to the Land Water Conservation Fund Grant round # 31, for an award of \$400,000. He noted the City applied for this grant last year and were awarded full funding of the project. These funds will be used for the Russell Park project for the previously approved capital project in the amount of \$1,225,000. Construction for this project will start in 2022. Mr. Bohannon added this project will help revitalize the east side of the community.

The Manager complimented Mr. Bohannon for his efforts in procuring the funds.

Councilor Chadbourne made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Remy.

On 3-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the City Manager be authorized to accept and execute a Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant Round 31 award for \$400,000.00 for the Russell Park Renovation Project.

Councilor Ormerod joined the meeting via zoom.

3) Acceptance of Energy Incentive Payments - Public Works Department

Public Works Director Kurt Blomquist was the next speaker and noted this item is the incentive program Eversource runs. This program provides funds to businesses and communities for implementing and accomplishing projects that reduce kilowatt and kilowatt hour demands at their facilities. He indicated over this past year, the Public Works Department accomplished several projects; the highway division accomplished some LED work in the downtown area, and the utilities division and the wastewater (water side) redid lighting work within the wastewater treatment plant area. Mr. Blomquist noted the two grants are for \$3,860 for LED work in the downtown the other grant is 10,485 for the wastewater plan. He indicated what the department is requesting is to utilize these funds for other work or seed money for other projects, since they are not program funds. He added staff is always looking to reduce energy and use the best efficiency in the work they perform.

The Manager recognized the Public Works Department for their efforts.

Councilor Remy made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Chadbourne.

On a 4-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept Energy Savings incentives of \$3,860 for LED lighting upgrades in the Downtown and \$10,485 for interior and exterior lighting

upgrades at the Wastewater Treatment Plant and expend these funds for energy work in the downtown area and at wastewater facilities.

Councilor Remy commended staff being able to obtain these grants.

4) Councilor Filiault - Charter Amendment Related to Municipal Primary

Councilor Randy Filiault addressed the Committee next. Councilor Filiault stated he wanted to bring this item forward two years ago because voter attendance at the primaries had become so anemic. Recently, volunteers who work at these polls have asked if the City could do away with the primaries with such low voter participation. He noted he waited two years and the numbers are actually lower this year.

The Councilor stated he has been in contact with the City Clerk and other officials about this issue and felt it was time for a formal discussion. He however, noted such a change would need to be done through a charter amendment and the voters are the ones who have to decide. With that the Councilor turned the presentation over to the Clerk.

City Clerk Patty Little addressed the Committee and recognized City Attorney Tom Mullins. Attorney Mullins stated Councilor Filiault has approached city staff in reference to this issue and agreed elimination of the primary would require an amendment to the city charter. He noted that often time, the City does not have multiple candidates. However, if the city decided not to conduct a primary, there are choices that would need to be made going forward. The first choice would be if there is no other mechanism in place, at the general election there is more than two candidates, there would be the need to elect an individual that has less than the majority of the vote. The other possibility is doing a runoff election for the top two vote getters. The problem with that option is timing, as the city would need to have enough time after the election to allow the runoff to occur, and then certify those votes in order to go forward with the January 1 swearing in date. The other issue with that option is if there is a recount requirement.

Attorney Mullins noted if the Council wanted to move forward with this item it cannot happen for this election cycle and would need to happen in two years in connection with a city election.

Councilor Remy asked if there could be an option that a primary would be conducted only if over "x" number of candidates would be eliminated from the ballot in total; have a fixed number. For example if the City is not eliminating more than five people, the primary is not run. He went on to explain, this year the only race where a candidate was eliminated from the primary was in the Mayor race. In 2019, the City eliminated six people.

Attorney Mullins indicated the City would need to get the Secretary of State involved in this discussion, keeping in mind any question on the ballot to amend the charter, has to be reviewed and approved by several state agencies including the Secretary of State's office and the Attorney General's office. Attorney Mullins explained one of the pitfalls associated with that is the City cannot limit the opportunity for people to make an attempt at the ballot. Councilor Remy noted at the last two primaries, there were write-in candidates that came on during the primary and one of them ended up winning the race. He asked if the primary was eliminated there would not be the

opportunity for a write-in candidate to get on the ballot— Attorney Mullins agreed, there would not be that opportunity. Ms. Little noted in the general election there is the opportunity write in positions, but whether that write in candidate would receive those sufficient votes to beat out the candidate on the ballot is uncertain.

