

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

**MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Tuesday, March 12, 2024**

**6:00 PM**

**Council Chambers,  
City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Harold Farrington, Chair  
Alex Henkel, Vice Chair  
Cody Morrison  
Leatrice Oram  
Joshua Meehan  
Elizabeth Wood  
Emily Lavigne-Bernier  
Alexander Von Plinsky, IV  
Juliana Bergeron  
Joe Walier  
Jay Kahn, Mayor, Alternate (Voting)  
Councilor Philip Jones, Alternate (Voting)  
Councilor Catherine Workman, Alternate (remote,  
6:05 PM; Voting)  
Kenneth Kost, Alternate (Voting)

**Staff Present:**

Jesse Rounds, Community Development  
Director  
Evan Clements, Planner  
Megan Fortson, Planning Technician  
Rebecca Landry, Communications &  
Marketing Director

**Members Not Present:**

Councilor Michael Remy  
Armando Rangel  
Pamela Russell-Slack  
Joseph Perras

**1) Call to Order & Roll Call**

Chair Farrington called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM and roll call ensued.

**2) Minutes of the Previous Meeting – February 6, 2024**

Revisions: Line 236, replace “employ 50–500 people” with “employ greater than 500 people.”  
Line 288, change “family-based healthcare” to “family-based childcare.”

A motion by Mr. Walier to adopt the February 6, 2024 minutes as amended was duly seconded by Ms. Bergeron and the motion carried on a unanimous roll call vote.

3) **Presentation from Master Plan Consultant – David Beurle: One of the City’s consultants from Future IQ, will provide additional information about the process for the Master Plan update project**

**A) Team Introductions**

Chair Farrington welcomed the lead project consultant, David Beurle of Future IQ. Everything in Mr. Beurle’s presentation is available on the project website: [www.KeeneMasterPlan.com](http://www.KeeneMasterPlan.com).

Mr. Beurle began by describing the project team, which has a great combination of complementary skills. The three consultant teams on this project are:

- Future IQ – focused on future visioning:
  - Team: Mr. Beurle (Project Director), Heather Branigin (Project Coordinator), Brittany Rempe (Creative Director), and Walter Paixao-Cortes (Data Engineer)
- WGI – technical capabilities regarding land use:
  - Team: Courtney Powell (Urban and Community Planning Manager), Andrew Crozier (Senior Urban Designer), Kevin Cann (Project Manager), Lisa Nisenson (New Mobility and Connected Communities), and Tyler Tornese (Planner)
- JS&A – economic development:
  - Team: Jon Stover (Managing Partner) and Leslie Gray (VP)

**B) Project Overview, Timeline, & Methodology**

Next, Mr. Beurle reviewed the project timeline.

Phase 1—Community Vision and Community Snapshot:

- Step 1: Initial Planning and Project Set-Up (February–April 2024)
  - Project kick-off
  - Online project website and branding
  - Monthly Steering Committee meetings
- Step 2: Initial Community Engagement and Research (April–June 2024)
  - Community survey #1
  - Key stakeholder interviews (recommendations from the Committee are welcome)
  - Snapshot report
  - Keene think-tank and report
  - Community visioning sessions
- Step 3: Plan and Report (June–September 2024)
  - Stakeholder survey #2
  - Strategic pillar roundtable
  - Develop strategic community vision plan
  - Presentation

Mr. Kost asked about the differences between the community and stakeholder surveys. Mr. Beurle said that these were only the surveys for Phase 1. All surveys will be open to anyone who wants to take them. In this context, Mr. Beurle said the community and stakeholder surveys were essentially synonymous.

Mr. Beurle continued his presentation by showing the Committee around the website project portal, which was nearly ready to go live. In community-based planning, a good communication strategy and information repository are needed. The consultants were working with the City's Communications and Marketing Director, Rebecca Landry, to build the standalone website that will be connected to Keene's website. Mr. Beurle showed how the website design was chosen to complement the City's branding. He showed examples from other cities (under "Research Lab") Future IQ had worked with, like one in VT. The Steering Committee will be featured on the website with bios, photos, and recorded interviews. He also showed how the survey data would be loaded to the website. There will also be various newsletters on the project, which would ideally reach several thousand people, helping to ensure the public is not surprised by any aspects of the project. The website will also include discussion boards on certain topics to gain insight into the community's preferences.

