

A regular meeting of the Keene City Council was held on Thursday, January 6, 2022. In the Honorable Mayor George S. Hansel's absence, the City Clerk, Patricia Little, called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. A motion by Councilor Bosley to nominate Councilor Powers as temporary Chair was duly seconded by Councilor Greenwald and the motion passed unanimously.

Councilor Bosley led the Pledge of Allegiance. Roll called: Bryan J. Lake, Michael J. Remy, Gladys Johnsen, Michael Giacomo, Randy L. Filiault, Robert C. Williams, Philip M. Jones, Andrew M. Madison, Kris E. Roberts, Bettina A. Chadbourne, Catherine I. Workman, Mitchell H. Greenwald, Kate M. Bosley, and Thomas F. Powers were present. Raleigh C. Ormerod was absent.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chair Powers announced a Council workshop on Tuesday, January 11 to continue the discussions on Council Goals. The workshop will start at 6:00 PM in Heberton Hall. Chair Powers continued stating that Staff would be making their traditional presentations before the City Council and the Planning Board on the Capital Improvement projects for the 2023–2029 fiscal years. These presentations will be at the Michael EJ Blastos Community Room on Saturday, January 22. There will be coffee and Danish available at 8:00 AM and the presentations will start at 8:30 AM. This event should conclude by 11:30 AM. Finally, Chair Powers announced that the Legislative Delegation meeting would be hosted by the County on Monday, January 24 at 6:00 PM in Delegation Hall. Councilors can park in the County parking lot on either Winter or Center Streets and enter through the doors that are on either side of the building. Refreshments will be served at 5:15 PM. Delegation Hall is on the 2nd floor.

MINUTES

A motion by Councilor Bosley to adopt the minutes of December 16, 2021 and January 3, 2022 was duly seconded by Councilor Greenwald and the motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING – COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION TAX RELIEF – 112 WASHINGTON STREET

The City Clerk noted a Scribner's error in the date of the hearing, which listed the year as 2021. The City Clerk read the public hearing notice and Chair Powers called the public hearing to order at 7:07 PM. The Chairman welcomed City Assessor, Dan Langille, and the applicant, Josh Gorman.

Mr. Langille began by providing background on the 79-E program and how the City got here. The 79-E program allows temporary tax relief that encourages the rehabilitation of underutilized buildings in the downtown area. The City Council has previously set a designated area where buildings in that area would qualify. Mr. Langille explained what is required to qualify. The building owner must spend a minimum of \$75,000 in rehabilitation costs and demonstrate a public benefit. Public benefits include enhancing the downtown economic vitality, improving a culturally or historically important structure, and promoting the preservation and reuse of existing building stock, promoting efficient design, safety, and greater sense of community consistent with the City's Comprehensive Master Plan and the nationally recognized Green Building Standards.

The project does not have to meet all those benefits, but must meet at least one. So, if the applicant meets both those qualifications, they submit an application to the City for Staff review. Staff works with the owner to ensure the application is complete before turning it over to City Council.

Mr. Langille said this was a public hearing before the matter which will be reviewed by the Finance, Organization, & Personnel (FOP) Committee in greater detail. If the FOP Committee determines that relief is granted, it would last up to five years depending on how the Council feels the project meets the public benefit. Then, Mr. Langille would work to value the property prior to any work beginning and the owner would continue paying taxes on that value and the improvements would not be considered until the end of the tax relief.

Mr. Langille turned it over to the building owner, Mr. Gorman, who described the project. Mr. Gorman said that he purchased 112 Washington Street in 2017, at which time it had been vacant for two years and prior to that it had been an office building and mixed-use office and residents. Approximately 70 years ago, it was a tourist travel home and prior to that, it was a stately single-family residence. At the time of Mr. Gorman's purchase, the carriage house was compromised and on the brink of being torn down, and the main brick building was suffering from decades of deferred maintenance, which he said left the property in such disrepair that it was purchased for half of its City-assessed value at that time. Without a repurposed use and extensive repairs, he said the downward spiral was likely to continue. After two- and one-half years of renovation and repair, Mr. Gorman said the property is now a restored historic inn consisting of eight private guestrooms (each with private full baths), operator's quarters, a common parlor, and an operator's kitchen.

