

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, July 6, 2023

6:30 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Bryan J. Lake
Michael J. Remy
Gladys Johnsen (via Zoom)
Michael Giacomo
Robert C. Williams
Randy L. Filiault
Philip M. Jones
Andrew M. Madison
Kris E. Roberts
Raleigh C. Ormerod
Bettina A. Chadbourne
Catherine I. Workman
Mitchell H. Greenwald
Kate M. Bosley
Thomas F. Powers

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager
Thomas P. Mullins, City Attorney
Patty Little, City Clerk
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works
Director/ACM/EMD

George S. Hansel, Mayor

Mayor Hansel called the workshop to order at 6:33 PM and provided introductory comments. He reminded the Council that this project first appeared in the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) in FY-18 and there were multiple opportunities for public comment in 2017 and 2018. In 2022, the Ad Hoc Downtown Infrastructure Project Steering Committee met 10 times, all of which were open to public comment. After the Steering Committee submitted its recommendations to the City Council, there were another 6 public meetings, at which public comments were accepted. In total, there had been 21 opportunities for public comment on this project, which Mayor Hansel thought rivaled public input for the 2010 Comprehensive Master Plan. Thus, He said there would not be an opportunity for public comment at this workshop. This was a chance for the Council to discuss the project and decide on the next steps. Lastly, Mayor Hansel corrected misinformation being circulated on social media that was brought to his attention regarding the reminder Councilors received for this workshop. All Councilors received a text message from the City Clerk reminding them of this workshop. Mayor Hansel said this is a common practice that does not violate any NH law. The City Clerk works hard to ensure that

Councilors are aware of meetings but there is no back-and-forth via text message; it is simply a reminder.

1) REPORTS – COUNCIL COMMITTEES

a. Continued Discussion - Downtown Improvement and Reconstruction Project

A Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee report read on a vote of 3–2, recommending to City Council with respect to the proposed Downtown Infrastructure Project, the following:

- That Central Square remains in the existing configuration, but with improvements to lane markings, lengths of crosswalks, and traffic lighting systems.
- That the improvements to Main St. maximize sidewalk widths while also keeping parking in the center median.
- That the raised crossing table crossing Main St. to Gilbo Ave. and Railroad Square be installed as proposed.
- That the remaining crosswalks on Main St. be evaluated for potential elimination of mid-block crossings and/or the installation of pedestrian lighting systems where appropriate.
- That the project include infrastructure, water and sewer for the installation of public bathrooms at a later date.
- That protected bike lanes not be included in the final design.
- That during the final design an evaluation be done of all turning movements to connected side streets for possible alteration or improvement.
- That Gilbo Ave. remains two-way traffic.

Mayor Hansel filed the Committee report as informational.

2) DESIGN ALTERNATIVES AND OPTION SUMMARY SHEETS

a. Design Alternatives

b. Option Summary Sheets

The Public Works Director/Assistant City Manager/Emergency Management Director, Kurt Blomquist, and Stantec Consultant, Ed Roberge, summarized the design alternatives and presented new option summary sheets. Mr. Blomquist reviewed items that the Council had received in advance of this workshop: 1) June 13, 2023 – copies of the 4 design alternatives for discussion, 2) July 3, 2023 – copies of the option summary graphics. All of these items were posted to the project website on the afternoon of July 3. Mr. Blomquist addressed concerns he had heard about new information represented in the graphics that would be shown at this workshop. He said these graphics did not necessarily represent new information or options. Rather, he called it a consolidation/refinement of information that had been provided/available. He recalled that the majority of the work for this project would be to the underground utilities and there were options for surface treatments when the downtown is rebuilt. Mr. Blomquist said that all of the options presented would include treatment to Gilbo Avenue/Railroad Square. He reminded the Council of the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure (MSFI)

