

City of Keene  
New Hampshire

**FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Thursday, March 24, 2022**

**6:00 PM**

**Council Chambers,  
City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Thomas F. Powers, Chair  
Michael J. Remy, Vice Chair  
Bettina A. Chadbourne  
Bryan J. Lake  
Andrew M. Madison

**Staff Present:**

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager  
Thomas P. Mullins, City Attorney  
Jeff Chickering, Deputy Fire Chief  
Kurt Blomquist, ACM/Public Works Director  
Duncan Watson, Asst. Public Works Director  
David Hickling, Airport Director

Chair Powers called the meeting to order at 6 PM.

**1) Acceptance of Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness (HMEP) Grant - Fire Department**

Deputy Fire Chief Chickering was the first to address the Committee. He stated this item was for the Manager to apply for, execute and accept the terms of a grant agreement for the Hazardous Materials Preparedness grant application as presented in the amount of \$26,934 for the purchase and insulation of conferencing equipment and hazmat plan updates.

Councilor Lake made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Madison.

On a 5-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Council authorize the City Manager to do all things necessary to apply for, execute, expend and accept the terms of the grant agreement for the Hazardous Materials Preparedness (HMEP) Grant application as presented in the amount of \$26,934 for the purchase and installation of conferencing equipment and hazmat plan updates.

**2) Acceptance of Local Source Water Protection Grant - Public Works Department**

Public Works Director Kurt Blomquist addressed the Committee next and stated this item is in reference to the Water Resource Protection Grant. This grant is for work at Babbidge and Woodard Reservoirs located in the Town of Roxbury.

This project is to continue fencing around Babbidge Reservoir where the City has had issues in the past with unauthorized people having campfires, riding ATV's etc. This grant is for \$12,000, and will fund approximately 190 linear feet of fencing and a 16 foot wide gate.

There is some additional cost for in-house staff time to perform clearing in the area where the fencing will be installed; this work has a value of approximately \$3,000.

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

On a 5-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept and execute a Local Source Water Protection grant from the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) in the amount of \$12,000 for the installation of security fencing at Babbidge Reservoir.

**3) Lease of City Property for Renewable Energy Projects at Monadnock View Cemetery and Rose Lane - Assistant Public Works Director**

Asst. Public Works Director Duncan Watson stated he was before the Committee tonight to talk about a couple of parcels that have been identified as potential locations for solar development. One of the parcels is located in the northwest corner of Monadnock View Cemetery and the other on Rose Lane.

The property at Monadnock View Cemetery is currently has as a conservation easement. So in order for an energy project to be developed, the developer would need to seek a variance. Whether or not they would decide to seek that variance, and whether or not it would be a variance they could achieve is unknown at this point.

The Rose Lane property however, is located in the commercial industrial zone. This is where the old wastewater treatment plant was located but it has been closed and capped according to New Hampshire Department Environmental Services specifications.

Mr. Watson stated a solar array could be located on this parcel, making it a productive use of an otherwise unproductive land. Each one of these solar arrays would be around a quarter of a megawatt in size, should they be fully developed. He indicated staff is requesting to seek permission for the City Manager to do all things necessary to negotiate and execute a lease agreement.

This is not a power purchase agreement but a straight land lease. The developer would be working either with a direct wheel of the power on the Monadnock View Cemetery property; there is some interest from Cedar Crest which is located adjacent to the parcel. On the Rose Lane property it would be put under the grid meant to benefit low and moderate income families with lower electricity cost thanks.

Councilor Chadbourne asked for clarification on providing this electricity assistance to low income families and whether this was going to be a separate company from Eversource. Mr. Watson stated the generated power would be metered in some fashion, and there would be a community service organization that would be aggregating the power and offering that power to some of their customers.

The Councilor noted the Memo refers to the City receiving a nominal fee to lease the land and

asked how long this lease would be for and at what price. Mr. Watson stated this is something that would be negotiated by the City Manager but not something that would make a big difference to the City's budget. This is a project that would be beneficial from an energy generation standpoint and use of land that cannot be used for any other purpose. The lease term would probably be around 20 years that is how long it takes for an energy project to fully realize its full benefit. The Councilor asked whether the developer approached the City or is the City being proactive and seeking solar panel companies to lease land. Mr. Watson stated it is a combination of both; the City had originally put out these parcels when the 350 Marlboro Street project was being discussed. This is a slow process to use a parcel of land that makes economic sense.

Councilor Lake asked because this is going to be a ground-based array whether there is concern about glare on to any of the neighboring properties. Mr. Watson stated this is something that they had looked at with Revision Energy and there is currently a row of arborvitaes that shield the area.

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

On a 5-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the City Council authorize the City Manager to do all things necessary to negotiate and execute a lease agreement with ReVision Energy for a solar array installation at Monadnock View Cemetery and Rose Lane.

#### **4) Negotiate Lease of Airport Property – Monadnock Aviation - Airport Director**

Airport Director David Hickling addressed the Committee next and stated this item is a request to lease land at the airport for hangar development. Monadnock Aviation who is the fixed based operator at the airport provides a vital service. They provide the fueling and ground handling for all aircraft coming in. Their proposal is to construct a larger hangar approximately 90' x 90'. This would be a heated hangar, capable of accommodating larger aircraft which the airport does not have the capacity for at this time. He indicated Monadnock Aviation has been providing a vital service at the airport and even though they struggled during the pandemic they seem to be coming back from that. This is something that would definitely benefit the community and the airport with additional revenue.

Councilor Chadbourne stated she was happy this is happening and noted 5 years ago the City created an economic development plan and it is nice to see that coming to fruition.