Mr. Gorman continued stating that the proposal before the City Council was for the expansion of the inn use through 79-E tax incentives. This expansion would be achieved by adding two guest rooms on the first floor of the carriage house and an apartment on the second floor. The approval of the petition would allow for future preservation, maintenance, as well as further increasing the tax base upon expiration of the incentives. The property currently has an operator's quarters and two part-time staffers, as well as Mr. Gorman and his wife and children. Through this proposal, the operator's quarters in the brick structure would become another guest room, the new apartment on the second floor would be for operator's purposes, and two more guest rooms would be added on the first floor. Cumulatively, this would result in 11 guest rooms and the apartment on the second floor of the carriage house.

Mr. Gorman had appeared before the Zoning Board of Adjustment and received a Variance for this project. He continued stating that he believed the project met six public benefit criteria:

1. Mr. Gorman believed the project would support downtown economic vitality, given that since fully opening July, the current accommodations at the Burrell House have received consistent volume and five-star reviews, and a large majority of these reviews expressed great pleasure in the location of the property and the ability to walk downtown to enjoy the many wonderful local restaurants, cafes, and shops. Many of the reviews also expressed a desire to return and explore Keene again soon. Mr. Gorman said that the addition of guest rooms resulting from this project would certainly further contribute to

supporting the economics of our downtown merchants as well as the entire Monadnock region.

2. He believes the project would enhance a culturally and historically important structure. He said the carriage house and this property are truly one of a kind of properties and the admiration of almost every passerby, who often take pictures of it. The carriage house is on the New Hampshire Historic Properties Register and when the property was purchased, the previous owner had contemplated tearing it down. Since acquiring the property, he said many repairs have been made to save the structure. The challenge now is to create viability for the structure in the longer-term, so it can always be maintained and cherished by our community, which the interior renovations would enable.
3. Promoting the preservation of reuse of existing building stock by the rehabilitation of historic structures. Mr. Gorman said the exterior of the carriage house would maintain all of its existing historically accurate features and the interior renovations would allow for the reuse of much of the beadboard, which is currently on the ceilings and walls of the entire first floor. This reuse of the vacant structure would allow for future maintenance and preservation.
4. Mr. Gorman said that the renovation of the carriage house and expansion of the guests rooms would promote efficient design, safety, and a greater sense of community in a manner consistent with pages 52–55 of the Comprehensive Master Plan, which specifically addresses the various elements, challenges, and importance of maintaining our City's history through the preservation, reuse, and energy upgrades of our many historic architectural gems. The Master Plan also speaks to this important issue. Mr. Gorman said the 79-E program is a prime example of such a program and this project captivates all the purposes, challenges, and benefits relative to the reuse, preservation, and efficiency. Pages 56–58 of the Comprehensive Master Plan also address the need and benefit of having a vibrant, walkable community. Mr. Gorman said the location and use of this building promotes such walkability for all its guests and employees, thus benefiting the many downtown merchants.
5. Mr. Gorman believes that the renovations directly support the integration of public art downtown. He believes the carriage house and its details of a time long since passed are actually a form of public art. To meet the challenges maintaining these forms of public art, useful repurposing and reuse is essential and Mr. Gorman said this project accomplishes just that.
6. Mr. Gorman said the renovations would include Energy Star window and the complete structure would include a modern, highly efficient mini-split heating and cooling system.

Mr. Gorman concluded stating that he broke down project costs as required by the application and cumulatively, he estimated putting \$177,700 into the structure from start to finish.

