

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AD HOC HOUSING STABILITY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, October 5, 2022

3:00 PM

Council Chambers
City Hall

Members Present:

Mayor George S. Hansel, Chair
Councilor Bryan Lake
Doug Iosue
Steven Bragdon
Jennifer Seher
Stacie Pickford
Craig Henderson

Staff Present:

Elizabeth Dragon, City Manager
Rebecca Landry, IT Director/Assistant City
Manager

Members Not Present:

Natalie Darcy
Joshua Meehan
Jennifer Alexander

1) Call to Order

Mayor Hansel called the meeting to order at 3:01 PM.

2) Approval of Minutes

Mr. Craig Henderson noted that there was one error where he was quoted as saying they spent 1 million dollars and it needed to be corrected to .5 million. Correction noted by Ms. Rebecca Landry.

Councilor Bryan Lake motioned to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Doug Iosue. Approved by unanimous approval.

3) Committee Draft Report Review & Discussion

Ms. Landry wanted to make a few comments. She wanted to give the Mayor the opportunity to provide an introductory letter, if interested. She noted that it could be made as the beginning of the report as well as including a list of committee member names, titles and organizations that they represent. She had highlighted throughout the report areas where she needed more information. Under shelter services on the third page, she explained she had highlighted "other

examples here and other community agencies”. She was hopeful to hear from everyone in this meeting about what could be done to fill in that gap.

She also noted for the group that under shelter services, the second bullet was where the NHERAP program was discussed as well as the lack of case management, but the group did not discuss what they wanted the City to do about that.

Ms. Landry noted that Ms. Darcy could not be here for this meeting, but do need to work that out.

Ms. Landry mentioned that in a prior meeting, Ms. Stacie Pickford had brought up the need to identify and reduce barriers to substitute housing, but the group did not talk that out much. On the last page, she noted that someone had brought up the County Affordable Housing Trust and gap funding as part of the ten-year housing plan, but Ms. Landry did not have much information on that. She noted that are definitely some areas in which the group needs to fill in some of the blanks.

She also noted that City Manager Elizabeth Dragon and Ms. Natalie Darcy were interested in addressing in the report the responsibility of all communities in the state to share the load and do not have anything specific on that at this point in time.

Ms. Landry said other than those specific examples, this reflects the recommendations created by the group and would then be something given to the City to reflect recommendations the group would like the City to implement. The last section will not be an act of the Council, but more ideas and suggestions that this group would like to see the City do/address.

Councilor Lake spoke and addressed the county affordable housing trust piece. He noted that he personally worked for Monadnock Interfaith Project (MIP) group on an affordable housing trust fund for the region. Noted that they have some MIP members here that might be able to elaborate in more depth. He asked Chair Hansel whether it would be an appropriate time for them to weigh in. Mayor Hansel suggested waiting to open to public comment after.

Ms. Jennifer Seher noted there is one section that references CAPGI and is listed under affordable housing and believes that it should be connected to regional coordination opportunities. Ms. Landry noted that it might be appropriate for both columns. She suggested they could mention the model and mentioned CAPGI as an example and then move the specific recommendation of CAPGI into the regional section. Ms. Seher did talk with Len Nichols, he noted that the models that are working across the country right now have more to do with collaborative, shared stakeholder work and shared invested/funding related to service delivery rather than housing development.

Mr. Henderson noted that non-driver ID’s and birth certificates would be important to include in shelter services because some of their clients have difficulty getting those types of things.

Ms. Seher agreed with Mr. Henderson and pointed out that this is a case in point in using existing services as she has expertise in helping people gather this information, but Service Link is not connected to be able to work together with SCS.

Mr. Henderson also mentioned including other community agencies in the report and suggested including mental, medical and more broadly, the social services sector.

Mr. Iosue asked for clarification on the CAPGI discussion. He asked Ms. Seher if the recommendation captured much of what Ms. Seher brought last time when they discussed No Wrong Door and a person-centered focus. Ms. Seher agreed yes. She asked Mr. Iosue whether he thought it needed to say that more specifically in the report. Mr. Iosue responded that when Ms. Seher suggested it go under coordination, it moved it to a place where he understood it better. Ms. Landry requested Ms. Seher write a few sentences to help capture the best language to use to explain this, to which Ms. Seher agreed.