Chair Powers asked where this hangar is going to be located. Mr. Hickling stated two sites are being looked at; between the terminal and the maintenance building and the other is where all the other corporate hangars are located. The Chair asked about timing for construction. Mr. Hickling stated cost of construction is high, hence people are getting leases in place so that when the price comes down they will be ready to construct.

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

On a 5-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to negotiate and execute a lease agreement with Monadnock Aviation for land to develop a new hangar.

**5) Councilors Williams, Workman and Lake - Encouraging the City to Develop a Homelessness Strategy through Programs that Focus on Reducing Harms Associated with Homelessness**

Councilor Workman started the presentation and read the following for the record: *“Housing is a basic human need as outlined in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. In fact, it falls into the first category of physiological needs. The basic requirements for human survival which include air, food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, and sleep. If these needs are not sufficiently met, it becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to meet the other secondary needs. While the recent events involving issuance of no trespassing orders to the people living in the encampment area behind Hannaford’s was the catalyst for drafting the letter. It certainly wasn’t the only reason.*

*The intention of the letter was to spark a deeper community conversation on ways we can treat our most vulnerable residents with compassion, dignity, and respect while encouraging more out of the box brainstorming on short term and long-term sustainable solutions to better assist individuals struggling to obtain and maintain housing. It’s important to know the listed action steps are recommendations or a starting point for the discussion and is not meant to be comprehensive. As the City, Keene has always been a compassionate community with various nonprofit agencies providing an array of services to the community members who are in need. It is imperative that we recognize there are barriers associated with connecting these to these services. There are ways we can do better overall. Homelessness is a complex issue and requires a multifaceted approach to combat it. We need to be real realistic with our expectations. The fact of the matter is regardless of our efforts no matter how extraordinary, we will never completely eradicate homelessness.*

*However, what we can and should be doing is meeting people where they are to reduce the harms of homelessness as well as ensuring there is a clear path to services with as few barriers to assistance as possible.*

*When someone is in crisis doing the bare minimum of even making a phone call using an automated system can be over an overwhelming task. If you hit too many closed doors or obstacles it can be paralyzing and stop someone from continuing to ask for help. In the field social workers often state they will hold hope for individuals until they themselves can hold that hope. We, as a community, should strive to do the same.*

*In closing, Councilors Lake, Williams, and I acknowledge the hard work that the Greater Keene Homelessness Coalition, area nonprofit agencies, and the City has done and continues to do to bring attention to the issue of homelessness. Tonight we are asking that the focus be on both short-term and long-term actionable steps with measurable outcomes. Working on both is not mutually exclusive, and while it makes strategic sense to focus on the long-term solutions, it appears we have lost sight of the short-term solutions that could be implemented at least on a trial basis to determine effectiveness.”*

Councilor Williams was the next to address the Committee he began by saying during the period of 1995 to 1996 he experienced homelessness at 19 years of age. Because of various factors he had a difficult time finding a place to live. Whenever there was an opportunity to have a roof over his head, he would take it. For the most part he was either sleeping in a tent, in his truck, someone's couch, and at one point on a mattress in a crawl space under a porch. He stated this was not a great way to live. Every night you have to figure out a way to get a good night's sleep. The choices are you can sleep in your truck and get woken up by a police officer or sleep in a tent hidden deep in the woods hoping you don't get discovered; in either case you put a lot of effort into hiding, which is extremely stressful, and it's hard to build a better life for yourself under those circumstances. This results in having a hard time being able to find better housing, get a job, take classes at the community college or to date.

The Councilor stated this was his situation and hence his concern when he heard about the people who had been asked to vacate their campsites behind the West Street shopping Plaza. He stated he is glad that some of these people have been able to work with City staff and local social services organizations to find shelter and appreciate the effort that has been done to make that happen. However, there are many who have chosen to go deeper into hiding. He felt this is a wake-up call which reminds us the system we have still isn't working for everyone and some are being left behind.

He stated today, the three Councilors present are asking the City to engage in a process to build a strategy on housing and homelessness and importantly to take action on that strategy. He added they are introducing several of their own ideas for potential inclusion in that strategy:

(1) Establish locations around the City to be designated as appropriate for camping. These locations should be provided with a City-funded dumpster and latrine services to minimize the impact of campers on the local environment. The option also is to open a new campground on public land where people could stay legally or maybe instead of a single campground that brings a lot of people to a single place there could be primitive camping sites available by permit at different locations in the City's parks and public lands, so that no single part of town is asked to host a very large number of campers. He noted Keene prides itself on being an outdoors town but he wasn't sure how much of that is true if there are no available camping areas. The City's current camping ordinance says the only place you can camp in Keene is at Wheelock Park campground and this campground closed a few years ago. The lack of legal camping facilities in Keene is the reason the City ends up with a lot of illegal camping in its parks.

The Councilor felt it would benefit everyone if we recognize the needs for things like trash removal and a decent place to go to the bathroom.

(2) The second item being proposed is to establish a safe parking program, entailing the designation of parking lots where people living in their vehicles would be allowed to park and sleep overnight in relative security. He noted safer parking programs are becoming a common practice in cities on the west coast. Safer parking programs offer a way to bring people into the fold. The Councilor stated the City can accomplish real harm reduction by bringing

people who live in their cars to places where they can have access to a bathroom which is critically important, and where they can sleep overnight in their car knowing there is going to be a certain amount of police presence in the area that will help to prevent them from becoming victims of crime.

He felt this program would be relatively uncomplicated to implement and would like to see a pilot project happen this summer.

(3) The third proposal is that the City work with its social services partners to provide occupants of camping and parking areas with outreach support and pathways to more stable housing opportunities. The Councilor stated this is a straightforward recommendation. They are not asking for a free-for-all on camping and parking, but rather asking that the City use these needs as opportunities to get people out of hiding and bring them to a place where they can get the support they need to get themselves to a better situation.