Councilor Chadbourne stated the more complicated the City makes it for the public by changing the existing rules of the Charter, the more difficult it will be on the ballot for the public. She wasn't sure if the public could be educated first before the item is placed on the ballot. She indicated she came in tonight in support of the idea but after listening to the concerns raised by the City Attorney, she is unsure whether this is a good idea or not.

Councilor Ormerod stated in the spirit of improving the workflow for the election process with respect to what Councilor Filiault has come forward with. By not conducting the primary the City would save nearly \$10,000 and end up with a runoff election, he asked whether a runoff election would be less expensive than a primary. Ms. Little stated, in terms of cost for a primary versus a general election or a runoff is essentially the same. There might be a slight reduction in staffing but other costs for facilities, coding, memory card, printing of the ballots etc. will essentially be the same. She indicated what would be different is if there wasn't a need for a primary or a runoff, the City wouldn't expend the funds and those funds would drop to the bottom line.

The City Clerk addressed the committee next and stated there are only three cities in New Hampshire that continue to have primaries: Keene, Manchester, Nashua and Lebanon. She stated she had reviewed some of the Charters and went over some of the options for this issue. In the City of Nashua a primary would be held only if three or more candidates file for Mayor. The primary is just for the Mayor's race with the candidates with the two highest votes going forward to the General Election. In Keene, if there is a primary the whole slate of offices - even election officials - go forward on the ballot.

In Somersworth, there is no primary and there is no runoff for the Office of Mayor, even if the candidate receives the plurality of the votes and not the majority of the vote.

In Concord, if no candidate for Mayor receives a majority of the votes cast, the results are determined between the two candidates receiving the highest number of votes by a special runoff election to be held on the second Saturday following the regular election.

Ms. Little went on to say as the City Attorney alluded to, there are only so many days between that General Election and January 1 and there are many mechanics to this process; they take time and there is a statutory timeline associated with many of those. She indicated staff has already started having some general discussions about this item and are pleased to continue their research and look at other City Charters. Except for a couple of cities in New Hampshire, the rest are on the November General Election timeline and are faced with the November, January 1 timeline.

In Keene, January 1 is our Inauguration Day but that date is not the same for some other cities. Some cities have the first Tuesday after the first Monday in January.

If the City wanted to think about changing that date, this would give the City an extra week to shoehorn all these steps. Ms. Little stated regardless of which one the City chooses, statutory

process and charter amendment takes a good seven to nine months to pull together. It is a very time consuming process and needs to start at the beginning of 2023, to feel like the City has given it due process.

Councilor Lake addressed the Committee next and stated one of the concerns that was raised was the fact the City might be going to a General Election with three or more candidates for one single position and end up electing someone without a majority of votes. He felt one of the things the City could probably explore is making an adjustment to how we actually vote. One of the things that is currently done in our voting system is we restrict the number of candidates we can actually vote for. For instance, for the mayoral race you can only vote for one candidate.

The Councilor felt one thing to explore is to remove that limiting factor. For example, if there are three candidates, allow people to say, they would approve of candidates one and two, and perhaps not approve candidate three. Similar to how at large councilors are elected at the present time; not voting for those councilors one might not like.

He felt this would empower voters to better voice their opinion on a list of candidates, it would help ensure that in these races with more than three candidates that we actually get towards a majority vote for one of the candidates. He felt this would be a simple change; same voting process just removing that restriction that you can only vote for one candidate at a time.

Councilor Chadbourne recommended placing this item on more time and felt it warrants further research.

Councilor Chadbourne made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Remy.

On 4-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends placing the Charter Amendment Related to Municipal Primary on more time to allow staff to return with additional information regarding the proposal to eliminate the municipal primary.

5) Councilor Filiault – Rooms and Meals Tax Decrease

Councilor Filiault addressed the Committee again and stated this is not a new item for the Council. He indicated this is something that faces every community in New Hampshire and explained for years the State of New Hampshire has ignored the RSA which was written in 1967 requiring the State return .40 cents of every dollar to local municipalities for rooms and meals taxes. In this past NH budget the state amended that amount to 30%.

Based on research done by staff it has been learned for the past 10 years, since 2011, the State has short changed Keene tax payers nearly \$8.8 million dollars. This means for the last ten years the City has started its budget on an \$880,000 deficit.

