



## **Master Plan Steering Committee**

### **AGENDA**

**Monday, June 17, 2024                      6:00 PM                      City Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Council Chambers**

- I. Call to Order and Roll Call
- II. Minutes of Previous Meeting – May 7, 2024
- III. Think Tank Workshop Overview
- IV. Community Survey Results & Data Visualization
- V. Visioning Sessions – June 18 - 21, 2024
  - a. “Train the Trainer” sessions
- VI. Next Steps:
  - a. Continued Visioning Sessions in July
  - b. Strategic Pillars Roundtable in August
  - c. Future Summit October 5th
- VII. New Business
- VIII. Next Meeting: Tuesday, August 6, 6:00 PM

1 City of Keene  
2 New Hampshire

3  
4  
5 MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE  
6 MEETING MINUTES  
7

Tuesday, May 7, 2024

6:00 PM

Council Chamber,  
City Hall

**Members Present:**

Harold Farrington, Chair  
Alex Henkel, Vice Chair  
Councilor Michael Remy  
Cody Morrison  
Joshua Meehan  
Elizabeth Wood  
Alexander Von Plinksy  
Joe Walier  
Kenneth Kost, Alternate  
Mayor Jay Kahn, Alternate (voting; left at 7:15 PM)  
Councilor Philip Jones, Alternate (voting)  
Councilor Catherine Workman, Alternate (voting;  
remote)

**Staff Present:**

Jesse Rounds, Community Development  
Director  
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner  
Evan Clements, Planner

**Members Not Present:**

Joseph Perras  
Juliana Bergeron  
Armando Rangel  
Leatrice Oram  
Emily Lavigne-Bernier

8  
9 **1) Call to Order & Roll Call**

10  
11 Chair Farrington called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM and roll call ensued.

12  
13 Consultants present: David Beurle (Future IQ), Heather Branigin (Future IQ), & Leslie Gray  
14 (JS&A).

15  
16 **2) Minutes of Previous Meeting: April 2, 2024**

17  
18 Revision: Correct the spelling of Mr. Perras' name in the members present/not list.

19  
20 A motion by Councilor Remy to adopt the April 2, 2024 minutes as amended was duly seconded  
21 by Councilor Jones. The motion carried unanimously.  
22

23 **3) Community Snapshot Overview by JS&A**  
24

25 Chair Farrington welcomed Leslie Gray, consultant from JS&A, who reported on the community  
26 snapshot. This existing conditions analysis will guide the think tank conversations. Ms. Gray began  
27 by reviewing how the City’s economic conditions and demographics had changed since 2010 to  
28 inform where the City should go from here. The “snapshot” is an analysis of existing conditions.  
29 The snapshot will expand in phase two. The data included: census, ACS (American Community  
30 Survey), and City studies. The snapshot will help to answer two core questions: (1) How has Keene  
31 changed since the 2010 Master Plan update, and (2) what does today’s economy look like? The  
32 consultants were compiling the preliminary findings to complete the snapshot report. All of this  
33 information will be distilled into a short presentation during the think tank.  
34

35 Ms. Gray continued, describing some of the data (2010–2020).

- 36     ▪ Demographics & socio-economic findings:
  - 37         ○ Consistent population size, though the community is not necessarily consistent.
  - 38         ○ High household median income.
  - 39         ○ Increased higher educational attainment for those over age 25.
  - 40         ○ Excellent unemployment rates.
  - 41         ○ Strong labor participation rates.
    - 42             ▪ Indicates a good economic base.
    - 43             ▪ 45% of those employed Keene live in Keene, which is a good indicator of
    - 44             economic development. Comparable to other cities in the region.
  - 45         ○ AARP Livability Index:
    - 46             ▪ Keene’s current score was 57 compared to the national average of 50.
    - 47             ▪ Includes housing, transportation, environment, health, engagement
    - 48             opportunities, and more.
    - 49             ▪ Compared to other communities, Keene is above average.
    - 50             ▪ There are opportunities to think more strategically to increase the City’s
    - 51             index score over the next 10 years so Keene can continue being responsive
    - 52             to residential needs, with a healthy economy.