Committee’s recommendation, which was to maintain the general configuration of Main Street and Central Square, with adjustments to sidewalks and crosswalks. He also recalled the Ad Hoc Steering Committee’s recommendations for the two-lane configuration with dedicated bicycle facilities and a roundabout intersection, which was forwarded to the Council in December 2022. He also cited the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option, which would maintain 2 traffic lanes, with dedicated bicycle facilities and the existing traffic flow pattern at Central Square. Mr. Blomquist noted that the Steering Committee also discussed the Main Street traffic flow, including a Single Lane Hybrid Option: a single lane along Main Street, dedicated bicycle facilities, and expanded space within the traffic flow patterns of Central Square. He recalled that all of this information had been available since December 2022. Mr. Blomquist cited other information that had been available since the Steering Committee review in November 2022: levels of services for various intersections (including Central Square—existing, 5-ways light intersection, or roundabout), tree inventory, and parking utilization and impacts. Mr. Blomquist reiterated that this information had been available but had been presented in different ways. The information presented at this workshop had been available to the public since July 3.

Mr. Roberge reviewed the design alternatives and shared the new high-level option summary sheets.

Option A - MSFI Committee Recommendations:

Mr. Roberge began by displaying an image depicting the MSFI recommendation but altered to include Councilor Bosley’s request to see how bike lanes would impact sidewalk cafés and other flexible use of downtown space. The MSFI recommendation was to maintain the curb line and parking as it exists today. Within that footprint, Mr. Roberge showed the addition of a 5-foot-wide bike lane with a 2-foot buffer area which is the minimum needed for a bike facility. He also showed what would be the 8-foot walking sidewalk section; a 6-foot sidewalk and 2-foot buffer for flexibility if there are things (e.g., plantings, lights, benches, etc.) within that space. With all of the items depicted on this graphic, Mr. Roberge pointed out the remaining space. In response to Councilor Bosley’s request, Mr. Roberge worked with the City Clerk’s office and Public Works Department to depict the (approximately one dozen) currently licensed sidewalk cafés. The consultants looked at how a bike lane would impact each of these sidewalk cafés. He showed an example of 2 sidewalk cafés, whose current configuration would be impacted; the licenses require a minimum of 6 feet from building face to a “clear wall.” He showed some other sidewalk café locations that would not be impacted based on how they are laid out today. Mr. Roberge recalled that the consultants considered the operations in the whole downtown corridor, the intersection operations, crosswalks, tree impacts, flexible sidewalk space, and parking.

Mr. Roberge continued by discussing parking as a benchmark that is critically important in all design alternatives. He showed the existing parking conditions downtown, noting that the starting point was 168 spaces. The goal with some of these design alternatives was to maximize parking. He showed graphics that demonstrated the vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian levels of services (AM and PM), meaning the time of delay or queuing time. He pointed out the areas

south of Eagle Court, where there is some on-street parking on the east side, but the west side of the street is not aligned the same way to accommodate on-street parking.

Option B - Ad Hoc Steering Committee Recommendations:

Mr. Roberge recalled that the Steering Committee's recommendation was to maintain a 4-lane Main Street as well as the angled parking on both sides, including the Gilbo/Railroad raised crosswalk table that Mr. Blomquist mentioned in all options. The Steering Committee also recommended a compact roundabout at Central Square and expansion of the Square to the north. The Council had also seen an option for a 5-leg signalized Central Square intersection. There was also a hybrid model presented, which would essentially keep the existing Central Square intersection and create more opportunities for improved pavement markings, reducing some pavement widths, and options to widen some of the sidewalks. He showed the example of The Stage, where the sidewalk café is in conflict with the existing curb, so adjustments would be needed to solve such problems. Mr. Roberge summarized the Steering Committee recommendations: maintain 4-lane Main Street and 2-lane side streets, remove center median parking, maintain 2-way direction on Gilbo Avenue (which could be altered in the future), a mini roundabout at Central Square, and northward expansion of Central Square. Mr. Roberge noted that all of the design options included tree impacts that were listed on the summary sheets. The Steering Committee's recommendation would result in removing 57 trees. He noted that 14 trees were to be removed due to poor condition in all the design alternatives, and there was no detailed analysis of additional tree impacts due to the utility work; it might be possible to engineer the utility work around trees at some locations. In addition to the Steering Committee's recommended northern expansion of Central Square, there would also be minimal impacts to the configuration of the Court Street and Washington Street sides of Central Square. Importantly, Mr. Roberge said the Steering Committee's recommendation would result in a net loss of 15 parking spaces because of the roundabout configuration.