Councilor Filiault indicated silence at this point is not an option. He called the committee's attention to his letter and the recommendations outlined in the letter; file suit against the State for violation of the RSA. The Councilor pointed out if the City owed any money to the State the rules would not be this relaxed.

Councilor Filiault noted people in this community cannot afford the taxes. Our population has stayed the same for a decade because people can't afford to live here. He felt focusing on rooms and sales tax is the best option at this time. He indicated this money is owed to the City. Councilor Filiault stated he has had conversations with the County Administrator, Chris Coates. He indicated the county administrator and commissioners have been working hard at this item as well. He noted Keene cannot handle this on its own and trying to get every town and city on board would be a difficult task and hence working with our county administrator and county commissioners seems like the best option; get every county to come on board to go after Concord. With that he turned the presentation over to County Commissioner, Chris Coates.

County Administrator, Chris Coates addressed the committee next. Mr. Coates began by indicating that he is on the Executive Committee of the New Hampshire Association of the County and Trustee of the New Hampshire Retirement System. He added that he was also a City Councilor for 10 years, and a member of the Keene Board of Education for 10 years. He stated he has witnessed the impact the state balanced budget could have on municipalities. The formula to balance the budget changes from year to year and cut revenue can increase community budgets as much as 752 million dollars with no warning. He noted cost shifting is not new for the state. Mr. Coates stated we have witnessed property taxes that have tripled in the past 20 years and felt this has nothing to do with city and school spending but has everything to do with state costs shifting. He indicated the state has been systematically breaking nearly every promise made to municipalities. He indicated this path is not sustainable to communities and the taxpayer.

Mr. Coates stated what is being proposed tonight is not going to be an easy task.

The state aid programs were developed to help enhance communities with needed services and tax relief. However, this has evolved into only increases to property taxes. He felt it is critical for everyone to understand the effect the state budget decisions have on local property taxes. It is critical for all of us to understand what the reductions in a state aid program has on any governing body or schools.

Mr. Coates outlined some of the broken promises by the State of New Hampshire: Rooms and Meals Tax – he noted the 30% increase started with Cheshire County because of Senator McCarthy who sponsored the bill.

The State would split the revenue 60/40 with municipalities but this promise was not kept and millions of dollars was taken from local communities over the past few decades and property taxes have been increased to fill this void.

Another item is the business profit tax enacted in 1969. Here again, the State promised that if municipalities collected the tax locally it will return to the local municipalities, that revenue sharing has decreased over time to little if any revenue.

Highway Block Grants - the State promised to help communities maintain and improve Class IV and V local roads, their promise lead to the legislature establishing a sustainable plan to maintain and improve local roads and highways by use of gas tax on fuel. However, only once in 23 years has the gas tax been increased to account for inflation as a result approximately 30% of all local roads and highways are in poor condition. There is no state funding plan to correct the condition

of the roads. Property taxes are being increased to fill this void for communities where necessary roadwork is needed.

State Bridge Aid Tax - Due to the lack of realistic funding through gas tax and tolls there will be many red listed bridges 10 years from now as there were 10 years ago. Local communities that make their own repairs do so with 100% of their own local funding and with limited success of reimbursement from the state. There is no realistic State plan to honor the promise of providing adequate bridge aid to communities - property taxes have to be increased to fill this void or bridges are closed, weight limits are put in place on the bridges, or they are not addressed at all.

Mr. Coates stated these last two items place lives at risk.

Mr. Coates referred to another item with respect to education funding. Catastrophic Educational Aid is when a student who is at risk requires out of district placement, the state is required to pay 100% of the difference in cost, this 100% is down to about 65%. This means schools have to pick up the difference in costs.

NH Retirement System – In 1967, the State required all communities to consolidate local pensions into one retirement system for public employees. In return, the State enacted statute and promised to make funding contributions to mitigate the cost of local communities and recognize these costs are integral to the overall need of the government in New Hampshire and to enable the employees to retire after years of dedicated service. In the past few years, the State has broken that promise and have shifted millions of dollars of funding burden onto the local tax payers. The state failed to meet the 35% contribution as promised and local property taxes have been increased as a result.

