

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**HERITAGE COMMISSION**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Wednesday, March 8, 2023**

**4:30 PM**

**2nd Floor Conference Room,  
City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Cauley Powell, Chair  
Molly Ellis, Vice Chair  
Susan DeGidio (remote)  
Councilor Gladys Johnsen  
Rose Carey  
Brian Lee

**Staff Present:**

Evan Clements, Planner  
Will Schoefmann, GIS Technician

**Members Not Present:**

Marilyn Huston  
Louise Zerba, Alternate

**1) Call to Order – Roll Call**

Ms. Powell called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.

**2) Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Carey made a motion to accept the minutes of the November 9, 2022 and January 11, 2023 meetings. Ms. Ellis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**3) Elections – Chair/Vice Chair**

Ms. Carey made a motion to nominate Cauley Powell as Chair. Ms. Ellis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. DeGidio made a motion to nominate Molly Ellis as Vice Chair. Chair Powell seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**4) Downtown Infrastructure Project Update**

Mr. Schoefmann reported that, after the last public listening session, the City Council decided to set up about five more informational workshops that would be open to the public. He stated he

would check the schedule and forward the information to the Commission members. He also stated the information should be on the City's website.

Mr. Schoefmann also reported that the City Manager announced the project start date may be delayed until 2025. He noted there are a number of federal grant funding opportunities that would not be available if the project were delayed further. Ms. Ellis questioned why anyone would want a delay. Mr. Schoefmann speculated businesses want more time to prepare for construction. He wondered if they want to organize a fund to help affected businesses, like Ted [McGreer of Ted's Shoe & Sport] and Luca [Paris of Luca's Mediterranean Café] did during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Clements stated he did not know but did not think delay would be helpful.

Chair Powell stated there is a working draft of the letter the Commission discussed sending to the City Council at their last meeting. She sought input on the draft.

At 4:39 PM, two members of the public arrived. Rita Haywood moved to Keene a year and a half ago and is looking to find a committee to work with. Jeananne Farrar has lived in Keene for 86 years. She was a founding member of the Heritage Commission and the Historic District Commission. She is interested in the Commission's views on the project.

Councilor Johnsen arrived at 4:41 PM.

Mr. Schoefmann repeated his project update for the newcomers. Chair Powell asked Councilor Johnsen to keep Mr. Clements updated on any insights relevant to the Commission. Councilor Johnsen stated the Councilors want to make sure that they understand everything about the project, so they are having at least one more information session. She mentioned there was a wonderful turnout at both prior information sessions.

Chair Powell noted their meeting time was limited, but there would be other opportunities to discuss the project.

Mr. Clements returned the discussion to the draft letter from the Commission to the City Council. He suggested circulating and discussing the draft at the meeting but noted there is no rush to finalize it. Chair Powell stated members could send their input in writing after the meeting, as well. A revised letter could be the subject of a motion at the next Commission meeting.

Mr. Clements distributed copies of the draft. Chair Powell gave attendees a few minutes to read it. She then noted the draft was based on discussion at the last Commission meeting, as well as written input from Ms. Zerba and Ms. Huston. She invited others to send their input to her, as well.

Councilor Johnsen said the letter was very well written. She suggested stressing in the letter that the Commission understands that the area has to be dug up because the aging pipes and infrastructure under the street must be replaced and that is the reason the City is doing the project.

Ms. Haywood stated the current traffic pattern at Central Square is very confusing. She was driving from Court Street to Roxbury Street and had to be “straightened out” by a police officer. She feels the traffic lights are confusing. She thinks the proposed new circle might make more sense. She relayed that, at one of the information sessions, a woman was very angry the street in front of The Stage would be closed to deliveries, but she believes it would allow outdoor dining and sounds lovely, and deliveries could be made early in the morning.

Returning the discussion to historic elements of the area, Chair Powell asked Ms. Carey for her thoughts. Ms. Carey said she is in favor of the proposed plan because there would be more green space for events and gatherings. It would be safer to access; it would be more pleasant to be in the square area; it would be a less confusing traffic pattern.

Ms. Ellis noted she has a three-year-old, and she thinks about the memories he would make in the future about going to the common, which would be his heritage. She agreed with Ms. Carey that it would be nice to have the space, particularly for pedestrian safety. She also noted there is an alley behind The Stage for deliveries.

Mr. Lee said the letter was great. He agreed with Councilor Johnsen’s suggested addition to the letter. He thinks the changes to the square will enhance or rediscover the original purpose of the square – for congregation. He noted that he recently had difficulty trying to cross the street to get to the gazebo in the square. He saw two near-accidents outside The Stage recently. He indicated a roundabout with traffic lights is odd. He thinks the beauty and history will be enhanced by the new design.

Councilor Johnsen noted the new plan preserves all the historic elements of the area. Mr. Lee suggested adding specific historic elements the Commission wants saved to the letter.

Ms. DeGidio agreed with Mr. Lee. She thinks the letter was great. She also agreed with Ms. Carey. She said they must look to the future. She thinks having fewer cars in the area would make for a more people-friendly space. Having more space for outdoor dining area would be good. The plan is a way to preserve and move into the future. She supports the plan.