Option C - Multi-Lane Hybrid Option (#2 in the original set of options):

This option would maintain the 4-lane Main Street. This was considered the "hybrid" option because it would maintain the existing Central Square configuration and signalized intersection operation, with some lanes narrowed and more efficient. With this option, the greenspace of Central Square would increase from 17,450 to 25,000 square feet. Mr. Roberge said that the traffic lanes of Central Square are excessively wide today. With this option, narrower crosswalks could be positioned better. He referred to the northern sidewalk of Central Square (in front of The Stage), and the recommendation to move that curb line 20 feet from the building face to allow for a bike lane and flexible sidewalk space. Even with this sidewalk expansion, there would still be 2 lanes of vehicle traffic around the Square. Some of these changes would also address issues of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance. Mr. Roberge said there would be some benefits to the intersection configuration on the Court Street side, despite some operational impacts to sidewalk café licenses on that side of Central Square that would require reconfiguration of the cafés. The situation would be similar on the Washington Street side of

Central Square, with the same 20-foot sidewalks and similar issues with café configurations. Mr. Roberge summarized this option, noting that the intersection levels of services would be similar to what exists today (a 4-lane Main Street operating at a C–D level, AM and PM). The pedestrian level of services would be reduced because of the crosswalk lengths that span multiple lanes of vehicle traffic at present; this is comparable to what exists today. In this hybrid option, 60 trees would be removed. There would also be a net gain of 1 parking space.

Option D - Single Lane Hybrid Option (#3 in the original set of options):

This option originally included a lot of features like a multi-use path and greenspace down the center median. This additional hybrid option was presented in response to a lot of feedback about maintaining the historic presence and operation of Central Square. This option was the same Central Square configuration as the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option, with the exception of reducing to one 18-foot lane of vehicle traffic in each direction. When this option was presented in the past, there was feedback and concerns about access for emergency vehicles or delivery trucks. The consultants had presented a model demonstrating that important bypass capability with the single lane; delivery trucks would still be capable of double parking like today. Mr. Roberge showed what he called a tree-lined parking plaza in the center median leading to Central Square, which would increase parking. Without the double threat of pedestrians having to cross a second lane of traffic, Mr. Roberge thought it would be safer to bring parking back to the center median. This space could also be useful when the street is closed for events. By adding parking back to the center median, this option would result in a net gain of 29 parking spaces. This option would have essentially the same level of service at the Central Square intersection, with a slight increase in queuing length due to the presence of stacking lanes that are not utilized to their maximum extent today. The pedestrian level of service would be improved due to the single-lane and shorter crosswalks. With this option, 61 trees would be removed. Sidewalk spaces would be maximized, and pedestrians would be protected.

Mayor Hansel heard Council questions for Mr. Blomquist and Mr. Roberge.

Councilor Remy referred to the Single Lane Hybrid diagram, which showed 2 lanes leading up to the Central Square intersection on the Court Street leg; he asked about the purpose of the 2 lanes. Mr. Roberge replied that he tried to emulate what exists at Central Square today; the diagram showed a smaller version of the current free right turn that is larger than needed today. He thought it was fair to expect the same 3-minute queueing back to Winter Street that occurs today. He thought the current baseline conditions might only be marginally improved but said the enhanced lane alignment would allow better use of the Square. Mr. Blomquist described how certain sections of particular activities (i.e., vehicles and pedestrians) would function and move in the hybrid signalized intersection.

Councilor Giacomo referred to the tree losses in each of the options presented. He asked for the net loss of trees for each option. Mr. Blomquist said he would not have those numbers until the next, more detailed design phase. Councilor Giacomo referred to the various options that would

reduce or eliminate the center median down Main Street. He said there are currently approximately 30 trees in that median, and he assumed removing those would be a part of the tree loss figures that Mr. Roberge cited. He asked if the rest of the tree losses were represented by “X” on the physical plans in front of the Council. Mr. Roberge said yes.