Councilor Bryan Lake requested a couple of additions based on topics that came up that he has been thinking about since the last meeting. There was conversation around needle disposal. He would love to see some sort of recommendation to the Council around exploring a city-based needle disposal program or in some fashion collaborating with other partners in the City. Everyone wants to keep City staff and the public safe. Ms. Landry said she would like to look into what is already available and then she can bring that back. Mr. Lake said if he remembered correctly, the only one he is familiar with is the one at the Community Kitchen. The second topic is the idea of camping. While he is not necessarily suggesting including a specific recommendation here, if the stance of the committee or the City is that it is not feasible at this time, he would at least like to see that outlined here for the time being as to why we cannot go about it.

Mayor Hansel said he might be able to address some of that in his intro letter. He asked Ms. Landry if she saw it fitting in the report. She noted that it certainly fit better in the letter, as it will not be tied to a specific recommendation. Councilor Lake said he felt that was a good mutually beneficial solution. He noted that while this does not mean they are giving up on this topic. He has and will continue to have the conversation and just have not come up with a solution at this point.

Mr. Henderson spoke and returned to discussing the highlighted areas. The report stated, "Identify and reduce barriers to subsidized housing". Some personal examples of barriers to access to subsidized housing that he had come across in his professional career have been criminal history, victim history, and policies around prior evictions. He noted that HUD on one hand has the ability to solve homelessness, but it also creates the challenges with the policies sometimes. He mentioned that since the funding is short-term, we might want to take the NHERAP recommendation out altogether since it is a dedicated funding source. Ms. Landry noted that rather than connecting to NHERAP, it might be best to tie that to coordinated case management.

One option is to focus on the need for case management and because of the lack; it did not incentivize the transition to more permanent housing. Ms. Landry said it could be rewritten around the need for case management around any program as opposed to tying it to NHERAP so long as Mr. Henderson was amenable, which he was.

City Manager Dragon addressed Mr. Henderson and said the recent changes to the shelter agreements between the City and Southwestern Community Services and 100 Nights goes to addressing the issue related to case management and making sure that we are involved in the process. One of the things the City has been discussing with the shelters is the number of people being placed in hotels, what happens when the money runs out, and who is doing the case management. The City has been working with the shelters to create a stronger relationship in terms of communication and case management, so that when someone presents as homeless, they are connected to the City. The City has made a lot of progress and changed the shelter agreements, which are currently out to be signed right now. The focus of the recommendation should be the importance of case management.

Mayor Hansel asked Ms. Dragon if there were any additional items the group should identify regarding the ongoing work happening in the City. She noted that she saw the recommendation about the CAPGI model because that is something through the homeless coalition that they have really been trying to get to a better place with. From those conversations, the City now has case management meetings with the shelters about specific individuals. While that is a significant improvement, it has not gotten them to where they need to be in order to have that person-centered approach. The homeless coalition already exists, has the regional partners at that meeting and she is investigating/ brainstorming ways to engage them more. She also saw the recommendation about outreach and mentioned briefly to the committee about the changes happening to the job description for the 28-hour part-time position working in Ms. Darcy's office. She noted in the past, there has been no outreach from the City and how the City desires better connections to allow for improved communication, tracking and improved understanding of the needs of the community. She plans to do it as a pilot as she will need to change the salary arrangement, which requires City approval.

She noted that while there has been significant discussion about barriers and challenges, the conversation would need to continue. Using these coalition meetings as a way to brainstorm solutions has been helpful. The housing issue is a huge issue and she is excited to move forward with the housing analysis to identify where the gaps are and develop solutions to meet the needs. We do not meet the transitional need very well and we have been having more conversations about ways to address that. She would like to see the section 8 voucher added as a barrier. She noted that efforts around education about the section 8 program and the benefit that it brings to the property owner are important. She believes the committee has done a great job summarizing some of this. She concluded noting how helpful it has been to hear from the group.

Ms. Stacie Pickford reiterated the need for making it easier to obtain birth certificates, social security card and non-driver identification. Ms. Dragon said she would talk to Ms. Darcy and see

what they can do to make it easier for individuals. Ms. Pickford added that another client she had was someone that wanted to come in from the cold and there was no room in the shelters. Ms. Dragon said when there is no room available in shelters, the City resorts to using hotels. The City tries to go to local hotels first and if needed, they expand to options that are more distant. She wants to have further discussions about meeting the gaps and coming up with more solutions and include the social services agencies.

Ms. Pickford noted that it has been in conversations to allow for safe parking for those that want to be in their car with their belongings. She asked if that has been a discussion on the City level. Ms. Dragon responded that she was aware that one of the churches had someone reach out and notified the police department that they had someone they had given permission to stay in their parking lot. Ms. Seher addressed Ms. Pickford asking if she was feeling as though they were not included in the recommendations. As Ms. Pickford came in late, Mayor Hansel provided some background about the letter suggested by Councilor Lake and the fact that some are not ready for a recommendation from the committee but deserve further investigation in the future.

