

City of Keene
New Hampshire

JOINT PLANNING BOARD & MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE
WORKSHOP
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, August 6, 2024

5:30 PM

**Heberton Hall, Keene Public
Library**

**Master Plan Steering
Committee Members**

Present:

Harold Farrington, Chair
Alex Henkel, Vice Chair
Josh Meehan
Joe Perras
Joe Walier
Emily Lavigne-Bernier
Leatrice Oram
Councilor Catt Workman
Ken Kost, Alternate (Voting)
Councilor Phil Jones, Alternate
(Voting)
Mayor Jay Kahn, Alternate
(Voting)

Members Not Present:

Councilor Mike Remy
Cody Morrison
Elizabeth Wood
Sparky Von Plinsky
Juliana Bergeron

Planning Board Members

Present:

Harold Farrington, Chair
Ken Kost
Mayor Jay Kahn
Tammy Adams, Alternate
(Voting)
Mike Hoefler, Alternate
(Voting)

Planning Board Members

Not Present:

Roberta Mastrogiovanni,
Vice Chair
Councilor Mike Remy
Sarah Vezzani
Ryan Clancy
Armando Rangel
Stephon Mehu, Alternate
Randyn Markelon, Alternate

City Staff Present:

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

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Farrington called the meeting to order at 5:33 PM and asked for a roll call. Chair Farrington invited Master Plan Steering Committee members Mayor Jay Kahn, Councilor Phil Jones, and Ken Kost to participate as voting members. Planning Board alternate members Tammy Adams and Mike Hoefler were also invited to participate as voting members.

2) **Minutes of the Previous Meeting – June 17, 2024**

A motion made by Mr. Walier to adopt the June 17, 2024 minutes was duly seconded by Ms. Oram. Chair Farrington offered two corrections: that Armando Rangel be removed from the list of members and that the word “report” be replaced with “reported” on line 59. The motion to adopt the minutes as amended carried unanimously.

3) **Workshop (led by David Beurle)**

a) **Review of Project Progress and Public Input to Date**

Mr. Beurle explained that the master plan is still in the first phase, which is for visioning. The visioning phase will end on Saturday, October 5th at the Future Summit, which will be held from 9:00 am – 12:00 pm in Heberton Hall at the Keene Public Library. He explained that tonight’s meeting will serve as a round-table discussion to begin fleshing out the proposed themes for the master plan, as well as discuss the preliminary heat map survey results.

Mr. Beurle showed the preliminary heat map results as part of a PowerPoint presentation and explained that the data included all results up through the visioning session in East Keene on Monday night. He noted that additional data from earlier in the day still needs to be incorporated into the results. He explained that the majority of respondents identified Scenario D as their least preferred future and the center of Scenario B as the most desired future. He noted that the survey data not yet incorporated into the heat maps appears to mirror the same results.

He explained that these results show that people in Keene have an appetite for change in some ways and noted that housing is the number one issue that people have been raising during all public forums. Mr. Meehan inquired as to how Keene’s survey results compared to other similar communities. Mr. Beurle stated that he was surprised by the tight concentration of the results, which indicates a strong consensus.

Ms. Oram noted that some participants were concerned about Scenario B at the Visioning Session that she attended, and she is glad to see that their input is included on the heatmap. Mr. Kost wondered if participants were given upcoming demographic data about Keene’s population becoming and staying stagnant in the future at the Visioning Sessions. Mr. Beurle stated that this was briefly discussed during the opportunities and obstacles (headwinds & tailwinds) portion of each session. He added that participants often provided contextual data as well, for example an attendee from the Chamber of Commerce shared that 35% of workers are expected to retire in the next 10 years.