(4) The next proposal is to review building code and zoning ordinances to make room for lower cost housing solutions, such as tiny homes, cottage communities, conversion of existing spaces into accessory dwelling units. The issue of housing and homelessness are deeply connected. There is a direct relationship between the cost of housing and the amount of homelessness in a community. He stated the City needs to find ways to bring down the cost of housing.

(5) Work to expedite projects that bring expanded housing capacity to the City with a balance focused on both subsidized and market rate. The Councilor stated housing is a supply and demand problem, and the problem in the City is that we have a lot of demand and limited supply. If we want to get the cost of housing under control we are going to have to figure out how to build more of it.

(6) The last suggestion - one that has been around for a while is to find a long-term solution for the lack of public bathrooms downtown. Providing public bathrooms is a difficult issue due to the need to provide supervision and cleaning services. He noted in the City of Portland Oregon has developed a special type of outdoor bathroom to support people who are experiencing homelessness. These facilities are mostly self-cleaning and very difficult to vandalize. He indicated they would like to see the City review and experiment with this idea. Perhaps placing one of these bathroom facilities along the Rail Trail where it can also be used by people who are biking through area.

With that Councilor Williams turned the presentation over to Councilor Lake.

Councilor Lake stated the City needs a path forward for how it is going to carry these things out. The best course of action would be to have these set of objectives be referred to one of the City Boards or Commissions, such as the Human Rights Committee to be further investigated and have that Board or Commission report back to the City Council with specific recommendations on how to carry them out. Provide that committee a chance to explore and come back with recommendations where they see fit. For example, on the recommendations for camping. Where would it go? What is needed for resources such as trash removal?

How does this integrate with service outreach? For Building Code? What needs to change to allow for more affordable housing options etc.

The Councilor stated what they are attempting to accomplish with this list of suggestions, it is not to be in direct conflict with the existing objectives of the Greater Keene Homeless Coalition which has the aim of bringing together ideas focused on ending homelessness. Instead, these objectives are complementary by striving to reduce the harms associated with homelessness. These are two different goals, but of course could have overlapping strategies, such as trying to increase affordable housing options. He stated he wanted to be clear, this is not an attempt to indicate the City isn't providing services and seeking out additional solutions to the issue of homelessness, but rather that there are additional opportunities as has been outlined to reduce the impact the affected individuals in the community at large.

The Councilor stated it is their hope that a committee such as the Human Rights Committee could work alongside the Greater Keene Homeless Coalition to move their objectives forward. This concluded the Councilors' presentation.

The Chairman turned the presentation over to City staff. City Manager Elizabeth Dragon was the first to address the Committee. The Manager stated her opinion is that the welfare laws and the overall structure of welfare in the State of New Hampshire is broken. The shelter model and the proposed camping model does not get to the root of the problem. It forces people to leave their own community because their community lacks the support they need. Instead, they are forced to congregate in group living quarters in the few communities that have shelters and social services. Then because those communities have shelters and services, it becomes more cost-effective to grow those in towns and cities that have those services shifting a larger burden to a handful of communities, instead of finding solutions in every community across the State.

To address the issues we need to get upstream of the problem. How do we do that? Welfare reform at the State level. Each community in the State should be providing transitional housing in their own community and mobile support services. Welfare Directors should be focused on strategies to prevent homelessness and they should be working to keep people in their homes; through rental or mortgage assistance or even just helping residents access available state programs that will provide that assistance. Right now there is no incentive for communities to do any of this, because right now, if someone becomes homeless, the Welfare Director in the community picks up the phone and calls all of the shelters in the State until they find an open bed. At that point, that community pays to transport them to that shelter.

Other barriers include communities with very limited hours to apply for assistance and complicated applications. If you are in need of emergency assistance but your town's welfare office isn't open, chances are, you are going to a place like Keene that has office hours and is accessible. The Manager stated in the 4 ½ years she has been the Manager she has seen this happen. 100 Nights has transitioned from a shelter that was open 100 nights during the coldest time of the year to a year-round shelter starting in year 2017 and now they are building a new shelter on Water Street, which almost doubles what their original capacity before their recently added bus and hotel rooms.

The Manager stated at today's Greater Keene Homeless Coalition meeting it was indicated that those self-reporting they are from Keene in our shelter system is 60%. 25% are not even from Cheshire County. This is good information to inform the conversation and it is likely that Keene residents are even less than 60%, because people often think they have to say they are from Keene to get services from Keene, which is not the case. Regardless of residency the way the State law is structured, if you are eligible to receive assistance from the City and the shelters, you receive it regardless of your residency status. The Manager stated we are a caring community who tries to do the right thing. No matter what Keene does as a community or how much additional capacity it creates unless the State's welfare structure is addressed it will never be enough. Communities around us without shelters and programs are large cities who struggle with these same issues will look to Keene if there is an open bed and Keene's numbers will continue to grow.

The Manager stated staff heard at the Coalition meeting that more towns in our county are in need of Southwest Community Service (SCS) Shelter Services as compared to last year. Another telling statistic - the estimated rate of homeless for New Hampshire is 12.3 people per 10,000 population, meaning on average Keene should have about 31 people experiencing homelessness. At the present time 100 Nights has 64 clients between the Shelter, their bus, and people they have put up in hotels using Covid funding. SCS has 45, 15 to 20 people are living on the streets or in the woods, and MCVP has seven, which is 136 homeless clients in total.

The Manager went on to say if someone is homeless and comes to the City regardless of availability in shelters, the City will house them. What was seen at the encampment behind Hannaford's, after weeks of outreach and a coordinated approach - this outreach began on January 31 and lasted through March 14. She indicated, what staff saw was only a couple of people actually agreeing to go into a shelter. A couple more went into rehab and the rest were not interested in the services that were provided, even though the barriers to entry to get into our shelters are very low.

The Manager went on to say people have different life stories and circumstances, and staff takes the time to learn about those stories and circumstances and provide services that are right for them. But the work that is done is focused on bringing people in from the streets or the woods not creating more opportunities for them to live in the woods.

The Manager then addressed what has been done in the City. Both the Manager and the Mayor have been involved in the Governor's Council on Housing Stability. The Mayor has served as a member of the Commission, and the last year the Manager co-chaired a group focused on regional coordination. There is a strategic plan that has come out with both short-term and long-term action steps that talks about housing as well as a comprehensive plan on homelessness. This plan mentions the uneven and inconsistent responses across all towns, and as a result the participating communities shouldering a disproportionate amount of financial responsibility. It includes recommendations which the Manager felt does not go far enough, probably because tackling welfare changes in New Hampshire would be tough, but it does include conducting a formal data-driven assessment of the current welfare model to propose solutions to both the financial and the administrative structure based on that assessment.

The plan also talks about equipping smaller towns for responses. So issues don't overwhelm the larger cities and providing resources for short and medium-term financial assistance for rent and utilities for people in economic crisis. This is a good preventative measure that all communities should be focused on in their welfare department.

This year the Greater Keene Homeless Coalition has been actively involved in participating in a service mapping project. Mapping services for a variety of things to improve practices in promoting housing stability, homeless prevention and cross agency communication. Identifying program and policy overlaps and gaps to inform the next steps. Align resources to maximize the benefit to the community residents who are facing homelessness. The State hopes to create a model that can be duplicated in other parts of the State. Keene has already implemented some of those recommendations in the first draft. For instance, about a year ago Keene instituted client meetings with Human Services and the two homeless shelters to discuss individual Cases. This is a much better person-centered approach. Keene is now implementing the same type of meeting for street homeless. Keene is part of the state's coordinated entry system and would like to be part of the state's homeless management information system to better track assessments and referrals.

In addition, Natalie Darcy, Keene's Human Services Director is in the process of setting up a meeting with the Cheshire County Welfare Directors to discuss homelessness and city and town responsibilities. The Manager stated Craig Henderson of SCS is also going to be part of this meeting to speak on billing and town responsibilities. Ms. Darcy would like this group to eventually come up with a uniform application for area directors, as well as reminding them of their responsibilities.

The Manager noted, as she had mentioned earlier, some towns take appointments one day a week for a few hours. The State's Housing Stability Strategic Plan has a goal of increasing housing units in the State of New Hampshire by 13,500 by the year 2024 and there are action steps in the plan around that. Keene has taken this goal and applied it to Cheshire County and to Keene to understand what Keene's share of that goal might look like.

The Manager stated one thing she is excited about is the work being undertaken by all State Regional Planning Commissions to inventory housing types and affordability across the State. Many communities have very restrictive zoning regulations that prohibit certain housing developments. Keene has gone through an extensive update of its zoning regulations and has made changes to allow for more densification. There is more work to be done in that respect and the zoning code will continue to be reviewed.

With respect to Accessory Dwelling Units, the Manager stated they are a great way to add more housing and make home ownership more affordable. However, many people have not taken advantage of this in the State. The Manager stated Keene has taken stock of its housing and homeless strategies, made several improvements, and will continue to do so. Keene has implemented and participated in the Strategic Plan on Housing Stability and Comprehensive Statewide Plan on Homelessness, and have implemented many improvements as a result of these conversations.

The Manager further stated the Homeless Coalition has engaged partners who are leaders in this region and are extremely knowledgeable in this field.

The Manager stressed that Keene will provide housing options to anyone who is homeless and currently camping. Keene is in the process of streamlining its permit process but are not there yet.

With respect to public bathrooms. Public bathrooms are being discussed in the capital plan, and staff has looked at the Portland Lou as an interim option and it is easy enough to bring that forward again. The Manager stated what she would like to do is to continue to implement the strategic plans the City has in place, both at the State and the local level and continue the good work of our partners at the Homeless Coalition. She stated what she is really looking for is someone to take on welfare reform at the State level so we can get to the root of these problems. This concluded the Manager's comments.

Human Service Manager, Natalie Darcy was the next to address the Committee. She began by saying that her office is passionate in their efforts to assist the homeless community and committed to work to assure that everybody who wants to come in from the cold is able to do so. Sometimes it feels like a two-edged sword as staff must determine the town the person is from. This does not mean the individual will not be assisted, but assures the correct town can take accountability for the residents. She added she also has the responsibility to the taxpayers of Keene to assure the tax money is being spent appropriately. Ms. Darcy stated it is staff's hope that Human Services could be instrumental in keeping people in their homes.

Ms. Darcy stated her department is open Monday through Friday and there are also other programs in the area that will happily assist and help keep individuals housed. She added since the rental moratorium ended, the department is seeing many families evicted for reasons other than rent. Unfortunately, this along with .6% rental vacancy has posed the issue to a greater extent. Ms. Darcy felt it was imperative for the City to have a great working relationship with area resources to keep people in from the cold, which is why they are establishing this mapping program and working on the Homeless Coalition.

Human Services has not always had an abundance of homeless individuals. In the last 13 years for the first 10 individuals, there wasn't the need to put them up in hotel spaces. The last three years the City has seen an increase in requesting shelter hotel assistance. There is a 100% increase over the last few years and stated the issue is real. Ms. Darcy stated Human Services does not have staff to perform outreach work in the field and hence are happy to have partners such as SCS and 100 Nights.