53  
54 Next, the consultants would analyze the community survey findings to present that data to the  
55 Committee.  
56

57 Councilor Remy said he did not like the census slide shown because the data was collected when  
58 Keene State College (KSC; ~ 10% of Keene’s population) did not have students on campus. Thus,  
59 overall, it showed a decrease. However, he said that when considering the data ward-by-ward,  
60 Ward 1 (which includes KSC) was the only one that decreased, which he thought indicated that it  
61 was a result of KSC not being in session. Ms. Gray said there were limitations with the data, and  
62 she mentioned working with other communities that also had challenges capturing the full  
63 population. She said she would analyze the ward-by-ward data for more granular accuracy and  
64 compare the data to other communities across the nation with similar student populations.  
65

66 Chair Farrington appreciated the overview. He said he assumed that the increase in NH's  
67 population was not organic (i.e., births minus deaths), but rather due to people moving to NH. Ms.  
68 Gray said that was accurate, noting that there are three main ways a population can change: moving  
69 in/out, births, and deaths. The consultants had been reviewing net mobility using the American  
70 Community Survey, which showed that 20% of Keene residents are in a different home now than  
71 they were one year ago. From the macroeconomic perspective, Ms. Gray said it was clear that  
72 people are leaving bigger cities for places with more “affordable” housing relative to where they  
73 come from.

74  
75 Mayor Kahn appreciated the snapshot. He said there is a local urban myth that Keene residents are  
76 being outbid for homes by people moving here from outside the region. Some of this urban flight  
77 is to find desirable retirement locations. He suggested that the consultants invite local realtors for  
78 their insight. He also suggested that this process should lead to a comparator set to understand how  
79 those other communities are advancing in the ways that Keene wants to.

80  
81 Mr. Meehan referenced the livability comparison and noted that it would be good to have  
82 comparisons to aspirational communities, especially if there is data available to compare to other  
83 NH towns. He suggested keeping the metrics similar to help people understand. After the first  
84 think tank, there might be a clearer idea of people’s visions for Keene, which could indicate  
85 aspirational communities. Ms. Gray agreed that great baseline data can help pinpoint aspirational  
86 communities.

87  
88 Chair Farrington said that if it appears that a lot of people want to move to NH but are not aiming  
89 for Keene, there might be a need to overtly compete with other NH towns.

90

91 **4) Think Tank Workshop – May 30 & 31, 2024**

92  
93 Mr. Beurle of Future IQ discussed the project timeline. The Steering Committee is in Step 2. The  
94 first community survey is helping the consultants to pinpoint how Keene can be competitive.  
95 Stakeholder interviews will start soon and there will be visioning sessions during the second to  
96 last week of June. He said the community engagement and outreach was going well so far.

97  
98 Mr. Beurle continued, describing updates to the project portal. He showed the logo that aligned  
99 with Keene’s branding and says: Keene 20Forward. He said it was an interesting exercise amongst  
100 City staff and consultants to accomplish a great logo and accompanying narrative about the project.  
101 He thanked Steering Committee members who submitted photos and quotes, which help to give a  
102 local voice as to why the project is important. The portal includes the project overview, schedule,  
103 presentations to the Steering Committee, resources, the 2010 Comprehensive Master Plan, and  
104 other reports. The consultants are building out the project portal as much as possible so the public  
105 can participate and track the project.

106  
107 Next, Mr. Beurle discussed the upcoming think tanks; the agenda will be posted to the project  
108 portal soon. He thanked the Steering Committee for suggesting people for the think tanks; all had  
109 been invited and then it will be opened to others, who can sign up on the portal. A think tank is a

110 two-day exercise: Thursday from 5:00 PM–8:00 PM (including light dinner) and Friday from 9:00  
111 AM–12:00 PM. As such, participants would not have to miss a full day of work. Day one of the  
112 think tank agenda will include: an introduction, an explanation of trends shaping the City’s future,  
113 and insights about key drivers (interactive). At the end, participants will be asked to rank the key  
114 drivers they think are shaping Keene’s future. Day two will include (based on an analysis of day  
115 one): an outline scenario matrix, a narrative scenario development, and a brainstorm of high-level  
116 actions. Facilitators will include Mr. Beurle, Ms. Branigin, Ms. Gray, someone from WGI, City  
117 staff, and some Steering Committee members who will facilitate the small groups. The Steering  
118 Committee will be trained at the end of day one or beginning of day two.

119  
120 Otherwise, the consultants will be launching material on the project portal on May 8<sup>th</sup>. They waited  
121 so that the public could focus on the survey, which 438 people have completed to date. Ideally, the  
122 number of survey responses would increase to closer to 700+ before the think tanks. All Steering  
123 Committee members are invited to register and participate in the think tanks.

124  
125 Ms. Wood pointed out a typo in the think tank agenda: “5:00 PM–8:00 PM” should be changed to  
126 “5:00 PM–8:30 PM,” with registration at 4:30 PM.

127  
128 Mr. Kost recalled that at the previous meeting, Mr. Walier suggested a tagline that the Steering  
129 Committee accepted: “Learn from the past, plan for the future,” but Mr. Kost did not see it in the  
130 materials displayed. Mr. Beurle showed where the tagline was used in the various project materials,  
131 such as the survey, the think tank introduction, and the flyer. It depends on how much space is  
132 available on the various documents. Chair Farrington and Ms. Brunner agreed that on the think  
133 tank agenda, the tagline could be bold and green, so it stands out more.

134  
135 Mr. Von Plinsky asked when invites should be expected for the think tank and whether there was  
136 a cutoff for invites. Ms. Brunner replied that invitations were being mailed on May 8<sup>th</sup>. She noted  
137 that some of the Steering Committee’s recommendations for think tank participants did not include  
138 contact information. She asked the Steering Committee to submit contact information for their  
139 recommendations if they had not yet.

140  
141 Mayor Kahn noted that on the survey advertisement in the project portal, the project title was in  
142 all caps: “VISION 20FORWARD.” As such, the Mayor thought it could be misread or confusing.  
143 He suggested hyphenating as: “VISION 20-FORWARD.” Mr. Beurle said he would work with  
144 Ms. Brunner on it.

145  
146 Mr. Meehan noted that on the portal landing page, there is an option to learn more about the  
147 Steering Committee, but it takes the user to the survey. Mr. Beurle said he would fix it.

148  
149 Mr. Walier said it seemed that the community was unaware of this effort. He had not spoken to  
150 one person who knew about it. He wondered what the City/Steering Committee/consultants were  
151 missing in all this effort.

152

153 Ms. Wood suggested having a community table at the Food Festival or other events, when Steering  
154 Committee members could talk about the project and hand out flyers. This could lead to more of  
155 an audience. Chair Farrington agreed that it was a great idea. Councilor Remy would try to  
156 facilitate this at the Food Festival.

157

158 Mr. Walier also noted that there are many service organizations in Keene looking for speakers, so  
159 the Steering Committee could reach out to them.

160

161 Community Development Director, Jesse Rounds, said these were helpful comments and that  
162 talking with the various service organizations was a goal after the think tank. The Steering  
163 Committee is an important tool in this process, and they are encouraged to spread the word.

164

165 Ms. Brunner said staff could reach out to Dan Mitchell of WKBK to see if someone from the  
166 Steering Committee and/or Mr. Beurle could talk about the project, so the community is hearing  
167 voices other than City staff. Councilor Remy noted that he and Ms. Wood would be on the radio  
168 about different topics on May 16<sup>th</sup> and they would try to briefly mention this project.

169

## 170 **5) Survey Updates**

171

172 Next, Mr. Beurle provided an update on the survey (40 questions and some subsets) responses,  
173 noting that this process needs time to build momentum in the community. Of the survey responses  
174 to date, 10% of participants were involved with the 2010 Comprehensive Master Plan update,  
175 which indicates that the survey is reaching new people, ideally causing a ripple effect. He said City  
176 staff were doing great outreach.

177

178 The ~438 survey responses indicated (\*early indications; data not officially analyzed yet):

179     ▪ Average of 24 minutes to complete the survey, which indicated that users were being  
180 thoughtful for such a long survey, leading to high quality data.

181     ▪ 70% of people who started the survey completed it, which was encouraging for a survey  
182 this long.

183     ▪ A good distribution of age groups participated, aligning with the community's  
184 demographics.

185     ▪ 70% of users live in Keene (03431 zip code). Users who do not live in Keene have some  
186 relationship with the City (e.g., work in Keene).

187     ▪ Survey responses were evenly distributed between wards, though a little lower in Ward  
188 One.

189     ▪ Participants seem very satisfied living in Keene. The community provides opportunities to  
190 thrive and grow.

191     ▪ On the questions about how satisfied/concerned people are about Keene's current direction,  
192 more concerns seemed to emerge.

193         ○ There was a full range of responses from very concerned to very satisfied. Some  
194 were concerned that Keene is moving too slowly and not keeping up with changes,  
195 as well as the ability of the community to adapt to future changes. This interesting

196 data makes this process more important. Residents like living here, but are  
197 concerned about the City’s future direction. Users seem interested in the notion of  
198 community “identity” and key strategic position.  
199

200 There will be a follow-up email to all survey participants asking them to elaborate about the City’s  
201 future and share the survey with their networks.  
202

203 Mayor Kahn was glad to hear the average response time. He suggested updating the first page of  
204 the survey that indicates the survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Mr. Beurle  
205 agreed. Mr. Beurle said the longer response times indicated to him that people are taking their time  
206 on the open-ended questions, though some had skipped those questions.  
207

208 Mr. Von Plinsky asked about the direction/rate of change concerns. He wondered if concerns in  
209 Keene align with nationwide concerns. Mr. Beurle thought the open-ended questions would  
210 indicate what changes people are most excited/concerned about. He thought the survey data  
211 visualization would track those open-ended responses to narrow down to the most important local  
212 issues. Mr. Beurle’s initial read of the comments indicated some bigger picture issues with local  
213 implications (e.g., climate change and snowfall) and others focused on local context (e.g.,  
214 homelessness and drug use).  
215