Medicaid Funding for long term care - Over the decades the state has gradually but significantly shifted the cost of nursing home care to the local property taxpayer. In 1998, none of the local property taxes went to pay for Medicaid long term care. However, at the present time 50% of property taxes pay for these costs. Although the State has promised to cap the liability for Medicaid costs for counties, that cap is always in question; the Governor's budget this year had an 18% increase to that cap.

Locally, there are senators and state representatives who understand this cost shifting and have done their best to ease the burden of property tax payers. However, their voices aren't enough to accomplish real change and that is why Councilor Filiault has brought this item forward. He noted the City Manager is a strong voice for the City of Keene and across the state. Mr. Coates felt it was time to start this conversation regarding the down shifting of costs by the State to local tax payers.

He stressed the need to start working with our Representatives, and with our State Senators, so we can develop legislation that addresses these concerns when it comes to the City to Keene. New Hampshire is at a crossroad especially in the more rural areas of the State. The State Government needs to be made to recognize the shifting costs on to local projects is not sustainable.

Councilor Gladys Johnson addressed the committee next. She began by referring to her time in

Concord. In 2010 when the Speaker was Bill O'Brien and the Chairman of the Finance Committee was the Chairman who recently resigned. The Councilor recalled when Mr. O'Brien was the Speaker - they threatened their committee members that they had to vote as was being recommended by the Chair. If they didn't they lost their positions. Councilor Johnson thanked Councilor Filiault and Mr. Coates for their efforts.

Mr. Coates noted the County has a great relationship with the City and the schools and are willing to come together and see how they can work together on these issues.

Councilor Chadbourne thanked Mr. Coates and Councilor Filiault for engaging Senators and State Reps. She asked about other communities and other counties and suggested flooding the State House with all these communities so we can be stronger in numbers. She asked whether Mr. Coates has had a conversation with other county administrators or county commissioners.

Mr. Coates stated he and Margaret Burns will be presenting at the New Hampshire Association of Counties before hundreds of Senators and State Reps. and this a conversation that has been going on for many years. He indicated Keene is different in a lot of ways compared to the rest of the State. Keene is progressive and in this context it means looking forward. He added there might be no new taxes but there are new fees and less money coming in because they are cutting aid and this is what needs to be addressed. He indicated they are going to continue that battle and continue to do whatever they can to make people aware.

Councilor Chadbourne noted to the many ways in which money has been cut from municipalities and asked what the State is doing with those funds. The Manager stated they are balancing their budget with our dollars. The Manager added this has been an issue staff has been talking about for several years and the City of Keene is a member of the New Hampshire Municipal Association which annually updates communities as to what is happening with municipal aid. It graphically shows all those different categories and how it has declined.

In terms of other towns and cities getting behind an effort to push for return of full municipal aid – they are behind us she stated and have been for many years but have not been able to make a lot of progress. New Hampshire Municipal Association has a process every other year where they vote on the policies they will support. This is a standing policy where they will fight for return of full municipal aid to communities. Ms. Dragon noted Beth Fox is a member of this Board and she represents the City on this Board. Ms. Dragon stated this is the first year any significant progress was made on the meals and rooms tax, even though it is not fully funded and it is because a lot of people are talking about this now and are getting behind the effort. She added NHMA wants to keep pushing forward not just meals in rooms, but in all the ways the State has downshifted expenses to local taxpayers.

Mr. Coates encouraged people to read HB 2. He indicated those are the things the City has to fight for and be aware of and push back.

Councilor Remy asked the City Attorney whether it was legal for the State to make these changes. Attorney Mullins stated those Bodies have a lot of legislative control with respect to how they act, and we live in a system of government where we have separation of powers and institutional respect for each of those power centers. He stated he would like to have a discussion with City

Council about their options as a matter of law.

Councilor Remy asked whether the Council could request a meeting with the State Reps and Senators. Attorney Mullins stated they could.

The Committee suggested placing this item on more time so the item will remain on the agenda and will send a message to staff to keep moving forward with it.

Councilor Remy made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Chadbourne.

On 4-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends placing the rooms and meals tax decrease on more time with the understanding the issue will be discussed with the County Delegation in 2022 and add it to the agenda for discussion with State Representatives and Senators.

Councilor Filiault stressed he will keep bringing this item to the surface and bringing forward the issue that the State owes the City close to 8 million dollars over the past ten years.