Mr. Henderson pointed out a section on the last page in the recommendation stating, “In many circumstances, individuals’ needs and situations are assessed as a prerequisite to shelter” and suggested clarification on that. SCS does not have any prerequisites for people coming in. He suggested changing shelter to services. Ms. Seher agreed and noted that the City has an obligation to help someone who presents as homeless. Ms. Pickford added that the barriers could easily escalate a situation if not addressed.

Ms. Dragon pointed out that there is a housing development happening on Marlboro Street who has gotten their approvals. That organization reached out because they are interested in InvestNH money, which she saw was included in the report. To be eligible, they have to provide affordable housing units. They have agreed to offer up 15 affordable units. They needed a letter from the City stating that they would verify their rental amounts and that they were in compliance for the 5 years of the agreement and the City provided that.

Mayor Hansel asked for further comments.

Ms. Pickford noted that on the last page on the topic of the county affordable housing trust it was noted by Ms. Landry that more information was needed. She suggested Angela Pape as a resource for that information.

Mayor Hansel opened it to public comment.

Angela Pape lives in Peterborough and is a member of Monadnock Interfaith Project. She recognized and appreciated the time and effort that the committee has put into this. She wanted to discuss the county affordable housing fund and wanted to share a few reactions to the report. Monadnock Interfaith Project brought this idea of a housing development fund to the region. It is not a new concept, as it has been and is being used in over 800 counties in the country. It is often

created as housing trust funds so money cannot be diverted. The State of New Hampshire has a housing trust fund, as does Nashua and Manchester. The Upper valley recently created one as a loan fund. The reason for creating is that the private market is just not yielding affordable housing on their own, particularly at the lowest income levels.

She explained it like a watering can in which money comes in and money goes out. Best-case scenario in communities is a dedicated revenue stream of money coming in and then every year money is either granted or loaned to housing developers. MIP started discussions with public officials in 2021 and county commissioners suggested they form a work group. The group really grappled with what could a local trust fund look like, what the guidelines would be. They landed on supporting those under eighty percent area median income with twenty-five percent of the funds to support creating more units for those under thirty percent area median income (AMI). There have been difficulties since workgroup concluded. Just met with Chris Coates this past Monday. Had a productive conversation with the president of Savings Bank of Walpole, who will be convening business leaders. They feel it will be helpful with having investment from both sectors.

Ms. Pape continued, there are really two ways the City of Keene could be helpful. One way is for the City to be an advocate for the program and the second is the City of Keene could be a funding partner. It is clear Keene desperately needs housing for lowest income levels. The population that is struggling the most needs the lowest end housing. City of Keene could be a funding partner providing funding into that fund and it will be most successful if there is diverse investment partners.

Other piece we want to share- MIP representatives were present at the Council hearing back in March and were really inspired by the letter from the three City Councilors. The first two bullet points, establishing locations around the city to be designated as appropriate for camping and establish a safe parking program. MIP has been to every single ad hoc committee meeting as public observers and did not hear a robust discussion on either of those. They feel like it would be important for the committee to discuss it publically. There is a lot of national research being done on camping and parking options. There are concepts and ideas out there and while the City may not adopt it, it feels important to at least have the discussion. Ms. Pape pointed out that the housing options outlined in the report focus on the higher end of the AMI. MIP felt like the report did not really address the problem present in the city and urged continued discussion and thinking about housing for those under thirty percent AMI.

Ms. Seher shared that she felt camping was discussed last meeting. She asked if Cheshire housing trust is not a thing anymore and how that would fit in. Ms. Pape responded that they were folded under Keene Housing. The housing trust fund is money moving to developers to create more units-land versus money. She wanted to say and add that the point of having an outside CAPGI facilitator would be to address the people who are most at need, what is the best method to leverage what the city already has, and how it can be improved.

Angela countered saying the discussion was more around the co-occurrences, not potential proactive approaches and the pros and cons.

Mayor Hansel thought there was a robust discussion and said the conclusion was just the City was not able to take it on. He added that the Committee is not ready to endorse it right now, but certainly can be explored further.