With respect to these partners. This winter 100 Nights has helped over 70 individuals per night their regular capacity is 28 and today's number was 62. Ms. Darcy noted when April 30<sup>th</sup> arrives there is no plan to house these individuals. The department has received at least seven applications from hotels and are working with these individuals to try to get them case management and housing before that April 30th deadline. Ms. Darcy stressed Human Services will make sure no one is left out in the cold.

Ms. Darcy went on to say, if they are not receiving regular updates, such as bed lists, staff has no way of knowing who the individuals are, who need the assistance. This is why it is imperative that staff meets with these individuals to determine where they are from and contact the correct town to see if they have the resources within their own communities to take care of their homeless population.

Ms. Darcy stated the City has a great relationship with SCS as well. They have had open beds throughout the winter and the City has been able to house many individuals because of that relationship.

Ms. Darcy then addressed shelter guests from other towns. Jaffrey 3, Bedford 1, Hillsboro 6, Winchester 8, Brattleboro 2, Rindge 6, Claremont 6, Plymouth 1, Richmond 2, Florida 1, Swanzey 5, Manchester 2, New York City, Troy, Fitzwilliam, North Carolina, Georgia, Roxbury, Vermont, and Newport. Overall 55 individuals are from out of town and 48 individuals are from Keene. Keene is the hub with services and hence an individual wants to be identified as a Keene resident as the Manager has explained. Overall Keene is seeing 60 - 75% of all shelter guests from another community. Ms. Darcy noted towns are not taking their responsibility under RSA 165, for their homeless population. Many feel because they sleep in Keene they are from Keene. For Human Services purposes, however, shelter is transitory housing and is not counted as residency.

Ms. Darcy stressed they will not turn anyone away who comes to their office for assistance. As indicated by the Manager, many welfare offices are not open during regular hours and unavailable to the homeless population. Ms. Darcy stated her staff is working with clients who are out of town to get applications to the appropriate town and have started that process already.

Regarding housing developments, Ms. Darcy stated obtaining subsidized housing is great for the community. However, housing developments are not always the answer when talking about the homeless population. Adding subsidized affordable housing will help a great deal of families. Homeless individuals often times face challenges to qualify for housing. Such as background checks, criminal records often leave families locked out of these development as well as poor landlord references and credit reporting. Ms. Darcy stated most individuals who come to their office do not have the resources to pay their rent in a timely manner. In addition, many housing developments have a policy if someone is late three times during the year on rent payments they will be evicted. This leaves the family homeless. In addition, clients are put on a wait list that can last three plus years before being housed. Purging of lists also deletes people who need housing the most.

What are the next steps? Continue the mapping process with the shelters, mental health and health care providers. Using the homeless management system would be a helpful tool for the office in identifying the individuals who need the assistance and work with the mapping team to get people housed. Renew and start new Memorandums of Understanding with SCS and 100 Nights, continue to meet with all individuals to assess, assist, and refer to appropriate agencies. Meet with Cheshire County Welfare Directors to discuss homeless strategies. Standardize area applications with area towns and add 100 Nights and SCS to the conversation with reference to RSA 165.

Ms. Darcy stated her goal is to meet with Welfare Directors from Cheshire County on a monthly basis. Staff has requested 100 Nights and SCS send their clients to the City so the City can assess each individual and their needs. Staff will assist in completing and sending applications to the appropriate towns for billing, so that Keene is not on the hook for everybody in Keene. Identify gaps in the process so no one falls through the cracks.

In conclusion, Ms. Darcy stated she feels her office has a strong relationship with area shelters and is committed to seeing that nobody is in a position to have to live outside. They look forward to continuing to build strong relationships in the community and areas services so that homeless will get the best possible care. For fiscal year to date the City has spent an additional \$34,000 on hotel rooms accommodations and this does not include the funding the shelters currently receive.

Beth Daniels CEO for SCS was the next speaker. Ms. Daniels explained the way in which SCS has approached the issues of homelessness and housing is that it is on a spectrum; where someone falls in their experience with homelessness. SCS tries to create resources across that spectrum, whether it be street outreach and in the past they have paid out close to 9.8 million to prevent homelessness, through the emergency rental assistance program. SCS has several family shelters, single men's shelters and also permanent housing for the chronically homeless (five buildings).

She felt the conversation needs to be where the services are not being met. Ms. Daniels stated if this proposal is sent to a Committee and the City thinks about creating these types of sites, it will be a challenge to figure out how much structure the City wants to bring in. She felt having certain controls may deter people from utilizing the space. She felt bringing it to a committee is a really great way to move it forward.

Ms. Daniels introduced Craig Henderson Director for the Housing Stabilization Program. Mr. Henderson stated SCS is both a leader and a follower. SCS is going to figure out what the community is asking for and then lead the way and make it happen.

Mr. Henderson stated they are however, seeing some pretty troubling trends. In 2020, 290 people were served through MCVP, SCS and 100 Nights. In 2021, that number increased to 371. He agreed with the Manager that the welfare system is broken. If you build capacity in Keene people will be sent to Keene – there is no getting around it. Other welfare departments just don't want to deal with it. If they know Keene is the easy button, they will send their people to Keene. Hence, work needs to be done throughout the state to make sure resources are available where people are having problems. He stated Keene should be cautiously moving towards adding any sort of capacity because it will be filled. Numbers consistently show 75% of the folks that we serve are from Cheshire County.

Keith Thibault from SCS addressed the committee next and noted homelessness is a complex subject. He indicated there is not enough regional work done together and part of that is because of NH's tax structure. Mr. Thibault stated from his personal experience of developing real estate it can be as much about a homeless problem as it is an affordability issue. If people who are in the business of providing housing get enough resources they will build it. We have extremely

high housing costs partially because of our success. Housing costs don't match the wages that are being paid. He felt 100 Nights is a huge accomplishment which will help a lot.