Mayor Kahn Noted that data from the New Hampshire Fiscal Policy Institute shows that the populations in Keene, Manchester, and Nashua have all slightly declined since 2020 whereas the populations of Portsmouth, Dover, and Concord have all increased. Mr. Kost noted that he was happy that the survey data is showing that people are receptive to change. Mr. Beurle agreed and said that the combined survey results show that while people love Keene, they also want to see

change and more boldness. He stated that there should be ~300 heat map responses total once all of the data has been compiled.

b) Breakout Groups: Identification of Key Themes (Strategic Pillars)

Mr. Beurle showed that the highest number of respondents selected Scenario B (Innovation & Intentional – Change²) as their preferred future scenario. Based off of this response and other feedback and data collected so far, he drafted six generic themes/topics:

1. Community collaboration and strategic positioning
2. Housing availability and affordability
3. Economic and business development
4. Transportation and neighborhood/regional connectivity
5. Workforce and community development
6. Environmental stewardship and climate adaption

Mr. Beurle explained that although these general themes were created based off of the survey results, the Committee should take each of these items and make it their own. He also noted that “community character, heritage, and the arts” is something that was brought up frequently during Visioning Session discussions and is something that the Committee may want to consider adding into the themes somewhere.

Mr. Perras felt that the themes presented by Mr. Beurle looked good. Ms. Oram felt that community character could be added under “Workforce & Community Development.” Councilor Jones was happy with themes presented and stated that implementation plans should be created for each of these areas. Mr. Beurle noted that this would be done as part of the next phase of the project and that the Committee’s charge today is to flesh out the language, goals, and objectives related to these general themes.

Mr. Kost stated that he thought the proposed themes looked good; however, he wondered how the Committee could come up with implementation plans due to the interconnected nature of the themes with one another. Mayor Kahn stated that Keene’s “magnetism” is what will draw people in, if the community is engaged in each one of these themes. Ms. Brunner added that she heard many people in the Visioning Sessions mention that they came to Keene or enjoyed living here because of the opportunities for socializing and having fun. She was not sure how this could be incorporated into the proposed themes but did not want that feedback to be overlooked.

Mr. Perras noted that while he thinks that Keene is great, the community needs something that it can use to market itself as being truly exceptional. He thinks that the City may need to focus only on one or two of these areas at a time, for example, a “moonshot” for housing. Mr. Beurle noted that the implementation plans that will be created during the next phase of the project will help the City make progress towards all of these goals and work out priorities.

Mr. Rounds noted that when City Staff met with Mayor Kahn's Youth Council, they brought up the importance of childcare availability in the community. He thinks that capacity development may be another good focus area as well. Mr. Hoefler stated that he felt that community character may fit under "Economic and business development." Ms. Adams noted that a large chunk of the population will be retiring in the next several years and service availability for all ages (infants to elders) is also important.

Chair Farrington noted that some scenarios brought up by the Master Plan are within the City's "wheelhouse" and some are not. The City will not be able to address all of these topics alone. Mr. Beurle commented that this is where relationships with local organizations will need to come into play. Mr. Meehan noted that as a representative of Keene Housing, in his view one of the most helpful steps that the City can take to removing barriers for new housing are regulatory changes, including the recent Rural District minimum lot size reduction from 5 acres to 2 acres and the Cottage Court Conditional Use Permit process that recently went into effect.

Mr. Beurle asked committee members to split into breakout groups to discuss the proposed six themes. One member of each group presented the findings related to a particular theme at the end of the discussion.

Report-out on Environmental Stewardship & Adaptation (Theme #6)

Chair Farrington reported out for this group, which included himself, Ms. Adams and Jesse Rounds. He said they discussed the importance of maintaining environmental quality, the desire for more green/open space within residential areas and the city core (not just natural areas for the Rural District, but also accessible open spaces for other residential zoning districts), the need to maintain agricultural areas in and around the city (keeping in mind local farms and their important to our economy and culture), and being prepared for emerging technologies such as alternative fuel vehicles. He said this group also talked about respecting past plans, visions and commitments made by the city with respect to the environment. We do not need to start from scratch and should keep our past promises/commitments.