Joy Robertson, 36 Ellis Court Keene, member of the party for socialism and liberation southern New Hampshire branch: He wanted to reiterate that the point of creating this committee was to address campsites, overnight parking, and to provide more public bathrooms and then a more effusive idea of addressing affordable housing. Seems like the committee has done quite a bit of work to create grand ideas of things that can be down the line. They are not asking for radical things. They are asking for action now because there are people camping now. He is asking the committee to be braver than you have been and actually do something about this issue rather than kick the can down the road again. He announced that they have started a campaign to petition and make sure the City knows that the people of Keene want this.

Shawn Wilbur, 15 Oriole Ave, addressed the committee. He discussed how the homelessness issue is increasing and increasing. He has travelled the country and saw tents along the highway. At the beginning of the pandemic, his rent was raised \$600. Luckily, he was in a situation to move and buy a home, but noted that so many people that do not get this chance. This is such an actionable situation with so many things that could be done and they are not being done. He felt as though nothing was said and no new information was given or received. He had hoped action would have been taken before the next cold weather season arises. People are being evicted out of the only place they have left.

Michael Hall, minister of Keene Unitarian Universalist Church, 9 Kennedy Drive, spoke about how the thing he struggles with the most is there was a letter that had three specific proposals and whether you discussed them or not, the people deserve to have a reasonable explanation and discussion around why you do or do not want to do it now. Somebody very wise told him people have to do things for themselves. He stated the community has to make sure they live until they can figure that out. He is concerned and afraid that some people are going to die or issues that arise from this that no one wants to have happen. He suggested the committee be clear in their agreement denial. He also suggested providing a clear, thoughtful response and perhaps acceptance of some of those three items put forward by the Councilors.

Kevin, from Keene, noted that Housing First had been brought up and suggested that the committee does not put their eggs in that basket. The program was great twenty years ago, but not great any more. It worked when there was actually affordable housing, but there is not affordable housing available anymore. Sanctioned homeless camps have rules. Our homeless population are not going to want to follow the rules. There is a percentage of them that will not stay in an area that has rules. If Keene was to open a sanctioned homeless camp, they will still have fifteen percent staying elsewhere. He spoke about how he has visited roughly a dozen

sanctioned homeless camps in the United State as well as numerous camps across the world. He has spent time with organizations working with homeless and trying to find solutions. This is not just a Keene problem, or a Manchester problem. No one has the answer. What he has seen is communities like Keene and organization like Keene Serenity Center, Monadnock Peer Support, Monadnock Family Services, and churches that open parking areas are able to chip away bit by bit and make a difference. There are enough places for people to get food, shower, two places he knows of where people can shower without judgement. People do not always know about those resources unless they need them. His recommendation is for the committee to take baby steps. Do not put a piece of paper out there just to put a piece of paper out there. He suggested paying attention to what people like Ms. Pickford are saying and trying to tell you.

Bobby Williams, 66 North Lincoln Street, City Councilor from ward 4: Began by acknowledging that today is Yum Kippur. He has been frustrated at the lack of discussion of camping and parking. He noted that camping is allowed by permit, but what was recommended was not just camping anywhere, but supported by an organization with services and someone is making sure garbage is getting taken care of. He would like to hear more discussion of safe parking. It is a thing that works and very popular on the west coast. It would be possible to do a pilot project here. This public service should be made more widely available. He suggested an area down by the police station would be ideal.

Jodi, Newell 32 Leverrett Street. She started by saying that she has a saying that she goes by, "I can deal with anything as long as I know what I'm dealing with." She said the way that it was presented was "here are the negatives of what is happening". She added, if we are deciding on what to put forward as an idea, we have to know what we are talking about. We are talking about a wishy washy idea with no clear definitions or what it would look like and it feels condescending to be told we have had this conversation and the group has decided not to pursue it. May not be a catch-all, but it is a tool in our tool bag.

Mr. Iosue added that he believed that they did have a lot of discussion about camping, safe parking, and other alternatives, but it was not clear to him when the group decided that it would not be included in some fashion. He is not sure when the committee made that decision and tends to agree that it is a segment of the unhoused that is hard to reach, hard to engage. He thinks the current recommendations are tailored more to a segment of the population that is a little more resourced, healthier, and more able to engage. It is difficult to help someone until and if and when they are ready. He believed that this is not a situation that is going to be solved by this committee but is concerned that the group missed a recommendation about another group or an offshoot about how it might be addressed. He added that it was eluded that the topics were out of the scope - that does not mean that it is not there.

Mayor Hansel noted that the goal is to meet consensus and the recommendations are what the committee wants. It then goes to City Council from there and is used to form their decisions.

Mr. Steve Bragdon believed that the group discussed parking and camping quite a bit. He heard nothing that convinced him that the group ought to recommend that it be set up. On the other hand, he was open to explore it more.

Mayor Hansel said if the committee wants to make a broader statement than including it in the letter without making an explicit recommendation then they could certainly do that. He suggested having some bullet point or a section for areas of further exploration that calls out these items.

Ms. Landry added she could do that if that is the will of the committee. She suggested if a broader group of service providers can have this conversation, she wonders if this is a recommendation for another group.

Mayor Hansel said he could envision language around exploring creative housing options for the homeless coalition or another coalition yet to be named.

Mr. Bragdon said he understood the frustration, but noted that this committee is not going to come up with a solution, rather recommendations to present to the Council. The recommendations have to be realistic or they will not be implemented. He added that while the group can spend several hours discussing the pros and cons of camping and parking, but thinks there are some fundamental issues with those two particular solutions.

Ms. Seher said she was looking at recommendations that are here. She noted that there is a recommendation about comprehensive needs analysis. The recommendation is already in here, but wondered if it could be made more explicit to include camping, parking, etc. Mayor Hansel said he believed it might need to be separate. Ms. Landry responded that the housing needs analysis was mentioned because the City is already doing it, but that does not preclude us from making a recommendation to collaborate with others and doing a more specific analysis including those other populations.

Ms. Pickford wanted to address an idea that could have immediate implementation. She suggested the quality of life task force might be a way to move forward in a quick implementation way. This is more like a harm reduction approach to those that are unsheltered that cannot find, do not want or cannot be sheltered. It is a way to reduce harms and involved stakeholders together to build those relationships. Mayor Hansel asked if there was a way to build that into the current coalitions. He asked if they were open to the public. Ms. Seher responded that they were open and it might be a good addition. He suggested Ms. Pickford attend one of those and bring it forward.

Councilor Lake went back to the topic of safe parking. He noted it was not included in the recommendations. He recognized that there has been discussion about including it in the letter. He could not recall the discussion with the police as to why we could not explore a pilot program.

Mr. Henderson agreed that the group should at least explore that. He pointed out that he has lived in Keene his whole life and there used to be bathrooms downtown but it was well known that those were not bathrooms one wanted to use. Recently, the City did a trial run of portapotties, and they were completely trashed. He was clear in that he was not blaming homeless, but noted that unless there are security systems, people monitoring, the bathrooms will be destroyed. It has been done and has not been successful. He expressed frustration on the use of the term “we” and “us” and really, those terms refer to him and his role. He would like to see more exploration of options in collaboration with area organizations.

Michael Hall spoke and said as someone who works at the church, they are often left to deal with and help out with very small budgets to do something with people in need. He does think this is a “we” problem. He firmly believes there needs to be collaborative work towards addressing these issues. He would like to speak briefly and found it offensive when it was suggested that we got in these nice toilets and then the homeless people came and knocked them over. There are many people that could have done the damage and the insinuation is hurtful. He would love to see something where the group starts looking at those needs as exceptional things where it is understood that someone who is unhoused now is not always going to be unhoused.

Mayor Hansel did not believe there is a plan that he feels comfortable saying that we should do a pilot parking program. He asked if others felt different, to speak up. Ms. Pickford was in support. Another member suggested putting it to a vote of committee.

Ms. Landry said, as the person who is writing the report, having very concrete recommendations is important here. These are recommendations being made to the Council on what this group wants them to do. Mr. Iosue said that while we could put it to a vote, he just did not believe that the group was ready for a pilot parking or camping because of the numerous complications, issues and challenges. Ms. Seher asked for clarification about whether they were going to add a bullet about further investigating parking, camping and alternative housing options. We are not recommending a pilot right now, but more recommending further investigation and assessment of the feasibility of the implementation of those pieces.

Councilor Lake suggested something to consider is who is doing the assessment, when we need it by and how are we holding them accountable. Mayor Hansel noted that care needs to be taken because this committee does not have the authority to tell staff to do anything. Mayor Hansel asked if Ms. Landry needed anything else for the report. She responded and said generally speaking, she cannot say enough about how this needs to be a community approach.

City Manager Dragon noted that she would like to participate as a panelist in the next meeting. She believed that she could add additional information on several of these things. She noted that recommendations need to be thought about in the overall picture of the City and she can provide that insight.

- 4) **Next Meeting Date November 2nd at 3:00 PM**
- 5) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Mayor Hansel adjourned the meeting at 4:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Rebecca Landry, ACM, Marketing & Communications Director