Mr. Thibault felt this also has to be looked at as an individual's lifestyle choices; various forms of mental illness that also contribute to this and sometimes go untreated. We will find answers and they are going to come from a variety of places. Ms. Daniels added there are also some people who like to live the nomadic lifestyle, or be away from prying eyes. What that overall unsheltered population they make up, she stated she wasn't sure. This is a portion of the population they have served in the past.

Mindy Cambiar Director of 100 Nights was the next to address the Committee. Ms. Cambiar stated she does not disagree with anything the Manager, Southwestern, Ms. Darcy has said tonight. There does need to be a further conversation. She talked about how homelessness is addressed in Portland, Oregon and how well they are handling the homelessness with tents everywhere and broken down campers on side streets where people can live. She also suggested railroad cars and accessory dwelling units. How do we get people to believe that all of these people are human beings worthy of dignity and compassion? She felt we have to have more conversations going forward.

Councilor Johnsen stated what she is hearing is desperation, what's being done, and the disconnect. The three Councilors who are addressing the issue have seen this disconnect and are trying to fill in the gaps. She thanked everyone who is involved in trying to find answers to this problem.

Raleigh Ormerod City Councilor thanked everyone who spoke in great detail about what is being done and what could be done. There is a temporary crisis and there are some things that need to be addressed. He talked about his role on the school board where we are taking kids from surrounding towns but those children are not being separated – the difference there is tuition associated with them. The Councilor felt instead of setting barriers for people coming here there could be an approach for resources allocated to Keene. He felt Keene is a leader in energy, inclusiveness and maybe Keene could also be a leader in homelessness.

The Chairman invited members of the public to address the Committee next.

Mr. Kevin Morrow talked about the homeless population living behind Hannaford's and Walmart and felt a dumpster at this location will help. He suggested the drive-in next to the police station as a possible site.

A speaker who did not provide his name stated this past month his rent went up \$600 and felt that was unattainable. He noted this problem will get a lot worse before it gets any better.

Chris Cobeck of 229 Main Street stated it has always been the belief the responsibility of homelessness is one's own fault, and the responsibility of change lies therein. Partisan hand waving of this kind does not make the problem go away and merely thrust it upon the less prepared. Mr. Cobeck referred to his experience of having to administer Narcan with no medical training. He stated that he has mapped out locations of camps, shelters, and has taken on the task

of handing out food, hygiene, products, and medical supplies. He stated we can pretend the fault is with the individual but burying the question does not answer it. He added if he and his friends don't take the liberty of trucking into the woods and providing aid where the State fails, it would then become the problem of police investigators and morticians. He voiced his support to the proposal being brought forward by the three councilors.

Stacey Pickford Biaz of Jaffrey, New Hampshire stated she has experienced homelessness and there was a time she was addicted and struggling internally in silence. At the present time she is a landlord providing housing, so she see both sides.

She questioned where people who are incarcerated in Cheshire County go when they are released – is there a re-entry program? Chair Powers stated there is a re-entry program. She noted her transitional housing takes in people from surrounding towns and also noted to the transportation issues this area faces. She added homelessness is an experience not an identity.

Joy Douglas Marshall Robertson of 36 Ellis Court, volunteer with Keene Mutual Aid stated we are excited to spend time getting upstream but there are people drowning now. He stated we have the opportunity to set an example for what a compassionate community can look like in New Hampshire. This is a real effort to reduce harm to those facing the realities of extreme poverty realities that we cannot simply ignore and hope they disappear. In fact, a failure to enact a creative solution now will only cause the problem to grow in the future.

Being homeless is not a crime and it is not something that we as a community can afford to turn a blind eye to. Every year the homeless population grows and shelters become more overburdened, resulting in them being more stringent in their regulations. People with children and pets struggle to access emergency resources and shelter beds which are exceeded by the sheer number of people who do make the decision to utilize them. During the warmer months shelters cut the amount of beds and people who prefer to camp or have to camp stay in whatever areas they can find sanctioned or not. This increases isolation from basic survival needs and services, as well as the safety risks from medical and substance use related emergencies that were referenced earlier.

There is currently nothing that can stop these things from being realities. But much like providing children a skate park and recreational activities, it combats those problems by creating spaces where people feel that they're actually part of the community where they can actually exist, where services can contact them in non-antagonistic ways. The City can make areas off limits, but that won't stop desperate people from making desperate decisions. We are witnessing a rise in evictions due to the economic crisis of Covid and inflation, more and more people will find themselves with no option but to find places to camp. The City can spend countless taxpayer dollars on policing off limits areas every day to keep people away or we can take the more humane, less expensive route of designating an area for camping and requiring that those people that use the space be caretakers. He suggested coordinating with Parks and Rec staff and outreach services in order to provide a safe environment for people to have the basic needs met.

He asked the City Council to accept the proposal as it will be a net positive for the whole community as well as positive example for the rest of the State. He felt everyone will benefit

from more public bathrooms and more affordable housing options. He urged the Council to support this proposal

Mr. Dave Chandler stated he and his wife have been residents of Keene for over 13 years and now live in Langdon Place. He stated Keene has an immediate problem. He agreed this is a Statewide issue but we can't wait for the State to solve it. He stated he has a specific proposal to review with the Council: A set of criteria for adopting and establishing a specific program for helping the folks that are in immediate need and the City needs to deal with those people who want to live in the woods.

- An acceptable site for displaced tent people:
  1. It should be a location suitably apart from residential properties.
  2. It should be a site on property owned by the City of Keene,
  3. For safety and privacy a wooded site or open-level space near woods would be ideal.
  4. For safety and prevention of inappropriate behavior rules and regulations have to be put in place.
  5. Ability to gain access to critical services such as the Community Kitchen should be provided e.g. Express Bus service.