Chair Powell read an email from Ms. Zerba:

My biggest concern is that Central Square remains as is to allow cars to travel around, thus making it a real square. Another important feature is the appearance of the street and square, including the church steeple. As people head up to Main Street it’s a beautiful sight, and I would like it to remain as such. Keene is the envy of all who visit, as well as our own community citizens. The City of Keene has received many awards due to its architecture, green space, trees throughout the downtown and common, and the overall appearance of a true New England town, as it is perceived.

Chair Powell continued that Ms. Zerba does not want to lose any parking spaces; she does not want to lose any trees unless they are dead, or it’s otherwise absolutely necessary; she does not want to lose parking for visitors of the church, especially those with disabilities; and she does not want any increase in traffic to School Street.

In response to Chair Powell's question, Mr. Clements stated that Ms. Huston is against any changes to the square.

At Chair Powell's invitation, Ms. Farrar discussed her position on the plan. She first noted that the Commission is doing a great job and commended Ms. Carey's neighborhood tours and work on the Italian Neighborhood Heritage Project. She then stated she is not in favor of the plan. She said she has many engineers in her family, and an engineer who grew up in Keene told her the traffic would be worse with the proposed changes. She is nervous about the lack of parking spaces, especially around the park, where children would be playing. She noted the many awards Keene has received for its architecture. She warned the plan would result in traffic overflowing into surrounding neighborhoods. She worried there would be parking meters in front of nice homes on residential streets. She noted Keene is the seat of Cheshire County and therefore the center of business, civic events, political events, festivals, etc. She thinks the current Main Street is well designed. She noted she almost got into an accident at the Winchester Street roundabout but has never gotten into an accident on Main Street. She understands people live differently now, but she is speaking on behalf of people who have a strong sense of place. She thinks the plan looks like a playground or park not a government and business district. She understands the infrastructure needs to be repaired as soon as possible, but the street should only be tweaked. She has great reservations about the plan. The history of Main Street is astounding. The area should still look like Keene, not a park.

Chair Powell asked what features are important to save. She said the trees in the center median are beautiful have a lot of character, and she does not want to lose them. They are likely to stay, though. Ms. Ellis said the area is not really a square. She suggested it be thought of more like a common, where everyone can congregate and have community events. That is the true heritage of the area.

Ms. DiGidio wondered what Mr. Paris and Mr. McGreer think about the project as businessmen. Mr. Clements said he understood their greatest concern to be that businesses remain open during construction and not experience any business interruption. He noted Keene is using the same consultant as Concord used, so the company understands how to reduce the day-to-day impact of construction on businesses. He noted that property owners in the area would ultimately benefit from the infrastructure improvements, although not necessarily their tenants.

Mr. Clements stated that Ms. Farrar's comments about place making resonated with him. He thinks that, particularly with her work with the history and preservation of the community, the issue of community identity should be highlighted in the letter. He noted the square is the economic engine not only for the city but also the county, so maybe turning it into a park is not the right decision. He noted he was only giving his personal opinion.

Councilor Johnsen, speaking as a Commission member and not a Council member, noted that a lot of people want a bike path, but wondered where it would go, since no healthy trees would be removed. She suggested the Commission might want to address that in the letter.

Ms. Farrar said an engineer told her the Concord project was different because it involved a straight Main Street, which is much less complicated than a five-exit roundabout. She said an

English engineer specializing in roundabouts said not to mess with it. It would be very complicated. She stated that many people are also worried about the cost of the project. She thought the City Manager indicated it would cost up to \$9,000,000. She noted it could get even more expensive. Once the street is dug up, they could find more problems. Mr. Clements noted it would not get any less expensive than it is now, and additional delay could jeopardize federal funds. Ms. Farrar wondered if the city would lose CLG (certified local government) money if they ripped up its history, and it was no longer a Preservation America community or no longer had a historic or heritage district.

Chair Powell returned the Commission's focus to the history and heritage of the area. She indicated there would be more in-depth discussion at a future meeting. She asked if any particular projects should be highlighted in the letter. She suggested the Preserve America designation and Main Streets of America award. Ms. Farrar added that Keene received the Distinctive Destinations award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Ten Best Public Spaces award from the American Planners Association for Central Square.

Ms. Farrar noted Keene has many parks, including the recreation department and a new park on Carpenter Street, which should be utilized more for gatherings. She noted there is a green in many places in New Hampshire, including Walpole. She said Keene is a little different. Since 1828, the design has worked for all these years. She acknowledged there should be some safety improvements, though. She said the community is designated as a Pedestrian-Friendly Community. She lamented that people now want outdoor dining and a bike lane, but there's only so much you can fit on the streets.