Report-out on Workforce and Community Development (Theme #5)

Vice Chair Henkel stated that his group, which included himself, Emily Levigne-Bernier, Councilor Workman, and Megan Fortson, discussed workforce and community development. He explained that his group discussed the fact that workforce development needs to match community needs and therefore should be reassessed regularly. They talked about creating a reciprocal relationship of positivity between the City and its residents, promoting local events and opportunities to draw people into the community (and retain them), evaluating what sectors of the workforce will be retiring in the next decade to help fill in the gaps, improving infrastructure for all life stages (childcare to eldercare), and working with young people in the community to fill in the gaps.

Report-out on Economic and Business Development (Theme #3)

Mr. Perras stated that his group, which included himself, Mayor Kahn, Joe Walier, Councilor Jones, and Evan Clements, was focused on economic and business development. They discussed how Keene could serve as a convenor for economic development across the region. He explained that the area of Sunapee, where he lived before moving to Keene, had an organization called a “Corporate Council,” which was different from a Chamber of Commerce, but brought together different sectors of the community to take action towards improving the community in doing things such as creating housing funds. He went on to explain that his group also discussed inventorying and creating workflows around grants, incentives, etc. and creating an updated City website with this information and a “How to Start a Business” tab that can be filled with resources for new business owners in the area. The idea is to make it as smooth and easy to do business here as possible. He ended his recap by stating that his group also discussed showing new businesses how Keene is “exceptional” through the promotion and creation of local events and by pairing job/learning opportunities with local educational institutions. He stated that he believes Keene can become exceptional through a series of small investments in the community.

Mayor Kahn added that an example of a small investment that could yield large results could be to invest in our farmer’s market to make it the best in a 40-mile radius. He said Keene also has the Monadnock Food Co-op and optics engineering that we could “lean into” to make exceptional. His group also discussed launching a new business incubator.

Report-out on Housing Availability and Affordability (Theme #2)

Ms. Oram stated that her group, which included Josh Meehan, Michael Hoefler, Ken Kost, and Mari Brunner, was focused on housing availability and affordability. She explained that her group discussed the need to offer a wide spectrum of housing types, housing mobility and availability, creating the position of a housing concierge in the community, streamlining the development process, offering tax incentives, creating partnerships with businesses to develop housing for employees, and creating an inventory of lots available for development or redevelopment. Ms. Brunner added that the group discussed the walkability of Keene as an attractor for new residents and the opportunity to add housing density in the downtown and surrounding areas, possibly through public-private partnerships. Keene offers the amenities of city living with lots of New England/small-town charm.

Report-out on Transportation and Regional / Neighborhood Connectivity (Theme #4)

Mr. Farrington stated that his group also discussed theme #4, which was related to transportation and neighborhood/regional connectivity. He explained that his group discussed both movement within the City and between Keene and the surrounding towns. They discussed exploring alternative modes of transportation, transportation funding and ownership models (such as a joint City-employer relationship), organizing and incentivizing volunteer transportation opportunities within the community, and assessing parking needs and potential solutions. Other possibilities discussed also included the maintenance and expansion of the existing trail network.

None of the groups discussed Theme #1, “Community collaboration and strategic positioning.”

4. Upcoming Public Engagement Opportunities:

- a. Tabling at Keene Sentinel Celebration Event on September 7th
- b. Tabling at Monadnock Clean Energy Fair on September 28th
- c. Future Summit on October 5th, 9 AM-12 PM at Heberton Hall

Ms. Brunner ran through a number of public engagement opportunities that will be occurring during the months of September and October. She mentioned an opportunity that was not included on the agenda is the Keene International Festival, which will be September 28 at Fuller Park and the Recreation Center. Chair Farrington, Councilor Workman, and Mr. Kost volunteered to work at the Keene Sentinel Celebration Event on September 7th. Mayor Kahn volunteered to work at the Keene International Festival on September 28th. City Staff said that they would email out additional information about these events.

5. New Business

No new business was raised.

6. Next Meeting: Tuesday, September 3 at 6:00 PM

7. Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Farrington adjourned the meeting at 7:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Megan Fortson, Planner
August 7, 2024

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner