

City of Keene
New Hampshire

FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, June 27, 2024

6:00 PM

**Council Chamber,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Thomas F. Powers, Chair
Michael J. Remy, Vice Chair
Bettina A. Chadbourne
Bryan J. Lake
Kris E. Roberts

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager
Thomas Mullins, City Attorney
Amanda Palmeira, Asst. City Attorney
Marti Fiske, Library Director

Members Not Present:

All Present

Chair Powers called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

**1) Invest NH - Demolition of Former Roosevelt School - Economic Development
Director/Special Projects Medard Kopczynski, Economic Development
Director/Special Projects**

Mr. Josh Meehan Executive Director of Keene Housing addressed the Committee. He indicated the project they are working on is the adaptive reuse of the Roosevelt School at 438 Washington Street, which will be a two phase project. The first phase is a combination of adaptive reuse of the existing building and then an addition of new construction connected to the older building. They are planning on breaking ground for phase one in either July or early August (30 units)

Phase two will be 30 units for which they are going after funding right now. He stated the reason he is here today is because an opportunity has come through the Invest NH Program to cover costs related to demolition. Invest NH was first funded through ARPA but in the legislature this session they started using state funds because the federal funds were used up.

Mr. Meehan stated should the Council agree the city has graciously agreed to sponsor this application to receive \$412,000 which will cover the cost of the demolition of the project for phase one. He explained the city fills out the application and enters into an agreement with Monadnock Affordable Housing Corporation, which is Keene Housing Development's housing arm, a 501-C3 non-profit, who administer the contract, send receipts to the city, and the city forwards them to the state for Keene Housing to be reimbursed.

City Manager Elizabeth Dragon stated the city has been successful in getting some funds from the Invest NH Program for the Findings demolition, the city did go back for more funds but none were available. New funds have now become available as other requested funds did not get expended, and felt this was an opportunity to help bring down the overall cost of this affordable housing project. She indicated this is a relatively easy process for the city – there is some work related to grant requirements and processing of paperwork, and a close out at the end.

Chair Powers clarified the entire site was not being taken down. Mr. Meehan stated the gym was being taken down and these funds will cover those costs and the funds will also cover the cost of the interior demolition. The funding would also cover the asbestos remediation as part of the demolition cost.

Councilor Roberts stated the sooner this project is complete the better and noted it is referenced that the poverty level is at 11% but nearly 40% of households cannot pay for their basic needs and the biggest reason is the cost of housing and felt we are running the risk of more people living on the street if we don't get more affordable housing. Mr. Meehan agreed and stated they have 3,000 households on their wait list right now of which 1,500 tie directly back to Keene or an adjacent community.

Councilor Chadbourne made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Lake.

On a 5-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommend that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to negotiate, accept, execute necessary documents, and expend an Invest NH Capital Grant not to exceed \$412,000 with Keene Housing and the State of New Hampshire Department of Business Affairs (BEA) for the demolition of 438 Washington Street (the former Roosevelt School).

2) Acceptance of a Donation to the Heberton Fund - Library Director Martine Fiske, Library Director

Library Director Marti Fiske was the next to address the committee and stated the library has a donation for \$1,169 from the Library Trustees. She indicated this is for a project for sound remediation for Cohen Hall which will be partially funded by the Heberton Hall fund. She noted Cohen Hall is the former Masons ritual space and has a very high level of reverberation and makes it difficult to understand dialogue, especially during lectures and movies. She indicated the trustees also needed to have a study done for acoustical value of the circulation lobby and had an engineer look at both spaces at the same time.

Funding will be paid out of the Heberton Hall for Cohen Hall and the Trustees will cover the circulation area. The study has been completed. One half of the invoice would be for \$1,169 for the Trustees to pay for the circulation lobby. This money will get deposited into Heberton Fund so that one check can be drawn to pay for the engineering study for the full amount.

Councilor Chadbourne made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Lake.

On a 5-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept and expend a donation of \$1,169 to the Heberton Fund from the Trustees of the Keene Public Library.

3) Acceptance of Donation to Fund Makerspace Interns - Library Director Martine Fiske, Library Director

Ms. Fiske addressed the committee again and referred to a donation from the Friends of the Library to fund the Makerspace interns at the library. The Friends having been providing funding every year that pays for the total amount of the interns who work at the library's Makerspace.

Makerspace is open in the evenings on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and on Friday during the daytime and on Saturdays. Friends of the library have set aside \$15,000 this year from their budget for support for the library. The library has about \$2000.00 left over from last year's donation which needs to be deposited. Makerspace interns help with programming, teaching people to use the Makerspace equipment and one on one assistance to members of the community.

Councilor Lake made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Lake.

On a 5-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept and expend a donation of \$15,000 from the Friends of the Keene Public Library to fund Makerspace Interns.

4) Charles Smith - Request to Address Issues of Transparency and the Impact of Homelessness

5) Charles Smith - Request to Address Issues Relating to Freedom of Speech and Signage

Mr. Charles Smith of 9 Colby Street addressed the committee. Mr. Smith stated he would like to address the topic of homelessness first. He stated as he watches the news from around the country and he also referred to a funeral our President attended of a 12 year old girl who was murdered by an illegal immigrant and questioned if the houses being built are for people who live in the country or for those who are not supposed to be here. He asked individuals be vetted via their zip codes and residency so that people in the community who pay taxes can be assisted. He stated his concern is making this area safe for the next generation.

Mr. Smith next addressed political signs. He stated there was a recent ordinance passed by the city prohibiting political signs. He stated he understands the reason why the city might have taken this stance, due to people not removing signs when their campaigning has ended. He referred to a Kelly Ayotte sign that was in shreds.

He suggested a list for individuals to fill-out asking for locations to put up signs and once the

campaign is over those signs need to be removed. Mr. Smith volunteered to remove signs that are not in use. He talked about Freedom of Speech and the location of signs are covered under this Right. He felt our founding fathers would not want our voices to be smothered.

Mr. Smith then talked about the issue of Transparency. He pointed out that the city spent \$500,000 for body cameras and car cameras. He questioned why individuals are not permitted access to this. Mr. Smith stated he is trying to get access to an incident that happened on December 9 that he was involved in. He stated he has been told because he was not arrested he cannot have access to this footage. Mr. Smith stated he had raised this issue with the Mayor and the Manager to perhaps have access just to the audio but is being denied access due to policy. He felt policy does not trump the constitution.

Chair Powers stated items that come before the Police Department are not the purview of the city but the purview of the Courts. He stated cameras used by law enforcement are regulated by State Statute which clearly outlines the dispersion of this information. The Chair stated this Body cannot pass a law as it pertains to that element. He stated New Hampshire is not a home rule state and has to follow the rules set forth by State legislature.

Mr. Smith stated he had contacted Attorneys in Concord and explained the situation and the attorney referred him back to the city as this is a city issue and felt ultimately this is a decision of the Mayor and Manager.

Councilor Roberts responded to Mr. Smith's comments regarding signs. He indicated the Kelly Ayotte sign was for the upcoming primary but was destroyed during the recent heavy rains. He noted removing other people's signs could be considered breaking the law.

Chair Powers stated as it relates to political signs there are rules for city elections and strict state laws as it pertains to the national elections. The Chair stated the city does not prohibit anyone from locating signs on their own private property. He added there was no recent Ordinance regarding signage approved by the City Council. Mr. Smith stated he had heard this information on the radio and apologized for the misunderstanding.

Councilor Remy made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Roberts.

On a 5-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee accepts the communication from Charles Smith as informational.

There being no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 6:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

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