Councilor Jones said this was a good gateway project that he liked a lot. He asked Mr. Langille whether there was a time window in the 79-E Ordinance that gives the Council flexibility. Mr. Langille said that the City Council approved the 79-E Ordinance and there is a statutory limit of up to five years of tax relief. Councilor Jones asked at what point the time limit is determined and

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Mr. Langille said that would be when the Council votes on the application at their next City Council meeting, following the FOP recommendation.

Councilor Giacomo remarked that he walks past the building often and has loved watching the transformation. He asked whether the tax relief was on all the renovations made since 2017 of just the new renovations in this application. Mr. Langille replied that Mr. Gorman already has tax relief in place for the existing building and the tax relief from this application would only apply to the carriage house. Once the first tax relief expires, the renovations since 2017 would be added to the whole value.

Hearing no further comments, Chair Powers closed the public hearing at 7:21 PM, except for written public comments, which will be accepted until 1:00 PM on Tuesday, January 11. Written comments must be signed and submitted to the City Clerk by that date and time to be included in the record.

A true record, attest: 

City Clerk

PUBLIC HEARING – COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION TAX RELIEF – 310 MARLBORO STREET

The City Clerk read the public hearing notice and Chair Powers called the public hearing to order at 7:22 PM. The Chairman welcomed City Assessor, Dan Langille.

Mr. Langille said this was another 79-E application for a project by Randall Walter, who was not present, and so Mr. Langille only provided an overview of the project as he understood it. Mr. Langille said that much of the project was focused on energy efficiencies. He said that 310 Marlboro Street is large commercial mixed-use building. Mr. Walter seeks to add solar panels and heat pumps, as well as some interior work to enhance energy efficiencies. Mr. Langille said that the application met the required thresholds.

Hearing no comments or questions, Chair Powers closed the public hearing at 7:24 PM, except for written public comments, which will be accepted until 1:00 PM on Tuesday, January 11. Written comments must be signed and submitted to the City Clerk by that date and time to be included in the record. This matter would be heard by the Finance, Organization, & Personnel Committee on January 13.

A true record, attest: 

City Clerk

CONFIRMATIONS – INCUMBENTS TO SERVE A SECOND TERM

Mayor Hansel nominated the following individuals to serve a second term on their respective Committees: to the Airport Development and Marketing Committee: Peter Temple with a term to expire December 31, 2022, Elizabeth Bendel, and Councilor Greenwald with terms to expire December 31, 2024; to the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board: Steve Hooper with a term to expire December 31, 2024; to the Assessors Board: Rita Johnson with a term to expire December 31, 2024; to the Bicycle and Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee: Dillon A. Benik with a term to expire December 31, 2024; to the Building Board of Appeals: Doug Brown with a term to expire December 31, 2024; to the Conservation Commission: Alexander Von Plinsky, Kenneth Bergman, and Thomas Haynes with terms to expire December 31, 2024, and Councilor Williams with a term to expire December 31, 2023; to the Energy and Climate Committee: Zach Luce, and Bryan Lake with terms to expire December 31, 2024, Councilor Ormerod with a term to expire December 31, 2023, and Andrew Dey with a term to expire December 31, 2024; to the Heritage Commission: Cauley Powell with a term to expire December 31, 2024, Marilyn Huston with a term to expire December 31, 2022, Councilor Johnsen and Brian Lee with terms to expire December 31, 2023; to the Historic District Commission: Councilor Workman and David Bergeron as an alternate with terms to expire December 31, 2024; to the Housing Standards Board of Appeal: Doug Brown with a term to expire December 31, 2024; to the Human Rights Committee: Marti Fiske with a term to expire December 31, 2023, Jan Manwaring, Shaun Filiault and Mohammad Saleh with terms to expire December 31, 2024; to the Partner City Committee: Kurt Blomquist with a term to expire December 31, 2023, Mayor Hansel, Lena Kridlo and Dawn Thomas-Smith with terms to expire December 31, 2024; to the Planning Board: Harold Farrington with a term to expire December 31, 2024, and Councilor Remy with a term to expire December 31, 2023; to the Trustees of Trust Funds: Jennie Newcombe with a term to expire December 31, 2024; and, to the Zoning Board of Adjustment: Joseph Hoppock with a term to expire December 31, 2024.