Councilor Bosley referred to the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option and asked if the center median would provide enough width for plantings or to regain a tree line. Mr. Roberge said that Councilor Bosley was referring to an area where trees would be removed to accommodate road pavement. He said that the remaining center median would be 10 feet wide, which is a nice space for plantings, and he imagined that area lined with new trees.

Councilor Greenwald referred to the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option and the loss of parking from the center median. He asked where those parking spaces would be replaced. Mr. Roberge said that some of the existing parking layouts are really inefficient, so the spaces were standardized. He referred to the summary sheet for the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option and said that along the block of Main Street between Gilbo Avenue and Emerald Street, they were able to reduce the number of crosswalks from 4 to 3. Doing so would allow for gaining many spaces along both sides of the street. Mr. Roberge added that all parking spaces would meet current standards and ADA requirements. Councilor Greenwald said that one brilliant aspect of the 1980s plan was that it incorporated greenspaces in the parking areas. He said that this option would eliminate that greenspace. Councilor Greenwald asked how someone driving into Central Square from Court Street could get to Washington Street with the small island at the southern end of Central Square eliminated. Mr. Roberge said that small island could be restored; they had tried to maximize the green space of Central Square. However, as presented in the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option, a driver coming from Court Street could use a left turn lane to access Roxbury Street or Washington Street.

Councilor Chadbourne recalled that in 1986, the City received a generous donation of \$300,000 for all of the trees downtown. Mr. Blomquist noted that all of the Memorial Tree Fund donors are listed on leaves in the entryway to City Hall. Councilor Chadbourne recalled that Keene is a Tree City and said that while these options would result in the loss of some trees, it did not mean trees could not be replaced in different locations. Mr. Blomquist said that was correct. Councilor Chadbourne said she shared Councilor Greenwald’s concern about greenspace, which is a focus in the Comprehensive Master Plan. She said that quality of life is what draws people to downtown Keene, and greenspace is a part of that quality. She wanted to ensure that greenspace remained a focus and reiterated that the loss of trees with these options did not dictate the resulting amount of greenspace in the redesigned downtown. Mr. Blomquist said that was correct, the consultants tried to provide benchmarks of what would remain and what would need to be removed. There would certainly be opportunities for landscaping. He referred to the purple/magenta highlights on the plans presented at this meeting, which would be the space available for that landscaping. Mr. Blomquist said it is difficult for him to state what exactly would go where because there are competing interests between commercial activity and landscaping. He said the next phase of this project would be to begin determining these details.

He agreed that it would be important to ensure that greenspace is maintained, which does attract people to the downtown. Councilor Chadbourne asked if the lighting downtown would be specified during the same phase that greenspaces are designed. Mr. Blomquist said yes. This is an iterative process, and this is the preliminary concept phase of determining the general footprint, after which the more detailed process would begin.

Councilor Workman pointed out that the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option would compensate for greenspace lost in the center median by adding greenspace to Central Square. The intentional and important greenspace would be maintained. She said she liked this option. Mr. Blomquist commented on the intention to maintain the iconic image of looking up Main Street. He also stated an idea to drain storm water toward the center of Main Street for bioretention.

Councilor Ormerod noticed in the Single Lane Hybrid Option that there would still be parking on both sides of the road; he called this maddening for drivers. The Multi-Lane Hybrid Option seemed safer to the Councilor because all the parking would be on one side. He wondered if these concerns were reflected in the consultant's analysis. Mr. Roberge said that a lot of data went into these conceptual designs of Main Street. One assumption the consultants used was that there is parking interference at least 10 times per hour in the project corridor. Mr. Roberge agreed that with the Single Lane Hybrid Option, there would be parking along both sides, but said he was more comfortable with that because the traffic flow would be slower and managed by the traffic signals. Of course, there would always be outlying, more dangerous drivers. He said another advantage of the Single Lane Hybrid Option is that it would minimize parking interference approaching the intersection and thus enhance safety.

Councilor Filiault referred to the Central Square design in the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option and pointed out where fire apparatuses would progress from Washington Street into Central Square. Currently, he said there is plenty of space for that emergency access. With the Central Square island expanded as shown in the plans for this option, the space for emergency vehicles would be diminished; if traffic stopped, there would be nowhere for fire trucks to go. He asked if that was considered. Mr. Roberge said yes, the emergency access was considered in the lane arrangements and positioning of the island, but he thought that operation would be refined with the Fire Chief once the Council chooses a conceptual plan. In an all-stop condition, there would be no traffic moving with the potential exception of someone pulling out of a parking space. Mr. Roberge cited the potential for the edge of the Central Square island to be mountable if extra width is needed for fire trucks. Councilor Filiault referred to the space in front of 38 and 42 Central Square on the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option plans, which showed outdoor seating; he asked if that sidewalk seating would be eliminated due to interference with the sidewalk. Mr. Blomquist replied that he did not know if the seating would be eliminated or pushed against the buildings. In some cases today, merchants have to move their seating further away to avoid interference with landscaping. With a wider sidewalk, seating for some of these establishments could move closer to the buildings. He said part of the exercise of creating these plans was to demonstrate what exists today. Like the discussion of replacement landscaping, the next phases would determine where/how things like sidewalk cafés are replaced. Councilor Filiault referred to the

southern end of Central Square and asked if it would make more sense to allow a slip lane for going from Court Street to Washington Street without backing up traffic. Mr. Blomquist said that could make sense but added that a free flow could create conflicts. Those details were changeable at this point in time.

Councilor Lake referred to the plans depicting parking in the center median and asked where those pedestrians would cross to access the sidewalks. Mr. Roberge pointed out 2 large areas that would be crosswalks, likely with a center walkway connecting the 2.

Councilor Madison asked how wide that center island would be. Mr. Roberge said that it would be widest—approximately 10 feet—at the north between Roxbury Street and Gilbo Avenue. So, Councilor Madison said that the island could hypothetically be repopulated with landscaping/trees. Mr. Blomquist said absolutely.

Councilor Giacomo said that for both of the hybrid options, he had a similar concern for how the angle of the parking would change, which was how additional spaces were being added. He said it would be more challenging to back out of steeper/narrower parking spaces into a narrower roadway. He said that a vehicle longer than 14 feet would have to back out into both lanes of traffic. This was a concern between Railroad Street and Eagle/Cypress. Mr. Blomquist said that was a reasonable concern, but explained that standard parking spaces could be 45, 60, or 90 degrees. He said each configuration has a different advantage. These angles could serve an additional purpose if the goal is to slow traffic.

Councilor Remy said he had a similar concern as Councilor Giacomo. Councilor Remy noticed that the parking spaces would actually get less steep further north on Main Street (the Prime Roast and Hannah Grimes blocks). Mr. Blomquist said the plans showed a consistent 60-degree parking angle. So, Councilor Remy said it would be somewhere in between the difficulty of backing out near Muse and near Modest Man.

Councilor Powers asked about the standards being used for the dimensions on these plans. Mr. Roberge said the standard was a 5-foot bike lane with a 2-foot buffer; the blue strip on the plans was 7 feet wide.

Councilor Workman referred to the yellow buffer zone on the plans and asked if those areas must remain empty or if they could have plantings. Mr. Roberge said the yellow sidewalk space on the plans was 8 feet wide; a 6-foot clear space for walking (ADA compliant) and the 2-foot buffer could include raised planters or other things. There was still flexibility for those final design details. Councilor Workman reiterated that the buffers do not have to stay empty. Mr. Blomquist said there was no reason that the sidewalk area could not meander, but that 6-foot open width must be maintained.