216 Councilor Remy asked whether there would be value in sourcing links to track survey referrals  
217 from the Steering Committee or other sources. Mr. Beurle felt—based on his experience—that  
218 breaking down the data to such a degree leads to a less reliable dataset. The goal is to drive all  
219 possible traffic to the project portal. Councilor Remy said that if a second survey is needed, such  
220 tracking could indicate that flyers are not needed, for example, because people are not accessing  
221 the survey that way. Mr. Beurle said there was not a question asking how users learned about the  
222 survey.  
223

224 **6) New Business**  
225

226 Mr. Rounds returned to the topic of the logo and tagline. He said there were many possible designs  
227 as staff worked on the Steering Committee’s wishes. He hoped that this logo was what the  
228 Committee had in mind. He said City staff were listening, and he appreciated communication  
229 pointing out where the logo differed from the Committee’s wishes. He appreciated all of the  
230 Steering Committee’s time.  
231

232 Mr. Kost said he really liked the tagline and thought it was important to help community members  
233 know that the Steering Committee values the City’s history. He thought the tagline was a nice  
234 balance. Mr. Rounds agreed, noting his intention for the tagline to be used throughout the literature  
235 on the project portal. He added that the logo and tagline would be omnipresent because they are  
236 very important; it was not just about creating a brand, but also helping people to be comfortable  
237 with this process.  
238



239 Ms. Brunner noted that all Steering Committee members should have received the think tank  
240 invitation via email. She asked members to email City staff indicating whether they plan to attend,  
241 and if so, whether they will attend both sessions. She asked members to also indicate whether they  
242 are willing to be facilitators.

243  
244 Evan Clements, Planner, distributed 60 flyers with the survey link along Main Street. He was  
245 surprised that most business owners thought he was there about the downtown project and once  
246 they knew he was not, they were quite receptive. He said the change in tone between the two topics  
247 was dramatic.

248  
249 Chair Farrington recalled an idea from the last meeting to ensure it occurs: Mr. Kost, who is part  
250 of the Monadnock Interfaith Project (MIP) with the KSC school of architecture to create mockups  
251 of what development of a high-rise multiuse building would look like on Gilbo Avenue. Chair  
252 Farrington said they did nice work. Mr. Kost also planned to talk to the Library about displaying  
253 images/boards of the KSC senior projects about Main Street.

254  
255 For future agendas, Councilor Jones suggested that City staff share links to all of the important  
256 City plans and policies (e.g., Climate Action Plan and Economic Development Plan) referenced in  
257 these discussions. He thought it was important for both the Steering Committee and consultants to  
258 understand this history. Chair Farrington agreed. Ms. Brunner also agreed, noting that reviewing  
259 those plans and policies was a part of the consultants' scope. Mr. Beurle showed where all of these  
260 documents were located in the project portal, under "Useful Resources." Chair Farrington noted  
261 that since the last meeting, the School District published their Strategic Plan, which would be  
262 useful to include as well. Mayor Kahn agreed, noting that the Strategic Plan had come a long way,  
263 and would be finalized in June. Mayor Kahn could request the progress report.

264  
265 Ms. Wood agreed with Mr. Clements that downtown businesses are confused between this Master  
266 Plan update and the downtown project. She suggested creating a tool to help residents understand  
267 the difference. She noted all the upcoming City events through the Recreation Department at  
268 various parks on May 18<sup>th</sup>. So, Ms. Wood suggested leaving flyers at the various events. Mr.  
269 Rounds agreed and noted that there would be an upcoming meeting on the downtown project  
270 focused on Central Square on May 8<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 PM.

271  
272 Mayor Kahn appreciated Ms. Wood's comment, noting that there had been a lot of effort to gather  
273 and build momentum with the downtown businesses. He added that there are many empty  
274 storefronts downtown, and downtown business owners know what types of businesses would  
275 complement what already exists. He hoped this process would gather that information and he  
276 suggested starting with the business owners. Then, if there are generalized observations, he  
277 suggested testing them with the broader community, like survey respondents. He said it could be  
278 potential marketing leverage for the City that would add to the project data as well. He suggested  
279 that May would be a good time to present this to the Council.

280  
281 7) **Next Meeting: Tuesday June 4, 2024 at 6:00 PM**



282     **8) Adjournment**

283

284     There being no further business, Chair Farrington adjourned the meeting at 7:15 PM.

285

286     Respectfully submitted by,

287     Katie Kibler, Minute Taker

288     May 14, 2024

289

290     Reviewed and edited by,

291     Megan Fortson, Planning Technician & Mari Brunner, Senior Planner