A motion by Councilor Bosley to confirm the nominations was duly seconded by Councilor Greenwald and the motion passed unanimously on a roll call vote with 14 Councilors present and voting in favor.

CONFIRMATIONS – NEW MEMBERS

Mayor Hansel nominated the following new members to City Boards and Commissions: to the Airport Development and Marketing Committee: Luca Paris with a term to expire December 31, 2022; to the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board: Councilor Chadbourne with a term to expire December 31, 2023; to the Energy and Climate Committee: Diana Duffy with a term to expire December 31, 2024; to the Human Rights Committee: Hunter Kirschner and Rabbi Daniel Aronson with terms to expire December 31, 2023; to the Keene Housing Authority: Steve Bianco with a corrected term to expire December 31, 2027; to the Planning Board: Armando Rangel as an alternate with a term to expire December 31, 2022; and, to the Trustees of Trust Funds: Martha Curtis with a term to expire December 31, 2024.

A motion by Councilor Bosley to confirm the nominations was duly seconded by Councilor Greenwald and the motion passed unanimously on a roll call vote with 14 Councilors present and voting in favor.

NOMINATIONS

Mayor Hansel renominated Jane Taylor to the Zoning Board of Adjustment with a term to expire December 31, 2024 and nominated Richard Clough to the Zoning Board of Adjustment for a first term to expire December 31, 2023.

Chair Powers tabled the nominations until the next regular meeting.

COMMUNICATION – FREDERICK PARSELLS – STREET NUMBERS ON DISPLAY ON RESIDENTIAL DWELLINGS

A communication was received from Frederick Parsells, encouraging an educational campaign to advise homeowners of the City requirement that they properly display the street numbers on their dwellings. Chair Powers referred the communication to City Staff to be managed administratively.

COMMUNICATION – KEVIN LEARY – ACCESS TO PROPERTY 218-009-000-000 THROUGH THE OLD GILSUM ROAD

A communication was received from Kevin Leary, requesting access to the Fontaine property (TMP 218-009-000-000) through the Old Gilsum Road. Chair Powers referred the communication to the Municipal Services, Facilities, & Infrastructure Committee.

COMMUNICATION – COUNCILOR RANDY FILIAULT – REQUEST TO USE EXCESS NH ROAD TOLL CREDITS AS THE CITY'S MATCH FOR THE LOWER WINCHESTER STREET PROJECT

A communication was received from Councilor Randy Filiault, requesting that the City submit a written request urging NHDOT to approve the application of excess toll credits to the lower Winchester Street project as the City's local match of 20%. Chair Powers referred the communication to the Finance, Organization, & Personnel Committee.

CITY MANAGER COMMENTS

First, the City Manager shared that the Keene Public Library is pleased to announce partnerships with human service organizations that will offer office hours at the Library. Organizations providing direct services to residents will be available at the library on a weekly schedule to share information with interested citizens and assist library staff in providing better reference services to visitors. Better Life Partners, the Serenity Center, and Monadnock Family Services are the first organizations in the partnership. Better Life Partners aids people dealing with substance use issues and the Serenity Center assists those with alcohol use issues. A Monadnock Family Services PATH Outreach Specialist will be available to help those dealing with serious mental health issues and experiencing homelessness. Interested individuals may drop in anytime for information. Starting Friday, January 7, Better Life Partners and the Serenity Center will share

office hours every Friday from 1–3 PM, and as of Wednesday January 12, Monadnock Family Services PATH will be available on the second and fourth Wednesdays from 1–3 PM. The Library is seeking to expand office hours with other Human Service organizations. Interested groups should contact the Library Director, Marti Fiske.

