

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, April 2, 2024

6:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Harold Farrington, Chair
Alex Henkel, Vice Chair
Councilor Michael Remy
Cody Morrison
Leatrice Oram
Emily Lavigne-Bernier
Alexander Von Plinsky
Juliana Bergeron
Joe Walier
Joseph Perras
Jay Kahn, Mayor, Alternate (Voting)
Councilor Philip Jones, Alternate (Voting)
Kenneth Kost, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Jesse Rounds, Community Development
Director
Evan Clements, Planner

Members Not Present:

Pamela Russell-Slack
Joshua Meehan
Elizabeth Wood
Armando Rangel
Councilor Catherine Workman, Alternate

I. Call to Order & Roll Call

Chair Farrington called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

II. Minutes of Previous Meeting – March 12, 2024

A motion by Councilor Jones to adopt the March 12, 2024 meeting minutes as amended was duly seconded by Mr. Von Plinsky. The motion carried unanimously. [*Alternates acting as voting members were not assigned until after this vote, and as such, no alternates participated in this vote.]

III. Potential Names for Project – Continued Discussion

Discussion ensued about suggestions for the project name. The current placeholder was “Vision Keene.” Potential project names submitted by Committee members to Mr. Clements included:

- Focus 20Forward (*later confirmed that Mr. Clements misspoke “20Forward”)
- Forward Together
- Keene 2040
- Roadmap 2040
- Leading 2040
- Keene Vision 2035: Shaping Our Future
- Keene Forward: Building Tomorrow Together
- Keene Blueprint: Paving the Way for Progress
- Keene Horizons: Mapping Our City’s Future
- Keene Thrive: Navigating Our Path to Prosperity
- Learn from the Past & Plan for the Future (as a potential tagline)

The Steering Committee discussed what project name would be most effective. There was agreement that “Vision” lends well to aligning with the City’s new branding, as the Deputy City Manager, Rebecca Landry, demonstrated at the last meeting. Many Committee members spoke in favor of the phrase “20Forward,” despite that phrase having been misspoken. There was also support for including a year, which creates a timeline for something actionable. Mayor Kahn noted that there were many other “Vision” master plans in the City (e.g., Keene State College Vision 2000 and Cheshire Medical Vision 2020), so he thought a similar name for the City’s project could be apt, as people can focus on the visionary goals.

Many Committee members agreed that “Vision” is broad enough but still something that can be personal for community members. Still, a tagline under “Vision” could be helpful for further explaining the project. Discussion proceeded about not stretching the timeline of this Plan too far; 2040 might be missing the mark. Actionable goals are needed. Mr. Clements confirmed the timeline, noting that the horizon for this new Master Plan (MP) is 2025–2035, which would be followed by another two-year process to create the next MP, so the next MP might be adopted in 2037. He thought it was reasonable to have this MP focus on 2035–2040. Ms. Oram mentioned how Vision 2040 does not imply the same meaning as Vision 2020 did, with its implication of clear (20/20) vision. So, 2040 might have less buzz. Others mentioned how “Vision” implies a focus on the next generation. Some agreed that “20Forward” would give the illusion of a date without specifying one, particularly given that an MP should set the stage for everything moving forward, and the effects will be felt long after 2040.

A motion by Mr. Von Plinsky to approve the project name: “Vision 20Forward: Learn from the Past, Plan for the Future” was duly seconded by Ms. Bergeron. The motion carried unanimously.

The name would be forwarded to Ms. Landry, who would use her expertise to develop a logo in collaboration with the consultants.

IV. Survey Updates

Mr. Rounds explained that the survey was drafted and ready. The Steering Committee's help would be essential to distributing it widely and getting the word out. The survey results would help guide the think tank conversations at the end of May.

Mr. Beurle noted that it is a long survey, with approximately 36 questions. The length is due to trying to capture a lot of data. Users are warned of the duration before beginning the survey. He described some of the important sections of the survey that were developed based on this Steering Committee's conversations. Profiling questions at the beginning allow for segmenting the data. The survey asks about people's satisfaction with living and working in Keene (i.e., current direction, speed of change, and ability to adapt to the future). Other questions assess how people see the future strategic positioning of Keene in NH and New England.

There are also questions about Keene's reputation, as well as the importance of having a shared vision and MP. Then, there is an opportunity to rank a series of more specific topic areas. Mr. Beurle said he liked the chosen tagline about learning from the past and planning for the future. He thought he could work with Mr. Rounds to add a section to the survey that lists the vision elements from the 2010 MP and asks users to comment on the City's success at making those elements a reality.

Chair Farrington asked how the survey would be distributed. Mr. Rounds said there would be multiple ways—both online and in print. There would *not* be a direct mailer to all residents. Mayor Kahn noted that people can sign-up on the City's website for general email updates about City events; he asked if those more than 2,000 people would be sent the survey as well. Mr. Rounds said he would be working with Ms. Landry to use every avenue possible to distribute the survey. However, he noted that the email list Mayor Kahn referred to does have a bias limitation of those in the City who were curious enough to sign-up. The survey would still need to reach the other 90% of Keene.

Chair Farrington asked how the survey would reach commuters and visitors. Mr. Rounds said the intention was to use the radio to let those demographics know about the opportunity. He agreed with the importance of reaching these people who do not live in the City. Mayor Kahn mentioned that the KSC population probably brings more visitors to the City than any other entity; people are attracted to KSC because of the City, and people are attracted to the City because of KSC. He thought this was a captive audience of students and parents, and he said it would be interesting to capture those impressions. Mr. Clements said City Staff were using all their tools to distribute the survey, but it was important for Steering Committee members to spread the survey to their own networks too or share ideas with Staff/consultants if they do not have the capacity to reach those groups themselves.

Mr. Kost said that the Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC) would have a comprehensive list of all town planners and volunteers, who would be good to share the survey

with to reach those who visit/work in Keene but do not live here. Mr. Rounds said that Staff were working with SWRPC. Councilor Remy said he found out that during the last MP process, 564 Keene residents responded to the survey, representing 61% of the respondents, meaning that there were approximately 1,000 survey responses total. KSC had a survey with 885 responses from the 5,000 students enrolled (data from the survey graphs on page 247 of the 2010 Comprehensive Master Plan).

Mr. Von Plinsky asked if the City would be working with SAU 29 and other local school districts. He suggested capturing the views of those who would live with this MP the longest (i.e., students/young people). Mr. Rounds said that was possible and he had discussed it with the consultants. In the past, there were classroom activities. Also, the survey is open to anyone who wants to take it, meaning that Keene students are also allowed to participate. Chair Farrington added that SAU 29 was rewriting its strategic plan concurrently with this MP effort, and he thought that strategic plan should be incorporated somehow with the City's updated MP.

Mr. Clements said he would be working with Ms. Landry to create an 8.5" x 11" flyer with a QR code for the survey. This flyer could be distributed to businesses throughout Keene to display in their windows. Ms. Lavigne-Bernier said the flyers at Prime Roast's cash register get a lot of attention; Prime Roast also has a social media following of approximately 5,000—most of which are local—that she can share the survey with as well.

Mayor Kahn asked about the timeline of the survey in this MP process. Mr. Beurle said he hoped the survey would be finalized by approximately April 12, and the intention was to have it live until May 31. Thus, the survey would be open for 6–7 weeks, which is a good amount of time to build momentum.

Councilor Remy wondered if there should be a different survey for KSC with different questions that make more sense to students. Mr. Beurle said that was possible, but he did not recommend it. Segmenting the survey into demographics makes it hard to maintain a common thread, and can dilute the data, making it harder to assess statistical significance. What he found more effective is having the more standard, first survey reach as many people as possible—regardless of demographics—in advance of more specific “cohort” discussions during the community visioning workshops. The profiling questions in the first survey would facilitate targeting key demographics in the workshops.

Mr. Rounds reiterated that the purpose of this survey as the first step in this process was to lay the groundwork for later parts of the process, with a lot of future opportunities for additional surveys—whether City-based or with the consultants. He thought the survey Councilor Remy was referring to was an Antioch University New England survey that was specifically focused on the downtown (Appendix B of 2010 MP), and would be a valuable tool for future discussions. Mr. Rounds thought that Future IQ and the other consultants had a good vision for this process moving forward, which he thought was a great first step. The think tanks will be a powerful tool. Councilor Remy clarified that he was not challenging this process.

Mr. Walier asked whether this Steering Committee's work and the survey were public knowledge. Are Steering Committee members allowed to talk about this? Mr. Farrington said it is public knowledge and the Steering Committee is encouraged to talk about this effort as much as possible. Mayor Kahn agreed, noting that the City Council formally and publicly appointed this Committee, but added that the Steering Committee could help enhance general knowledge of this effort in the community.

V. Master Plan Presentation from Community Development Director

- A) Jesse Rounds, the Community Development Director, will provide background information about the 2010 Master Plan, the purpose and history of Master Plans, and New Hampshire's statutory requirements for these documents.**

Mr. Rounds gave a presentation on the City's 2010 Comprehensive MP and the NH laws that underpin this process (he agreed to share his presentation with the Committee). He thanked Mr. Clements for his in-depth work breaking down the whole 2010 MP into goals and proposed solutions. Reviewing all of these details would take a long time, so Mr. Rounds reviewed the highlights. To illustrate why master planning is important, he quoted organizational psychologist, Peter Drucker, "*long range planning does not deal with future decisions, but with the future of present decisions.*"

Mr. Rounds said this MP is Keene's opportunity to decide what the City's future will be. It is less about future decision making and more about where the future will take us and how much the City wants to work toward potential futures. Master planning is a basis for the City's regulatory actions, the City's decisions, and community programs. He said the 2010 MP included a lot of what the City should look into (e.g., greenhouse gas surveys) and the various tools to reach those goals. The City Council, Planning Board, City Staff, and Community Development Department use the 2010 MP regularly to make decisions. For example, when presenting the annual budget, departments tie everything to the 2010 MP. It is a powerful document that depicts how the City should grow and change, leading to a long-term guide. Thinking about 10 years from now is challenging for individuals, let alone a whole community.

Mr. Rounds listed the community vision from the 2010 MP: quality-built environment, unique natural environment, vibrant economy, strong and proactive citizenship and leadership, creative learning culture, and a healthy economy. The City has done a lot to support the resulting 21 subject areas and the success of that vision, which has driven a lot of the City's decisions over the past 14 years. He showed a Venn diagram to demonstrate that social, environmental, and economic sustainability lead to a healthy economy, environment, and populace. Developing vision statements to align with this diagram was very complicated and in-depth. While it was great to articulate everything the community cared about, it was a lot to think about all at once; sometimes such fine detail can lose sight of the ultimate goals. However, this did not discount the value of the 2010 visioning process and engagement, which was second to none. Mr. Rounds said the 2010 MP

was missing the “visioning” piece; how would the City reach these goals? Mr. Rounds said he would like to hear from those involved with the 2010 MP to learn more.

Next, Mr. Rounds reviewed NH RSA 674, which guides this MP process. RSA 674 provides a lot of guidance for the Planning Board and other regulatory bodies.

- RSA 674:1
 - Outlines the requirement to prepare and amend MPs to guide development. This is the Planning Board’s responsibility. This includes areas outside the municipality that the City controls (e.g., Airport and water reservoirs). This Steering Committee was tasked with promoting the MP process, research, implementation, and advice to the Planning Board.
- RSA 674:2
 - Requires the City to describe an appropriate future for the community, which must include a “vision” section and a “land use” section, showing the current conditions and future desired conditions. This includes giving the community an opportunity to articulate its desired future and giving the Steering Committee an opportunity to dive deeper into the areas of community importance. Some topic areas, like coastal management, are less relevant to Keene. Other topic areas, like housing, included a recommendation to create an implementation plan, which had not yet been accomplished by City Staff.
 - The RSA includes “optional” MP sections: transportation, community facilities, economic development, natural resources, natural hazards, recreation, utility and public service, cultural/archaeological/historical resources, regional concerns, neighborhood plan, community design, housing, implementation, energy, and coastal management.
- RSA 674:3
 - Gives this Steering Committee the authority to study existing data trends and practices. This section suggests MP revision every 5–10 years, as well as ways to involve the public. The City is looking to its State and regional partners, hoping for their involvement along with the Keene community.
- RSA 674:4
 - Lists the MP adoption procedures and practices. The Planning Board adopts the MP.