6) Strategic Parking Plan - Economic Development and Special Projects

Economic Development Director Med Kopczynski and Program Manager for Parking Services Chelsea North were the next two presenters.

Mr. Kopczynski stated he was before the committee regarding the main elements of the proposed strategic plan for Parking Services. He indicated this plan is the result of a great deal of review and research conducted by Parking Services staff. He indicated the plan before the committee has evolved and changed repeatedly over the past two years. This is a constantly evolving document and noted parking services needs to evolve as the market changes.

There are six adopted City Council goals that decide the direction. He noted the yellow box on the document, stating these are the department's goals as part of the budget and in the blue diamond are the City Council goals that have both guided the services budget as well as guided this plan as it is put together.

The balance parking tries to achieve is to create as much parking opportunity as they can with available resources. Funds in the Parking Fund goes toward a lot of different items. Parking's customer base is evolving over time and includes diversity of Keene State students, shoppers near Main Street and tourists, as well as those seeking a night life, whether it be for drinks or dinner or a night at the Colonial Theater.

Mr. Kopczynski stated absent in the prior discussion is workforce parking, as well as those who call downtown home, which is a growing population. A new focus down the road will be adding spaces for residents and this becomes more important as we look at the neighborhoods that have joined Main Street where additional units could be added and where parking is a restraint. He noted the city just adopted a new land use code which changed the focus of downtown zoning and

changed the parameters of the downtown zoning, as well as creating a transition job zone adjacent to our downtown which have increased the density.

Mr. Kopczynski noted to Best Practices as outlined in the document. Some of those items are as follows:

Efficient utilization of facility - manage those spaces that are frequently occupied; the secret to this business is to move cars and provide opportunity for people to park.

A flexibility of parking plan should accommodate uncertainty and change. This is what is being discussed in the strategic plan and prioritize the most desirable spaces should be managed to favor high priority users.

Pricing - In a majority of circumstances, parking facility users should pay directly for Parking Services. In other words what that is saying is they shouldn't be subsidized by the taxpayer.

Special effort should be made to deal with peak demand.

Quality - Parking facility quality, aesthetics, convenience, and safety is as important as quantity. If a parking facility is not attractive to use, people will not use it; if it doesn't look safe to use people won't use it.

Comprehensive analysis - All significant costs and benefits should be considered in party planning.

One aspect of the report that should be paid attention to is the need to adapt and be able to adapt to changing conditions. This has to be accomplished by short term changes as longer term strategies.

Mr. Kopczynski stated as they conduct interviews, collect and refine data, we need to continue to educate the public, staff, downtown businesses, and the City Council on parking management, costs. Support of the parking program is effectively a support for Main Street and our economy.

What type of parking is being planned? The City has a diverse and changing population of users for the parking system. The system was not designed to accommodate the needs of visitors, patrons, workers and residents nor to facilitate growth. The revised land use code may make the demand for parking supplied by the city more important for growth in this district. In that code those parking demands will increase based on utilization provided by the City. The City needs to provide space on upper Main Street so there is a turnover of spaces. This is more critical late in the day when restaurants are full. These spaces are competed for by workers, residents and people seeking to use businesses. Most businesses do not open until after 10 am and some are open until midnight.

At some point, the City needs to provide overflow spaces for Main Street, as well as spaces that can accommodate events, including those that will take place at the Colonial Theater. This will likely take place at the Gilbo Lot and the Commercial Lot. Gilbo, Emerald and Main Streets are becoming more connected and there will be more reuse on Gilbo as what happened on Emerald Street.

The City also needs to take into consideration workforce parking for employees working downtown and 24/7 parking of residences. It is estimated at this time, there are over 1,000 housing units in the downtown.

To meet these parking services goals, the City would create a rental permit program, which staff has been working on. This would be an expansion of the present program and expansion depending on space availability.

Wells Garage which was just converted into all rental, is 100% leased with some spaces now utilized 24/7 with a waiting list. There is a bulk purchase program outlined in the ordinance that has never been utilized but this is something staff will look at to see if it makes sense for employers. There might also be a recommendation to shift hours of operation from 10 am to 6 pm, but that is a conversation that will happen further down the road.

In addition, staff will explore expanded overnight parking rental programs for on street parking outside of the core and growth districts for possible overnight and permit parking opportunities. Looking at the need and visibility of a new parking garage, including a FY23 feasibility study and economic analysis with potential construction to happen in FY29.