Mr. Meehan asked how the consultants would leverage social media to get more members of the public interacting with this portal. Mr. Beurle replied that first, they will begin with the City's communication toolkit. He showed an example from VT, including images, links, and literature, etc., that people can post to their social media with a link that leads back to the portal. The first two questions of the surveys will ask for people's names and emails, which creates a database that could reach several thousand individuals by September.

Chair Farrington asked how long the portal will be live. Mr. Beurle said essentially, as long as Future IQ is in business. It is easy to maintain. This data will be a repository of important work and ideas.

Mr. Kost asked if the City would have long-term access to the data and other materials on the website. Mr. Beurle replied that the intention was to build a separate URL that would be transferred to the City at the end of the process. Ms. Landry already has back-end access to the website, with the ability to change things in real time. Ms. Landry added that she talked with Future IQ about the best way to approach this. Moving forward, anything on the project website will be kept on the City's website as well. The team agreed that the fewest click for a member of the public to get to the project website the better. Thus, she said there was a lot of flexibility. The project team was interested in how the Steering Committee wants the website managed and how the public accesses the site.

Regarding social media, Ms. Wood asked if Facebook and Instagram would be used to reach younger generations, or just the project website? Ms. Landry replied that social media like Facebook and Instagram will be utilized. Further, the City has an Audio/Visual Specialist who is helping to make decisions like what time of day is the best for posting to different social media.

In addition to social media, Google ads can be used to reach others. Mr. Beurle provided another example of survey questions used in Mankato, MN, to demonstrate how data can be presented. Whereas 10 plus years ago community planning was largely about community building, today it is more about strategic positioning to chart a path forward. Mr. Beurle said that the key to effective future thinking is to consider both *trajectory* (direction of change) and *velocity* (speed of change). How does Keene move fast enough to stay relevant and ahead of trends? He showed examples of data visualization. Survey questions in MN included things like whether people seek future growth opportunities or the importance of shared regional values. The consultants would be working with City Staff to develop Keene's community survey soon.

Mr. Beurle continued his presentation by further describing Phase 1, which he called the "future think-tank." The consultants use a "scenario-based planning methodology" that allows for considering different versions of the future. On May 28–29, (times and locations to be determined), the first day of the think-tank will explore future trends and the second will focus on building regional scenarios. What are the key drivers shaping the future of Keene? Examples could include the impacts of climate change, changing demographics, impacts of technology use, and housing availability, among many others. Then, members of the public would be asked to rank the future impact of these drivers to determine those with the highest impact.

Mr. Beurle explained how this data can be used to create a "scenario matrix," in which the most important drivers are grouped to identify themes. In the case of Mankato, MN, these themes included economic approach and community adaptation. Themes are presented as continuums to allow for visualizing and predicting implications for the different possible community adaptation futures. What are the plausible futures of Keene?

On the second day of the think-tank, the group will engage in predicting what could happen in Keene under certain future conditions. What is the preferred future of Keene? This community engagement process should generate rich data. The distance and direction from the expected to the preferred explains the shift in trajectory needed, which defines the framework for the planning process. In this effort, the community will develop "strategic pillars" that are the building blocks to the preferred future. Then, there would be task forces on each pillar, which essentially become the chapters in the comprehensive planning element. He called this a serious future analysis that is driven by collective intelligence. What do members of the community see? What are the forces shaping their assessment of future impacts?

Ultimately, 80–100 participants are expected over the two days of the think-tank. Ideally, this will be a representative cross section of the community. Following the think-tank, there will be community visioning sessions, in which members of the community weigh-in on the preferred future. Deep thinking and broad engagement of the community are essential. Mr. Beurle asked the Committee to consider who in the community should be invited to the think-tank.