Mr. Chandler suggested the woods behind the pickle ball courts on Maple Avenue as a possible location

James Duffy of Winchester was next to address the committee. He stated he has served on the Board of Directors for 100 Nights, is a member of the Monadnock Interfaith Project and a tenant in Keene where he pays rent for a studio. He stated this is a critical issue and hoped that energy, compassion and insight will move it forward. Mr. Duffy noted in 2021, 14 towns in Cheshire County made significant financial contributions to 100 Nights to help cover the cost of their residents. Mr. Duffy referred to page 50 of the Keene Comprehensive Plan which refers to housing issues and affordable housing and how that contributes to homelessness. He noted there was a recommendation made for an affordable workforce housing fund to be explored and asked staff whether such an issue was ever discussed. Page 50 also talks about convening community stakeholders to devise a specific strategy to address these issues and asked whether a specific group was formed since 2010 to address those issues specifically by the City. If not, is it possible that such a group could be formed? The Chairman stated they will follow up on these questions.

Mr. Duffy stated he is a former City Councilor and worked on the comprehensive plan. There are three principles this plan is based on that was identified in the Keene community goals; environmental integrity, economic opportunity and social equity. He felt this items falls under social equity and asked that this be kept in mind as conversations move forward.

Mr. Roy Ginsburg Vice-Chair of the Monadnock Interfaith Project (MIP). He indicated MIP is very interested in long-term systemic change. He indicated he has worked with people that face many challenges, including significant mental health challenges. He felt all people deserve dignity, safe housing and support, and he applauds Keene leaders for taking a serious look at the alternatives ways that people could have a place to live that is legal and safe. He felt the letter written by the Councilors is well thought out for possible short-term and long term solutions.

He indicated MIP is advocating for an affordable Housing Trust Fund for Cheshire County that would address longer-term solutions.

Mr. Ginsburg noted the first meeting of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund Work Group is next week. It will meet for six sessions and hopes to have concrete a proposal to bring to Cheshire County decision makers by early summer. He asked about properties that are vacant or underutilized that could be used in the short term for people to live. He encouraged the Council's support.

Ms. Susan Hay of 22 Middle Street stated she has watched this issue for the last decade and was part of starting the breakfast program at the Unitarian Church because she had seen people on the library steps at 7 o'clock in the morning because they had to leave the shelter and it was cold - and that was the next building that was going to open up where they could go in. She felt to be a compassionate City, we need much more creative thinking. She felt for people who live in the woods, this is a more viable choice than living in a shelter. For some of those people it is what they can handle and the City needs to meet them at that level. She stated she loves the recommendation and added the City has been talking about bathrooms downtown for a decade and felt it was shameful this issue has not been settled yet.

If people are going to be outside, a dumpster is also required. She agreed there is risk attached with some of these recommendations, but the risk already exists. She felt there is income inequality, but this is our town and this issue needs to be addressed.

Jenny Dole of 32 Leverette Street began by expressing her gratitude to the Council members for bringing this proposal to the Council and her support for same. She noted she works at a homeless shelter and added her grandmother was a founder of a shelter.

She stated she works with people who don't fall neatly into the boxes we have designated to qualify for shelter housing. More and more people are struggling these days and our system must adjust. In the meantime we, as a community must gather whatever resources we can to meet the needs of all of our neighbors. In this proposal there are immediate and long-term suggestions. To the former we absolutely must do what we can to facilitate the safety and security of those unhoused individuals who cannot or will not enter a shelter. She felt the City needs to meet them where they are at and demonstrate compassion, respect and recognition of their innate dignity.

Ms. Dole stated the City should provide safe areas for those camping and sleeping in their cars. Public services, like bathrooms, trash receptacles, and access to showers, is the very baseline of that recognition of dignity. This is low-cost, immediately actionable, and will help mitigate, concerns and facilitate self-improvement. Beyond that we need to tackle the broader issue of affordable housing.

She noted there are many examples across the country of creative ways to provide housing for all. She stated she wholeheartedly supports the suggestions of accessory dwelling units and MIP's Housing Trust Initiative. She stated first and foremost use whatever resources we have to provide public space in the immediate for our unhoused neighbors. She hoped we can come together as a community to implement creative ways to create truly affordable housing.

Jeffrey Thompson was the next speaker. He stated he did not have an address as he lives in a tent and he is homeless. He stated trash is an issue and can be overwhelming because he does his best to pick it up. He indicated he has been a resident of Keene since he was four and recalls Gilbo Avenue having public bathrooms. People are now left with using 100 Nights Resource Center which is not always vacant, or at times using the bathroom at Cumberland Farms gas stations. He felt dumpster are a good suggestion.

Mr. Thompson stated he is too broken to work but not broken enough to be on social security or disability. He stated he has beginning progressive stages of Parkinson's disease which makes it difficult for him to secure employment as many employers feel he is a liability. He stated he longs for a hot shower and has been wearing the same clothes for months. He has been homeless since he was 16 years of age. He stated he agrees with the designated camping area.

Reverend Michael Hall of 9 Kennedy Drive, Minister to the Unitarian Universalist Church was the next to address the Committee. He stated for centuries as a congregation they have been willing and able to do good for those who struggle in their lives due to poverty and lack of shelter and food insecurity. He stated no one should be abandoned or cast off as a sinner because of his/her desperation. The minister stated his church has always found willing partners from other area churches. He referred to all the charities his church has founded such as the breakfast program.

Rev. Hall applauded the three Councilors who have put forward a call for accommodation to those who elect to live outdoors. He stated he does not believe people are coming from other communities because Keene is a better place to tent. He added people end up in a shelter because they have a need that must be filled. He felt what is being proposed is a remarkably important emergency measure to deal with the issue right now.

