

WeCity of Keene
New Hampshire

HOUSING STABILITY AD HOC COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA

November 2, 2022

3:00 P.M.

Council Chambers

Committee Members

Mayor George Hansel, Chair

Councilor Bryan Lake

Natalie Darcy, Human Resources Manager

Joshua Meehan

Jennifer Alexander

Doug Iosue

Craig Henderson

Steven Bragdon

Jennifer Seher

Stacie Pickford

1. Approve Minutes of Last Meeting
2. Signs Relating to Panhandling
3. RSA 165: Aid To Assisted Persons – Welfare Reform
4. Exploration Of Safe Parking Program Options With Community Partners/Churches – Craig Henderson
5. City Code Section 58-33 (2): Camping
6. Working with area hospitals and jails to connect people with social services
7. Land Development Code – Proposed Minimum Lot Size Change From 5 Acres to 2 Acres
8. Communications
9. Next Meeting Date

October 27, 2022

A Public Letter to the City of Keene Ad Hoc Housing Stability Committee

Dear Committee Members,

In our community we have many people experiencing homelessness sleeping in the woods. They are people with inherent worth and dignity, yet sometimes living in squalid conditions. Expanded housing options and services are needed to keep them safer and embraced as fellow human beings.

Keene City Councilors Lake, Williams & Workman wrote a letter in March which led to the formation of the Keene Ad Hoc Housing Stability Committee. The councilors asked the city to explore innovative options including legal camping, overnight parking areas and more affordable housing options for people of low income.

The committee heard presentations about the work of city staff, first responders, and service agencies to assist those taking shelter in the woods. This work is difficult, heartbreaking, and dangerous. Staff are spending significant time breaking down scattered campsites and seeking to find people, often in the dark, to administer medical help. Additionally, we heard about the cost to the city of fulfilling legal obligations by housing people in hotels. The current response is an inefficient use of city dollars.

MIP attended every meeting. We have witnessed the committee's wholehearted intent to honor the humanity of our most challenged citizens. City administration is being proactive, revising roles and proposing new zoning regulations. Draft recommendations discussed by the committee include: increasing collaboration among service providers, examining barriers to accessory dwelling unit development, and increasing workforce housing. These long-term approaches, when instituted, may be helpful but are not aligned with the scope and reality of the current challenges.

We urge the committee to not adjourn until specific ideas raised in the original letter from city councilors, and other potential relevant solutions have been discussed with courageous, forward-thinking conversations.

Please consider ways to provide more legal options for people to have safe, private shelter with access to water and sanitary facilities. When talking about affordable housing, focus on those with very limited income. Consider ways to layer in jobs for people. Focus staffing positions on housing. Identify concrete short and long term steps, develop a timeline and budget recommendations.

People sleeping in the woods are our brothers and sisters, literally and figuratively. Without a relevant plan, people will continue to sleep outside; the emotional and financial burden on city staff will continue; and the public will be at a loss as to why the same situation arises every year.

On behalf of Monadnock Interfaith Project,

Rev. Michael F. Hall