Mr. Clements summarized the discussion about additions to the letter. He noted the Preserve America and Main Street America awards were important as aspirational for purposes of place making. He said Keene has been proven to be a great place, and they should make it better. Keene is the economic engine and county seat. There's a balance between urban features and rural living. The letter should acknowledge that the Commission understands work must be done. The area should be enhanced to allow for safe congregation. The project should leave a legacy. He suggested the Commission think about how they want future generations to use the space and live and move about in the square. He suggested including a few specific features, like the center median and trees, the Commission wanted to preserve. The idea of the common versus the square also goes into place making.

Mr. Clements said he thinks it was a great letter, and the suggestions would make it better. Chair Powell agreed, noting she would circulate a revised draft of the letter.

Ms. Carey requested adding something about how the traffic pattern would impact surrounding areas, with a focus on School Street. Mr. Clements said he would provide an update but did not think it should be in the letter. Councilor Johnsen noted she often has close calls with accidents in the area all the time. Chair Powell noted there used to be a police officer directing traffic there. Councilor Johnsen said that many of the younger councilors are thinking younger, and that is important. Mr. Clements noted Keene's population is aging, however, so the design should not only be for the next generation. Ms. Haywood said attracting young people is also important.

Ms. DeGidio made a point to thank Ms. Farrar for her perspective. She said Ms. Farrar was amazing and gave the Commission a lot to think about. Even though Ms. DeGidio supports the project, she thinks Ms. Farrar brought up important points. Ms. Farrar responded that preservation has been her passion for 25 years.

Ms. Farrar left the meeting at 5:21 PM.

**5) 2021 CLG – Italian Neighborhood Heritage Project**

Mr. Clements noted Mr. Schoefmann had to leave but wanted to show an example of a story map. Mr. Clements said he would show the story map but couldn't speak about it much because he was not involved in the project.

Chair Powell said she would not be able to do more interviews because the person filming would be away. Additional clips would have to come from the completed interviews. Mr. Lee has already cut some new clips but may send additional ones to consultant Ray Corson. Councilor Johnsen noted she still wants the City Council to hear about the Commission's work at some point, maybe once the story map project is done.

Mr. Clements explained that a story map is a scrolling story that includes graphics and GIS maps and information. He showed a story map for the Dillant-Hopkins Airport regarding leasing and development opportunities. It includes location maps and an overview of the facilities with additional information. It is easy to scroll and get a sense of everything. The story moves with the map. It is somewhat interactive. It is good for visualizing points.

Chair Powell noted the technology would work well for the project, with different photos moving to different areas, some historic, some modern, showing embedded videos, and using the map to move the reader around. Mr. Clements agreed about the benefits of using a story map for the project.

Mr. Clements asked Commission members to send Mr. Schoefmann ideas about how a story map could be used for the project. It would be built out based on the posters Ms. Carey and Ms. Ellis put together and additional photos and videos. Ms. Carey noted she wants to add something about the Pearl Street School, which was sawed in half and separated into two buildings at some point. Ideas should be sent to Mr. Schoefmann.

**6) 2022 CLG – Recovering Black History in Keene Project**

Mr. Clements had little to report. There is a tentative plan for a consultant to meet with the Historical Society to talk about how their respective projects fit together. He said the project is on track. He is hoping to kick the project off at the upcoming meeting in April. Chair Powell noted she plans to invite Jenna from the Historical Society and Kabria, the consultant working on the project to the meeting.

**7) Gift Confirmation**

Mr. Clements reported that he received a letter from the Historical Society thanking the Commission for donating a DVD presentation about the history of Keene Middle School, but he

was unaware of such a DVD or donation. Neither Chair Powell nor Ms. Carey were aware of such a DVD or donation. Mr. Clements said that, after double checking with Ms. Zerba and Ms. Huston, he would reach out to the Historical Society for clarification.

Ms. Carey asked if the Commission is a member of the Historical Society. Chair Powell said she thought so, and that membership was annual. She noted the Commission could pass a motion to renew the membership when the time came.

**8) Next Meeting – April 12, 2023**

Chair Powell asked if anyone had questions before the meeting adjourned.

Ms. Carey noted she had the displays Councilor Johnsen brought forward and was happy to set them up anywhere, possibly in the lobby. Councilor Johnsen suggested she check with Patty [Little, City Clerk]. She wants councilors to see the display. Chair Powell suggested waiting until the story map is done and publicizing it by displaying the plaques. Ms. Carey will hold onto the displays. She is willing to set them up. Councilor Johnsen said she was impressed with the displays and appreciated the interviews.

Ms. Carey wondered if a story map for Central Square would help people visualize the plan. People get overwhelmed with such a confusing subject. She suggested the Commission could collaborate with the City of Keene. There could be historic photos. Councilor Johnsen said the engineers could be asked to do it. Chair Powell noted it is in the Commission's wheelhouse to incorporate a narrative history of the area in a story map. She noted there is time to do research if the project doesn't start until 2025. Ms. Carey suggested having the story map available at workshops might be helpful. Mr. Clements expressed support for the idea but wasn't sure if it was feasible. He said he would reach out to the communications director about it. Chair Powell suggested waiting until the plan was more solid before making a story map.

**9) Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Powell adjourned the meeting at 5:36 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Wendy Chen, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,  
Evan J. Clements, AICP - Planner