Loading Zones and Curbside seem to be a core requirement now of businesses and it is not going to go away. It is something that will need to be integrated into services.

Charging Stations - Consistent with the adopted sustainable energy plan, parking management has begun a review of location and funding to add charging stations at parking facilities.

In the provision of parking spaces and the management of parking systems, the City is seeing revolutions with the installations of technology. Technology is changing how these businesses are run. Ideally, the City would not purchase any additional hardware for parking. What they would prefer to do is to convert the entire system over to payment applications by phone. This would save on all costs related to equipment and would free up space taken by meters, as well as improve the look of streets, while providing easier maintenance. However, Mr. Kopczyński noted this is not a change that would happen anytime in the near future.

At this time, there are 11 pay stations used to control 293 spaces compared to 514 meters on poles. Pay stations are used on Roxbury Street, Elm Street, and all city lots. There have not been any significant problems with pay stations. Since the touchscreens have been installed they have been programmed correctly. They proved to be very easy to use and very reliable, and staff is

recommending an immediate trial of pay stations on Main Street in front of City Hall. Pay stations will open up space in the right-of-way for business use but they can't go everywhere.

Ticket Fees - They are intended to create parking opportunity by moving vehicles. This is why tickets are written, it is not to punish people. If fees are not raised and kept current then there could be a cost to the general taxpayer. Two thirds of the money that is taken in goes towards maintenance and repairs. In time, staff feels on-street parking fees should be raised to \$1 and fees in lots to 50 cents with time limitations. It is also recommended that the length of time on Main Street be increased to three hours. Finally, there also needs to be one system to deal with workforce parking and another for resident parking.

The ordinances that control parking services are extremely outdated, cumbersome and difficult for staff and the public to understand. To that end, economic development staff will work with the City Attorney, Police Chief and Community Development Director to update the code to simplify the text. The role of Parking Services should be confined to the area where fees are collected to manage the downtown parking system. The fee schedule should be simplified as needed to address new classes of parking requirements and pricing. Night parking in the system should be simplified, so that it is easier to administer and for the public to utilize.

Councilor Remy asked about the decision for the parking garage being turned into reserved only. Mr. Kopczynski stated it was an item that came before the Council on July 15. Mr. Kopczynski went on to say the parking garage itself when it was originally constructed had a lease with the hotel which was part of the bonding fund. Hence, a significant portion of that building had been leased. Another significant portion of that space was leased by Dartmouth Hitchcock Keene. The other big user of that space has been city staff. The rest of the conversion came through City Council. None of those steps were done without City Council approval and knowledge.

Councilor Chadbourne asked about the downtown spaces and the proposal to increasing it to a three hour limit – she asked what they were at the present time. Mr. Kopczynski stated in the lots they are 9 hour days - six days a week. The downtown section near Keene State has a three hour window. The parking spaces that are downtown, other than by Keene State have a two hour limit. The Councilor noted we are talking about turnover in the downtown area but if we increase it to three hours we might be defeating that goal. Mr. Kopczynski stated this is the reason for having the conversation - downtown businesses have made the suggestion of expanding the time.

Councilor Chadbourne noted to the various expansions with the Fire Station and Court House which have caused loss of parking spaces, which in turn is requiring the construction of a parking garage. Even though Keene would like to encourage walkability people still need their cars, and every decision being made is pushing the City towards that idea of a parking structure.

Councilor Chadbourne asked whether the parking fund has recuperated from the deficit caused by Robin Hooders putting money in meters. The Manager felt Covid is when there was a financial issue with the parking fund when no one was coming out of their homes. At that time, the City

was anticipating an overall loss in the parking fund of about \$108,000. However, it did not end that way, it actually rebound very well and ended in the positive.

Mr. Kopczynski stated he was not aware of the Robin Hooders having a financial impact on the fund.

Chair Powers stated some history on the garage, this area and the Co-Op used to be a dirt lot and it was free parking and most city employees used this area as the deck behind City Hall was reserved for the public because of the Court. As times changed, city employees were parking in the Wells Street lot. When the Court vacated, city employees were moved to this location.