Councilor Roberts said that in all of these scenarios and conversations about bike lanes, it was easy to control the traffic flow at any time. When looking at some things like the 2013 Keene

State College study, he was reminded that the vast majority of people were using the bike path (or trail path) for walking. He said that a lot of current bike path users are walking to Monadnock Food Co-Op. He asked if there was clear data on how many people use their bikes downtown and when. Mr. Blomquist said there had been some studies and work by the Bicycle/Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee. He said part of the Council's challenge is determining its expectations for the future. He cited the intensive rezoning effort that supported more live/work/play in the downtown area, and he asked what those people would expect downtown and how they would move around; if the goal is for people to use fewer vehicles, what would be their alternative transportation? Mr. Blomquist thought the Council had the baseline information on what is happening downtown today. He said the Council was tasked with anticipating what would be occurring in the future, not just 2 years from now, but 20-plus years. Mr. Roberge added that pedestrians, bicycles, and vehicles were inventoried in the traffic study, which is available on the project website. He said bike use (several hundred per day; dozens per day at the peak hour) was lower than might be expected, but that could be due to a lack of facilities.

Councilor Johnsen was impressed with how all of the details were summarized and displayed at this meeting, which made her feel less hopeless. She cited how many constituents in favor of bike lines contacted her. Councilor Johnson thought the consultants and staff worked hard to address all of the wants and needs.

3) Council Discussion

Mayor Hansel suggested trying to gain some consensus on these 4 options.

Councilor Filiault saw the potential for parts of the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option to work if combined with the MSFI Committee recommendation. No matter what the Council decided, Councilor Filiault suggested that the recommendation be sent back to the MSFI Committee, so the public has a chance to ask remaining questions.

Councilor Bosley stated her preference for the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option. She thought it was important to maintain the historical integrity of Central Square. She thought the narrower vehicle lane widths would provide the safest environment for pedestrian crossings. Looking at Main Street south of Central Square, she thought the Single Lane Hybrid Option did not feel like it would support the growth of the community. She did not care for parking in the center median, which she thought would be problematic for those backing out. She said the entire Multi-Lane Hybrid Option worked for her, including the bike lanes; if bike lanes were eliminated, there could be expanded sidewalks. Councilor Bosley said that just because there were bike lanes on these plans did not mean they had to remain.

Councilor Workman supported the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option, which she called a perfect compromise. The Council could not appease everyone, but she said this option came close, with no loss of parking, traffic calming measures, shorter crosswalks, no roundabout, and bike lanes at sidewalk level. If the bike lanes prove problematic down the line, they could be eliminated in

favor of expanded sidewalks. She said this option also did not threaten the historic character of Central Square. Councilor Workman commended Stantec for these updated options; she wished it was the model in January, which could have saved 6 months of time. She hoped her fellow Councilors would support this option.

Councilor Madison said that when he was on the Ad Hoc Steering Committee, he agreed with the recommended option. He had since heard public comments opposed to a roundabout or expanding Central Square. For those reasons, Councilor Madison supported the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option, and he urged his fellow Councilors to do as well. He supported greenspace in the center median. He said that parking in the center median is a public nuisance and called it terrifying.

Councilor Williams said he supported the Single Lane Hybrid Option, though he found the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option to be acceptable as well. He thought the Single Lane Hybrid Option was friendliest to pedestrians. He cited an example of the dangers for pedestrians crossing more than one lane of traffic. Councilor Williams said he liked the proposed changes to Central Square, though he liked the options Jeff Speck proposed better; he hoped some of Mr. Speck's ideas were still in the Councilors' minds. He said the goal should be to be as pedestrian friendly as possible and he thought the Single Lane Hybrid Option would provide that.

Councilor Greenwald said he liked this presentation. He said he had some non-negotiable priorities. He was pleased to see options for Central Square with minor modifications, no loss of parking, and maintenance of the sidewalk cafés in the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option. He did recall that the MSFI Committee's recommendation would modify the side parking to get over 200 spaces. He said he is now an electric bike user, but he cited how the Class III electric motorcycles were taking over the dedicated bike lanes in Manhattan, NY. He wanted to be clear that the City would have to deal with the speeds of electric bicycles and issues from blending pedestrians, bicycles, and cars. He said many cyclists are not responsible. He understood that if the bike lanes at sidewalk grade did not work, they could be removed with no loss. Councilor Greenwald wanted to be clear that he was optimistic that this recommendation would be referred to the MSFI Committee, where the public would be able to comment again. He wanted to get back to the usual way of doing Council business. He was open to calling it a special meeting and to changing dates with the Planning, Licenses, and Development (PLD) Committee.