Chair Farrington asked if Mr. Beurle had reviewed the vision listed in Keene's 2010 Comprehensive Master Plan. Mr. Beurle said yes. Chair Farrington wondered if Mr. Beurle had

thoughts on how the 2010 Plan contrasted with this Steering Committee's efforts. Mr. Beurle replied that the needs for planning and land use allocation are different than they were in 2010. There are also different generational values today that require a different approach to this planning. The goal is to be future-ready; to help the community see where it is heading and how to set the course for the future it wants, in a world of rapid changes and uncertainty.

Mayor Kahn noted that New England is a region, and it is hard to separate the 23,000-person City of Keene from that region, so it is important to understand the region before funneling down to where Keene factors in. Should Keene exceed the potential of the region as a whole? Should Keene sit within the overall moving tide of the region? Mayor Kahn said that the interactive tools for data visualization would help the community to see influential trends for the next 20 years. There are great minds in the City and region that could be resources in this effort. Mr. Beurle agreed, noting that the first day of the think-tank will include presenting a lot of the micro data that the Mayor referenced.

Chair Farrington opened the floor to public comments.

Anthony Farantello of 84 Woodland Avenue said there is wonderful documentation of all the minutia that contribute to Keene's quality of life. He said some in the community are disenfranchised with economic and food instability, and job challenges. He wondered how the stakeholder interviewees would be chosen, noting that many important stakeholders do not come to these meetings. Mr. Farantello recalled a student telling him they want to leave Keene after they graduate because there is nothing here. He said that would be the quintessential question: what to create that will make young people want to stay here? Mr. Beurle expects that more than 1,000 people will take the survey, and the data can be sorted to see the demographics completing the survey. There could also be efforts to reach younger voices, like sessions in schools. He thought that in a community of this size, 1,000 responses should be a good cross-section of the community. It will be a 10–15-minute survey with in-depth questions that demand serious thinking. This should create a lot of high-quality data. It is common to extend a survey if not enough feedback is received on a particular issue. Ultimately, the Comprehensive Master Plan should be a framework that shapes the community for the future. It is not about solving many issues, but planning to mitigate challenges for the different segments of Keene's population; the job is not to fix, but to set the stage for future decisions.

Mr. Meehan asked how granular the surveys would be. Would they gather data on socioeconomic background? Mr. Beurle said that is a challenging issue, because such questions can be off-putting to survey users. Mr. Meehan understood but added that the Steering Committee and consultants should be mindful to work hard to ensure those marginalized groups (socioeconomic, health, age, etc.) are invited to take the survey. Mr. Beurle said that the consultants would need to figure out a strategy for that outreach.

Regarding outreach, Ms. Lavigne-Bernier thought this Steering Committee should take an active role. She was reminded of how excellent Keene State College's (KSC) social media is. She

recently started following the KSC men's basketball team and rooting for them on Prime Roast's social media. Now, the team comes to the shop almost every day. She said she would be happy to visit KSC and host a meeting about the survey, which could be more approachable for students. Ms. Lavigne-Bernier was a young person in Keene who wanted to leave the City after college, but involvement with a local small business changed her mind and now she never wants to leave. She thought many on the Steering Committee have connections to different community demographics. Mr. Beurle agreed, noting that there could be a specific survey for students and what informs their future decision making and aspirations. What would make it more appealing to stay in Keene? Ms. Wood agreed about focusing on reaching out to and keeping young people here in Keene.

Ms. Oram noted that Keene swells during the day because of people who work in Keene but live in other communities. She thought it would be wise to rely on employers to capture the views of their workforces, who likely have different insight than those who live and work in Keene. Mr. Beurle agreed, noting that one question will be what the respondent's relationship to Keene is. It is possible that those who do not live here might be more honest.