Councilor Ormerod thanked staff for the presentation and stated he was looking for a quicker conversion to the pay stations. He stated if the pay stations could be done via phone, it can be developed to work with those different segments of the market and asked for added explanation. Mr. Kopczynski stated there is more that can be done with the technology and staff has only begun to look at it. He noted at the present time, of the nearly 6,500 spaces most of the core and transition area spaces are empty through parts of the day. With an electronic system, you can have overflow parking going on to private property, with an arrangement with the property owner paying through the application and the property owner getting some of funds and the city getting some of those funds.

In the parking garage, with the right applications, you can pay for your parking ahead of time, plus buy the tickets you need for instance at the Colonial. There is a lot that can be done with technology. In the first instance, with pay stations there would be the necessity to maintain a coin option, as there are still people who want to pay with coins. Mr. Kopczynski noted pay applications however, continues to grow and a second pay application to give consumers choices would be necessary.

Councilor Ormerod asked instead of accepting this item as informational why the pay stations cannot be moved forward.

The Manager stated the plan is to have some ideas to move forward during the Capital Planning conversation and start working some of these purchases into the budgets for the future. She felt having a pay station, downtown in front of City Hall as a potential location, is a good next step. She stated she wanted to move forward with pay stations thoughtfully. Councilor Ormerod referred to his experience with pay stations and stated he is willing to be a champion of them.

Councilor Remy stated 2029 is a long way away and this problem is now and wasn't sure if there was a private business that would be interested in building a parking garage and operating it to accelerate the process. The Manager stated she would like to look at options like that and is talking with different organizations about potential location and leasing out space to provide the revenue to pay for a potential bond.

The Manager stated staff is looking at better utilizing spaces that are underutilized. The changes that are being brought forward have been to better utilize these spaces, get people off the Main Street so there is more Main Street parking available, at the same time as the city is planning for

this future garage and trying to come up with a way to finance it. The City is moving the management of the system in a way that hopefully will free up the spaces that are needed.

Councilor Chadbourne recalled the divided conversation from the public about kiosks. Mr. Kopczynski stated the City has 11 of them in operation and are not having any issues with them. The problems that existed, don't exist anymore.

Councilor Lake stated as a member of the Energy and Climate committee, stated they are doing a lot of work to get an understanding of recommendations to the city for how charging stations should be installed and are also working with organizations like the Monadnock Sustainability Hub to get some state funding to get these installed. He felt it would help if the two groups collaborate so they are not doubling up on work or working against each other.

Councilor Chadbourne asked for added clarification on charging stations, she has heard some of them are free. Mr. Kopczynski stated they are not free and it is his understanding the city gets some of that money. He added the City is looking at quicker stations to limit parking.

Mr. Kopczynski asked Ms. North to comment on this item. Ms. North stated it has been an interesting journey since she started in May trying to figure out the dynamics of the downtown area and how things have shifted since she has come on board. She stated she appreciates the committee's patience with her learning process.

Councilor Chadbourne made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Remy.

On 4-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends accepting this item as informational.

7) An Ordinance Relating to Authority to Use Electronic Signatures For Official City Documents Ordinance O-2021-13

Asst. City Manager/IT Director Rebecca Landry stated staff is recommending language be added to the city code that formally authorizes the use of electronic signatures. This would allow the City to both provide electronic signatures and accept electronic signatures. This will certainly provide the opportunity to streamline City processes that require signatures and the City does have a software application that provides the functionality to incorporate electronic signatures. In some cases, in the most basic interactions and then, in other cases the application allows for multi-party hierarchical conditional signatures. She indicated the City is in a good position to move forward.

Chair Powers clarified this process is authorized by state law. Ms. Landry stated State RSA 294-E, has been in place for a number of years – it is called the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Attorney Mullins stated the City has pushed the State vigorously to complete this process, but they had an issue, to the point where even state agencies finally gave up on the State and have enacted, their own processes for accepting those signatures. State law does provide for it. State agencies in question were supposed to do a report which they never did. He indicated the City is primarily relying not only on the implied right under the state law but there is federal law that

deals with the question of transmitting and accepting electronic signatures. Hence, the City decided it was going to rely on federal authority that provided the City to do so and rely on the fact that the State's own agencies are doing so. The Attorney recommends the adoption of this Ordinance. He added the State has also approved Notary signatures remotely.

Councilor Remy made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Chadbourne.

On 4-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends adoption of Ordinance O-2021-13.

There being no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 7:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

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