Councilor Johnsen was leaning toward the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option, which she said addressed many of the important issues.

Councilor Ormerod said he was still debating the 2 hybrid options. He recalled that the single-lane option would be safer because traffic would be slower. While it might be slower, he was concerned that single-lane drivers would have to contend with parking on both sides. Thus, Councilor Ormerod supported the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option.

Councilor Roberts said the Council was supposed to be looking for what is best for the City 20–30 years from now. He said one result of the pandemic is that small cities are dying because people do not go downtown anymore; people work from home and do not frequent restaurants or businesses. He questioned giving 5 feet to bikes when over the course of a day, there might be 10–15 cyclists per hour. He thought those 5 extra feet could be expanded into the walkway, giving businesses the ability to attract more customers, which would bring people downtown and spending more money as the economic engine of the City. Councilor Roberts said that even when visiting Luca’s or the Pour House, there is little space to travel past the sidewalk cafés, whereas the expanded sidewalk by Margarita’s allows people to pass by comfortably. Councilor Roberts did not think the future of Keene in 20 years would be people biking downtown, where there would not be significantly more development. He would rather give those 7 feet to businesses and pedestrians. Mayor Hansel asked which of the 4 presented options Councilor Roberts could support if the bike lanes were removed. Councilor Roberts replied that he could support the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option with bike lanes eliminated.

Councilor Giacomo said he respected Councilor Roberts’ points but said he found the perspective a little backward. Councilor Giacomo thought that there were few bikers downtown because there are no facilities or safety to bike downtown. He said that was the point. He thought it was interesting that the Energy and Climate Committee did not comment on this from an environmental perspective, which he considered in addition to the safety of constituents—pedestrians, and vehicles. While the data supports roundabouts: the Federal Highway Administration shows a 37% reduction in overall collisions, 75% reduction in injury collisions, 90% reduction in fatalities, and 40% reduction in pedestrian accidents. It is clear that roundabouts are safer for motorists and at a 4-way signalized intersection (Central Square is more complex), there are at least 32 possible vehicle-to-vehicle conflicts. He said that if the Council cares about the safety of people walking downtown, they were not really improving much from a safety perspective with these plans. He said that people would accelerate to get through the stop light as they do today, which is when pedestrians are killed; while there had been no fatalities downtown from 2019–2022, he thought not having dead constituents was a good thing and he wanted to keep it that way. Councilor Giacomo said there was a proposal that was clearly safer, but the Council seemed to be veering away from it. The Council had seen pieces of these 2 hybrid options before, including the average queue times, which was why he was surprised the Energy and Climate Committee had no comment; he said that with the stop lights, there were approximately 54 hours per day of idling, whereas a roundabout would be half of that. It seemed to Councilor Giacomo that the increased emissions and carbon dioxide in the downtown were not important to his fellow Councilors. Not only was the discussion about keeping the traffic lights intact, but also increasing some of the queue lengths. It sounded to him that the Council was making a less safe and less environmentally friendly decision while prioritizing things like parking. A roundabout would be a smoother, cheaper option (\$64,000 per year versus \$134,000 for signals). Councilor Giacomo said the constituents would be the ones paying that \$70,000 annual difference to keep a traffic signal at Central Square. He thought the Council should be talking about things that matter more than immediacy. Councilor Giacomo

thought the roundabout option would accomplish what is needed, cost less, and be more forward-thinking.

Councilor Lake said he also supported a roundabout, but one without stop lights and within the current Central Square configuration. Regardless, he said he supported the hybrid options, with the multi-lane option making the most sense to him. He understood the concerns about safety and having parking on both sides of a one-lane road.

Mayor Hansel said he was hearing a lot of support for the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option.

Councilor Powers wanted to ensure everyone was on the same page. For the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option, he heard that there would be no parking in the center median. Mayor Hansel said yes, that seemed to be what most Councilors preferred at the moment.