The City Manager continued stating that the beginning of 2022 had been busy for the Human Resources Department and City Staff. We have brought on board 10 new employees: five full-time on January 3rd to include three full-time firefighters, which will fill all fulltime vacancies, in addition to one Youth Services Manager and a Lab Technician. Additionally, within the City workforce, employee families have had four new baby additions, including one that was the first baby of 2022 in our region. Jack LaPorte of the Keene Police Department and his wife, Cailey, welcomed their newborn daughter, Kennedy, into the world on January 1 at 12:24 PM. Saturday at Brattleboro Memorial Hospital, Kennedy was the first birth reported by a local hospital in 2022.

Next, the City Manager shared a Public Works Department update. Winter would be making a showing after the meeting. Crews spent this afternoon loading and hooking up vehicles in preparation for tonight-into-tomorrow’s snow event. Snow Command was anticipating 2”–4” in Keene with closer to 4” in the higher elevations. Looking forward into the weekend, another round of wintry mix was forecasted for Sunday. This had the potential for light icing. Snow plow operators asked that drivers not crowd the plows. If you cannot see the plow diver in their mirror, the driver cannot see you. Stay in the know by monitoring the Public Works Department Facebook and Twitter feeds.

The City Manager announced the Department of Parks & Recreation Winter Fest on Saturday January 29 from 1–3 PM at the Recreation Center, with outdoor games, music, popcorn, hot cocoa, and smores.

The City Manager also announced that the Human Rights Committee would be hosting a virtual event Monday Jan 17 from 10:00 AM–11:15 AM entitled “Building the beloved community: the time is right to do what is right about health disparities in NH.”

The City Manager concluded with her Covid-19 update. As of January 5, Cheshire Medical Center had 27 inpatients with Covid-19, including nine in the ICU all on ventilators. Because two patients require dialysis as well, their 10 bed ICU is full. There are four patients on high flow oxygen. Yesterday the plan was to transfer three patients to their surge ICU. This is done to give them more capacity than they currently have. Hopefully, the percent positivity is really falling (was 21% and is now 19%). However, hospitalizations lag by two weeks behind percent positivity. She said we also expect to see a surge because of familys getting together over the holidays. The City Manager advised that quarantine and isolation guidance was changing at both the State and CDC. The major change was around shortening the quarantine and isolation period to five days with an additional five to 10 days of mask wearing depending on the situation, instead of the previous 10-day recommendation. She said this change was a big deal and was intended to bring people back into the workforce sooner.

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Councilor Johnsen noted that she heard something from the Governor about deploying the National Guard. The City Manager said that there was discussion about making more National Guard available throughout the State to support medical care, but she was unsure if that meant they would be seeing more National Guard in the Monadnock region. While local workforce had been impacted by Covid-19, the City Manager said it was not to a degree that services had been impacted detrimentally.

ORDINANCE FOR FIRST READING – RELATING TO CLASS ALLOCATION AND SALARY SCHEDULE – ORDINANCE O-2022-01

A memorandum read from the HR Director/ACM, Elizabeth Fox, requesting that the City Council refer Ordinance O-2022-01 to the Finance, Organization, & Personnel Committee. Chair Powers referred Ordinance O-2022-01 to the Finance, Organization, & Personnel Committee.

RESOLUTION – IN APPRECIATION OF MICHAEL S. WALDEN UPON HIS RETIREMENT – RESOLUTION R-2022-02

A memorandum read from the HR Director, Elizabeth Fox, with Resolution R-2022-02, recognizing Michael A. Walden's 24 years of service to the Public Works Department. A motion by Councilor Bosley to adopt Resolution R-2022-02 was duly seconded by Councilor Greenwald and passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

Hearing no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 7:42 PM.

A true record, attest: 
City Clerk