In closing he referred to these words from Leslie Jamison *“Empathy isn't just something that happens to us a meteor shower of synapses firing across the brain. It's also a choice we make to pay attention to extend ourselves sometimes we care for another, because we know we should, or because it's asked for. But that does not make our caring hollow.”* He added you don't need inspiration to help people out and hoped we can do this together.

Derek Scalia, of 16 Hillside Ave faith leader and member of the Monadnock Interfaith Project began by thanking the Councilors for this proposal. He stated he recognizes these measures will not solve the issue that is at hand and yet these measures are rooted in compassion and love, which is often not talked about in government. He felt this is the ultimate calling that builds strong and vibrant communities. Mr. Scalia stated those who are in need are often caught in a bureaucratic struggle that leave so many outside of the fold but the work that is before us will not be solved by one entity alone and work that needs to be addressed as a community.

Reverend Cindy Bagley Senior Minister at the United Church of Christ was the next speaker. The church has been involved with this issue for a long time and was the original overflow shelter for years. The Reverend taught her experience of being nearly homeless many years ago when her husband was diagnosed with a chronic illness. She indicated they lost everything and

this experience changed her life. She stated she was one of the lucky ones because she had a wonderful church and very gracious friends and added this issue that is being discussed tonight is something anyone could fall into, no one is exempt from it. Rev. Bagley stated her experience is what led her to ministry. She noted we have an immediate problem and a systemic problem and felt they both need to be addressed.

Reverend Elsa Worth Priest at St. James Episcopal Church, stated she has experienced this community as an extremely compassionate forward thinking, and civic minded community and nothing she has heard tonight changes her mind. She stated she is grateful for this letter that has come out from the three councilors who have shown an out of the box vision.

She stated things often come down to budgets and it is true there are limits to budgets, but it's also true that there is unlimited compassion in our community. She stated hence all we need is leadership and that she is grateful for this letter, because it is showing that our leaders are willing to think outside the box. She stated she wants to live in a town that is known for its innovative and creative leadership and used the business leadership as an example during the pandemic.

Mr. David Kirkpatrick stated he sits on the Board of Rights and Democracy Institute for New Hampshire and Vermont. He also owns a business located on Marlboro Street. He stated his first job in Keene was working for a company called Access who helped people who were not fitting into the box find other ways to have success. He stated he worked with a number of kids from Keene High to find ways to get them credits for things they were not able to do. He worked with kids and adults of various abilities and disabilities, and some they were born with and some they acquired. One of the things that they absolutely would do is get people to move to cities. He felt moving people out of places is not really a thing that that should be done for a variety of reasons. Mr. Kirkpatrick stated some people come to these cities because they need the resources being offered here.

He stated he agrees with the Manager that the problem is starts at the State and there is a great global problem that needs fixing. He stated each community has its own challenges and people are going to keep coming here and we need to find a way to address this issue. They are our citizens and we need to find a way to help them.

Sparkle Woodward of Keene stated she has lived in Keene for 4 years witnessed a lot of changed especially during the pandemic, when the demand for housing has increased. With demand there needs to be a supply. She stated we are stuck in a slump where demand continues to increase, as does the cost of living. Meanwhile, in New Hampshire, minimum wage continues to stay at \$7.25 cents.

A single bedroom apartment in Keene can cost well over a \$1,000 per month, this is not factoring in food, laundry, travel, and other expenses. This is causing individuals to become homeless. She talked about her experience of possibly facing homelessness due to a fire in her apartment and felt services are necessary for the homeless. She talked about the need for public restrooms and trash disposal.

An individual who did not provide her name began by thanking the Councilors for bringing this item forward. She talked about her experience with homelessness and where she found housing

at that time was at Cheshire Homes. She agreed the welfare system has been broken for a long time. She indicated she was embarrassed to ask for help then but now as a retired English teacher, on social security she lives in subsidized elderly housing and is not embarrassed to ask for help. She felt there has to be a solution to the issues facing the homeless population.

Councilor Remy asked for clarification as to what the Councilors were looking for. Councilor Lake stated there are issues that need to be fleshed out and were hoping for a city committee to work potentially in tandem with the Coalitions that already exist. He stated the idea would be to send this to Human Rights Committee and have them act on these items. Councilor Remy asked for the Manager's input on this suggestion. The Manager wasn't sure if this was the right Committee to send this item to. She stated she would like to address this issue with the Parks and Rec. Director who is a staff liaison for that committee; manages the work of that committee and understands the membership of that committee. Councilor Remy suggested perhaps assigning this item to a Committee. Councilor Madison asked whether this item might need its own Ad Hoc Committee because some of the issues are complex.

Chair Powers felt this could take time and asked whether the Manager could be charged with addressing a number of things and come back to this committee while working on setting up an Ad Hoc Committee. The Manager stated she could certainly look at the charge of HRC as well as looking at other options. She stated she could create a committee as well for a specific purpose and the Mayor creates committees as well. She stated she would like to think about this a bit.

The City Manager stated if the Committee really wants to help expedite this giving it to the City manager to create what she thinks is necessary for this purpose would be the best option. Otherwise the issue with RSA 91-A factors in and it becomes a much more formalized process.

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

On a 5-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to continue work with a Greater Keene Homelessness Coalition to complete the community mapping process on homelessness, prevention, and coordinated local response to homelessness. This report will be submitted to the Governor's Council on housing stability; and, further, that she work with the State and Service providers in our region on implementation of recommendations contained within that final report and the letter brought forward by Councilors Williams, Workman and Lake be directed to a committee at the City Managers discretion.

There being no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 8:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

Edits submitted by,

FOP Meeting Minutes  
March 24, 2022

ADOPTED

Terri M. Hood, Assistant City Clerk