Councilor Filiault said the Council was moving away from the roundabout option because the constituents did not want it. He said that sometimes the Council needs to listen to those who elected them. He agreed that there were some benefits to the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option, including no parking loss. He said that history means something to some people. He suggested that if people do not like the new downtown, then they should not move to Keene. Councilor Filiault said that some of the hybrid proposals included what the MSFI Committee recommended (e.g., more modern lighting and changes to turn lanes). He suggested merging the original MSFI recommendation with the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option. He thought that one more MSFI meeting would result in a recommendation the community would agree with.

Councilor Jones said that the MSFI recommendation had the least amount of impact, would likely cost the least, and would be the most flexible. So, he did not think the MSFI recommendation should be discarded. He thought any of these other considerations could be added to the MSFI plan at a different time.

Councilor Ormerod supported moving forward with 2 recommendations: the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option and the Roundabout Option. He still preferred the signalized intersection. He thought the Energy and Climate Committee was likely focused on bicycles and electric, single-use vehicles. He said that more electric bicycle use would reduce carbon emissions. The Energy and Climate Committee was focused on having sufficient infrastructure—wherever it might be—for electric vehicles, which he thought addressed the pollution concern.

Mayor Hansel said it sounded like the consensus was to send a recommendation from this workshop back to the MSFI Committee, which could alter the recommendations again. He wondered if there was consensus for sending the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option and Roundabout Option back to MSFI.

Councilor Bosley said she heard consensus around the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option, which she thought should go to MSFI so they could hear from the public about that model. She thought that

sending each drawing back to MSFI was defeating the purpose of this workshop. She understood that individual Councilors had preferences, but she did not hear anyone speaking in opposition to the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option.

Councilor Giacomo clarified that the Ad Hoc Steering Committee met 10 times, heard all the data, and sent forward a proposal for a reason—because the roundabout option was preferred in a public survey. Then, there was a public meeting, where 33 people spoke definitively on the project; he said there were more people in support of the roundabout at that time than there were people who wanted to keep Central Square the same. Councilor Giacomo stated that the City Council is not a Facebook echo chamber. He cautioned against perceiving any one Councilor's friends' opinions as indicative of the general public desire. He said the public had made clear that there is a true division. He warned that perhaps the Council was listening to some of the louder elements over the plurality.

Councilor Workman made the following motion, which was duly seconded by Councilor Lake: Move to forward Concept C—Multi-Lane Hybrid Option to the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee for public consideration and input. Further move to switch the July 2023 regular MSFI and PLD Committee meeting dates for the MSFI Committee to hear this matter on July 12, 2023.

Councilor Greenwald said that historically, Council workshops had not had motions, which City Staff disagreed with. He thought a simple show of hands would be more appropriate. Mayor Hansel said he would accept the motion.

Councilor Johnsen moved to amend the motion to also send the Roundabout Option to the MSFI Committee for consideration. Councilor Giacomo duly seconded the motion. The motion to amend failed on a roll call vote of 3–11. Councilors Remy, Johnsen, and Giacomo voted in the minority.

Councilor Powers said the Council was getting closer to an overall vote. As such, he encouraged all Councilors to carefully consider that bike lanes would take up space. While the lanes might be useful in the future, he still had concerns that they would create more issues. He recalled the economic impact of bike lanes and questioned whether that space could be used for other things.

Councilor Chadbourne recalled that all 4 options included bike lanes, which could be removed if desired. This motion at least provided a basis for moving forward and hearing what constituents want. She commended Councilor Bosley for her leadership in bringing this other option forward.

On a roll call vote of 14–1, the City Council referred Concept C – the Multi-Lane Hybrid Option to the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee for public consideration and input. Further, the City Council voted unanimously to switch the July 2023 regular MSFI and PLD Committee meeting dates to allow the MSFI Committee to hear this matter on July 12, 2023.

4) Adjournment

There being no further business, Mayor Hansel adjourned the meeting at 8:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker
July 10, 2023

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