Mr. Beurle closed his presentation by listing next steps:

- Launch the portal.
- Develop the communications plan (posted to the portal).
- Seek quotes from Steering Committee on why this process is important (more impactful than if coming from the consultants).
- Open think-tank registration 4–6 weeks in advance. Typically, two 3-hour sessions. Steering Committee members should share suggestions for community members to invite.
  - The think-tank will be Thursday and Friday, May 28 and 29 (possibly from 5:00 PM–8:00 PM, though not yet confirmed; mornings could also work)
  - Steering Committee members should recommend individuals who grasp the bigger issues in Keene. The Steering Committee members were advised not to overthink this, but to recommend 10–15 people each that would be ideal for good cross-representation.

Chair Farrington recalled that community planning should morph into strategic positioning. He shared a story he heard about a group of small communities in Arkansas, Colorado, Tennessee, and Montana who are forming a “coalition of hip hideaways.” These are unique, cultural attractions with outdoor lifestyles, strong economies, and career opportunities with the character of a smaller metropolis without the pitfalls of a crowded City. He called this an interesting strategic positioning. He also recalled that Keene was just named one of the top 10 places to retire. Mr. Beurle said these were the sorts of issues the think-tank process is intended to grapple with. It is key to be intentional about some of these critical decisions so that others do not decide Keene's future for it.

### **C) Steering Committee Role in Outreach**

Discussed above.

**4) Discuss Potential Names for Project**

Evan Clements, Planner, led the Committee in a brief discussion of giving this project a more insightful and invigorating title than the Comprehensive Master Plan Update. Staff discussed some initial words and phrases that could be a tagline, like “Vision Keene.” He sought the Committee’s guidance. The Committee suggested the following possibilities:

- Envision Keene 2040
- Hub 2040
- Vision 2040
- Develop Keene
- Precision
- Invest
- Preferred Future
- Balance
- Innovate

Committee members should email any other ideas directly to Mr. Clements (eclements@keenenh.gov), Mr. Rounds (jrounds@keenenh.gov), Ms. Landry (rlandry@keenenh.gov), and/or Ms. Fortson (mfortson@keenenh.gov).

Mr. Kost also suggested engaging with the Chamber of Commerce about this as they are focused on selling the region for the future.

Committee members mentioned that some of the words listed above, like “develop” or “precision,” could be off-putting to some in the community. There was agreement to try to focus on positive words. Ideally, anyone could visit the portal and see this word/phrase and feel like it is their vision too. Community members should feel some ownership in this process.

The Committee was reminded that their work must occur in an open meeting forum, per the NH Open Meeting Law, as discussed by the Assistant City Attorney at the first Steering Committee meeting. It is essential that members send their ideas directly to Staff, and do not “reply-all,” which constitutes an un-noticed quorum. Once a date and time for the think-tank is finalized, Committee members can share those details with their networks.

Once the Steering Committee has suggested taglines, Ms. Landry would use those ideas to continue working on the City’s marketing and branding process for the project.

**5) New Business**

Chair Farrington requested a presentation on outcomes of the 2010 Master Plan, which Mr. Rounds said is scheduled for the next meeting. Committee members can send comments on the 2010 plan directly to Staff.

Councilor Jones suggested reviewing the guidelines (RSA 674) for what should be included in a Master Plan and what should be optional, which Mr. Rounds also said is scheduled for the next meeting.

Mayor Kahn asked for some examples of other cities and the phrases/trends they used. What embodies a vision for communities undertaking a task like this in the recent past? Mr. Beurle said he would build that into the timeline. Mr. Kost suggested contacting Southwest Regional Planning Commission for their county-wide perspectives; they do master planning work for some small communities. City Staff would reach out to see if they are willing to engage with Mr. Beurle and his team.

Chair Farrington also recalled that at the first meeting, the Steering Committee requested details on the SAU's, Cheshire Medical's, and KSC's plans that might have useful parts that could be distilled for the City's updated Plan.

- 6) **Next Meeting: Tuesday, April 2 at 6:00 PM**
- 7) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Farrington adjourned the meeting at 7:23 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker  
March 18, 2024

Reviewed and edited by,  
Jesse Rounds, Community Development Director