

City of Keene
New Hampshire

FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, February 23, 2023

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
Kurt Blomquist, Public Works
Director/Emergency Management Director
Duncan Watson, Asst. Public Works
Director/Solid Waste Manager
Jesse Rounds, Community Development
Director

Members Not Present:

All Present

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

1) Conservation Commission Recommendation - Eversource's Request to Conduct Tree Trimming on Scenic Roads: Peg Shop Road, Chapman Road, Whitcomb's Hill Road, Daniel's Hill Road, Hurricane Road, Langley Road, Felt Road and Stearns Road

Public Works Director/Emergency Management Director Kurt Blomquist stated this item is in reference to a request from Eversource for tree trimming on a number of scenic roads in Keene. Mr. Blomquist explained the Scenic Road Ordinance requires a joint hearing between the City Council and Conservation Commission, which has been held.

Community Development Director Jesse Rounds addressed the Committee next and stated the Conservation Commission met this week and voted to approve the request for tree trimming.

Dane D'Arcangelo, Arborist for Eversource Energy, stated the scenic roads proposed for tree trimming are Peg Shop Road, Chapman Road, Whitcomb's Mill Road, Daniel's Hill Road, Hurricane Road, Langley Road, Felt Road and Stearns Road. He indicated this is a routine trimming which is done every four to five years. They trim a zone around the wires which is measured from the top most wire of the pole; primary wire and from that primary wire they trim 15 feet above that wire, eight feet to each side of the wire and ten feet below the wire. Individual property owners are contacted prior to the trimming, and the City and property owners need to grant permission for trimming.

Mr. D'Arcangelo indicated trimming is necessary to ensure the safe distribution of power and improve the reliability of the electric service for customers. Councilor Powers clarified this

trimming is going to be done just on the scenic roads and added one of his constituents has a tree that is causing issues. Mr. D’Arcangelo stated the required public hearing was geared towards specific for scenic roads but they doing trimming throughout the City; half of the city is being trimmed this year.

Councilor Powers stated there is a tree on Felt Road which starts on the right side of the road and has worked its way to the left side and felt it is going to come down at some point and asked whether Eversource will also be looking at this tree as it could be a hazard to their lines. Mr. D’Arcangelo stated at this moment they are focusing their removal efforts on the higher customer account lines which feed the scenic roads. In many instances scenic roads don't have a lot of customers but the roads feeding the scenic roads do and this is where they are focusing their efforts.

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

On a 5-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends accepting the recommendation from the Conservation Commission be accepted as informational.

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

On a 5-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends Eversource Energy be authorized to perform all tree trimming services on the requested and designated scenic roads in the City, subject to the following standard conditions: that Eversource Energy make landowners aware of the option for leaving topped dead or diseased trees for purposes of supporting wildlife habitat; and that the tree removal activity is coordinated with the Public Works Department.

2) Sole Source Construction Administration Contract: Wells Street Parking Structure

Asst. Public Works Director/Solid Waste Manager Duncan Watson addressed the Committee regarding offering a sole source construction contract to Desman Associates who are the current designers of the repair, and maintenance work that is planned for the Wells Street garage. Mr. Watson explained this work would consist of putting down a new membrane surface that is necessary to preserve the deck as well as some concrete repairs that are going to be throughout different sections of the deck. He indicated the City was very pleased to find out that there were five bidders for the project, and had its design engineers interview the low bidder and determined that the low bidder was qualified and suitable to do this repair work.

Mr. Watson stated this contract is for construction administration to oversee the construction that will happen as soon as the final pieces are in place.

Councilor Remy asked why it’s been called sole source if there were five bidders. Mr. Watson explained the bids that were received were from a competitive bid process. The low bidder who is going to be awarded the contract will be overseeing the construction process to make sure all the plans and specifications are adhered to and that there is quality control and quality assurance

aspects to this project. The people who designed the work that was bid out are going to be overseeing the work that is going to be done.

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 Manager be authorized do all things necessary to sole source and execute a professional services contract with Desman Associates to perform construction administration/oversight for the Wells Street Parking Structure repair and maintenance project scheduled for spring 2023 for an amount not to exceed \$32,800.

3) Update to HUD Grant Application - Verbal Update - City Manager

City Manager Elizabeth Dragon stated she had previously provided a couple of updates related to the HUD lead abatement grant application. She indicated the City has been talking to Cheshire County about potentially partnering with Sullivan County. However, Cheshire County has not been able to take it on. Hence, the City has been looking for another partner and have found another partner – MEDC. The grant would go through the City who will be the grant applicant. MEDC and Sullivan County will be sub-recipients.

Ms. Dragon stated the City is applying for four million dollars for the abatement portion and \$400,000 for Healthy Homes (for related code issues when the lead abatement portion is addressed). If the City is successful, staff will come back and request the Council take a vote to accept and expend the funds.

The Manager stated if the grant is successful the City should be able to complete about 200 units between Cheshire County and Sullivan County. Approximately, 61% of homes in Cheshire County were built before 1978. In 2020 the data estimated that 4,198 kids under the age of 6 of which only 962 were tested in Cheshire County and 33% of them had blood levels over the limit.

The law however, has changed and children under the age of one will be tested and the expectation is this number will increase dramatically. Hence, what this funding would do is allow property owners to access these funds to abate lead in their homes. The Manager stated there are some homes that are actually left vacant until that can happen. However, given the housing crunch the City has been experiencing, this effort seems to be in line. The Manager stated because she has a personal relationship with the Sullivan County Manager she will not be the project director and won't be in any role deciding any of the applicants, because the money is being directly passed down to MEDC who will be awarding the applications to the homes in Cheshire County. She won't act in the role of project director to avoid any perception of a conflict.

Councilor Chadbourne noted the Manager had indicated 200 units would be completed and asked how that breaks down per unit. The Councilor added she knows of an apartment which is costing the owner \$60,000 to abate. The Manager agreed it is getting more and more expensive and there is a cost to the property owner as well. How much will be allocated to each unit will still need to be worked out if the City is successful in getting the grant. The Councilor went on to

say it is her understanding that the State of New Hampshire keeps lowering the threshold hence the numbers will keep going up because the threshold keeps going down.

Councilor Madison asked whether Cheshire County will be providing any matching funds. The Manager stated the City has not gone back to the County but if they are successful with the grant they might go back to the County to see if they would like to partner. She added because Keene is applying for the grants, MEDC and Sullivan County are sub-recipients, the entire region will be covered. She added Cheshire County was not comfortable getting involved in this process as they felt the deadline was too quick even though Sullivan County had the structure in place, Cheshire County still felt rushed. The Manager felt Keene would be helped tremendously by these funds.

Councilor Powers asked whether Council action was required to partner with MEDC. The Manager answered in the negative and added Council action will be required if the City is awarded the grant which will then say Sullivan County and MEDC will be the sub-recipients. The Manager added she will be looking for letters of support from different entities.

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

On a 5-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the update to the HUD Grant Application be accepted as informational.

4) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 6:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

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