Mr. Kost was grateful for this presentation. He noted that the MP is a “long-term guide,” and asked if there would also be short-term or interim actions/decisions along the way. Mr. Rounds thought that the 2010 MP was very good, thorough, and detailed. He thought it might be useful to focus on the most important details. For example, an implementation plan could be a way to track and monitor these actions over time. An implementation plan was included in the consultants’ scope of work. With a project name like “20Forward,” Mr. Rounds thought it would be great to monitor and track the City’s actions.

Mr. Von Plinsky asked whether MPs generally have a definitions section. For example, it could be helpful to a reader to define terms like “affordable housing,” both in general and specifically to Keene. Other examples included “natural resource conservation” and “green energy.” Mr. Rounds replied that there is not usually a definitions section, but in the flow of the MP, it is best practice to define important terms.

Ms. Oram asked if the City had ever self-assessed how it did implementing the 2010 MP. Mr. Rounds was not aware of any such activity. Part of his presentation at this meeting came from a 2012 Planning Department (now Community Development Department) presentation that was intended to be an update. He thought that a formal look back could be useful to build into the overall process. Councilor Jones said the City tried to start a look back like this at the Joint Planning Board-Planning, Licenses, and Development Committee level, but it was pushed off because of so many applications taking precedence. Mr. Clements said he hoped this exercise/presentation would result in some reflections. A formal review would require a significant effort and coordination between City departments to comb through the whole MP. While some goals in the 2010 MP were easier to implement (e.g., improving the water treatment plant), the MP was also extremely granular (e.g., use low toxicity paints). While valuable information, such granular details might not be appropriate for the level of this MP document.

Mr. Von Plinsky suggested that this next MP should include clear ways that the listed goals could be measured in the future. Mr. Clements agreed, stating that the MP document is designed for this sort of tracking; articulating those goals and strategies in a way that is easy for City departments to track will be essential. Mr. Morrison suggested that another way to measure the effectiveness of the MP is to survey external partners. When he applies for a grant for a project, Mr. Morrison must show how the project aligns with local, regional, and Statewide planning. Thus, a few times annually, he reviews the City’s 2010 MP.

Councilor Jones wondered whether the MP could list short-term goals in addition to the long-term. Mr. Rounds said yes, without listing a timeframe, the MP would lose some utility as an implementation plan. Mr. Beurle said one of Future IQ’s philosophies is to think of the MP like a roadmap. Yes, it is a statutory requirement, but it is also a vision/roadmap with directions along the way. In developing the implementation plan, the consultants will identify first, second, and third-level actions. Beyond five years, there is a level of uncertainty, so those action levels should be reviewed often.

Mr. Perras wondered whether the City had ever included a demographer in its MP processes. He said it could be useful for understanding where the City is headed from a population standpoint, noting how his experiences showed how insightful it can be. While it had not been included yet, Mr. Rounds thought it was a great idea. Other places that Mr. Rounds had worked brought demographers in annually to understand impacts to planning. Mr. Rounds agreed to talk with the consultants about this possibility and Mr. Perras offered to share resources.

Mr. Kost supported the demographer idea. He also recalled the City's Housing Needs Assessment, which was informed by significant research. He thought that assessment was still relevant. Mr. Rounds said yes, the consultants had access to the assessment, which he called an incredibly valuable tool to consider growing the housing sector.

VI. New Business

This agenda item is a placeholder for Committee members to suggest topics for upcoming meetings.

Mr. Clements asked the Steering Committee to submit photos, bios, and quotes to Staff. Members should also continue submitting names for the think tanks (80–100 people) and potential one-on-one stakeholder interviews as soon as possible. Serving on a think tank would not preclude someone from participating in a one-on-one interview. The interviews are to understand and build connections with key players in the community that can help with context or reaching large networks. Members should share as much contact information as possible to help Staff reach participants.

VII. Next Meeting: Tuesday, May 7 at 6:00 PM

VIII. Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Farrington adjourned the meeting at 7:19 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker
April 8, 2024

Reviewed and edited by,
Megan Fortson, Planning Technician