

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HERITAGE COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, September 11, 2024

4:30 PM

**2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Cauley Powell, Chair
Molly Ellis, Vice Chair
Marilyn Huston
Julie Emineth
Rose Carey, Alternate
Louise Zerba, Alternate

Staff Present:

Evan Clements, Planner

Members Not Present:

All Present

1) Call to Order – Roll Call

Chair Powell called the meeting to order at 4:33 PM. Roll call was conducted.

2) Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes – June 12, 2024

Ms. Ellis noted a typo on page 2, line 73; Julie Emineth's last name is spelled wrong.

Ms. Huston made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of June 12, 2024, as amended. Ms. Ellis seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) 2022 CLG – Recovering Black History Project in Keene

A) Final Presentation

Chair Powell welcomed Kabria Baumgartner, here to give her presentation.

Ms. Baumgartner stated that she has had the great pleasure, for the past year and a half, to lead this research project exploring 19th century Black history in Keene. She continued that she has presented parts of this research before, along with her students, but today she will share some of the major findings and key themes they have come across. She will also offer recommendations for pushing this work forward. The final report will have a few more recommendations.

Ms. Baumgartner continued that her research project focuses on the 19th century, but it is part of a larger effort: Recovering Black History in the Monadnock Region, led by Jenna Carroll at the Cheshire County Historical Society and Michelle Stahl at the Monadnock Center for History and Culture. This multi-year project has a mighty team of volunteer researchers, “citizen archivists” who search through thousands of archival materials. She herself, as a historian, was brought into review, expand, and contextualize the work those citizen archivists have done. The work was part of a grant supported by the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, the Certified Local Government Grant Program, and the Heritage Commission. It is a great partnership. She also thanks her Northeastern students, Grace Rooney, Janika Dillon, Emily Boyer, Laurel Schlegel, and Ellie Witham. Their goals were to review the research collected by Ms. Carroll and her team, identify new research paths, and interpret and contextualize these sources.

Ms. Baumgartner continued that even when looking through thousands of archival materials, such as Census records and military records, you will only get a glimpse of people’s lives, especially people who come from disadvantaged and minoritized backgrounds. The records are imperfect. For example, some are informed by the subjective and possibly stereotypical views of minimally trained Census workers. Documents are sometimes fragmented, inaccurate, or in conflict with other documents. The inability to get a complete view of people, events, and places when researching Black history is frustrating, and stories may be incomplete. Acknowledging that archives are a place of power and privilege as well as exclusion, they are capitalizing on tried and true archival research methods to shed some light on Black history in Keene.

Ms. Baumgartner stated that historian Ira Berlin argues that until the final break with slavery on January 1, 1863, the north was part of a slave-holding republic. This is important context to keep in mind while thinking about the legacy of slavery in the US, New England, and NH. Although its population of enslaved people was relatively small compared to MA, RI, and other New England colonies, NH was very much part of this legacy of slavery. The estimates she and her students found are imperfect and likely undercounts, but there were 656 enslaved people in NH in 1775, and 158 in 1790 (the first US Census). That is about 1% of the total population. In Cheshire County, about 18 enslaved people were counted. One might thus think slavery was not a big deal in NH. But it was. Despite the low numbers of enslaved people, slavery as a system was brutal, inhumane, and oppressive, meant to extract Black people’s life and labor. It had a terrible, harmful impact on Black cultural development in the 19th and 20th century.

Ms. Baumgartner continued that slavery’s harmful impact on Black cultural development is particularly evident in the story of Roxanna Plantain. A New Hampshire Sentinel article from 1876 says Ms. Plantain’s burial plot says, “*She was colored, and once a slave.*” Another article says she died at age 46 at the residence of Henry Door. He was a wealthy, white merchant. There are many questions, such as who enslaved her (they cannot be certain it was Mr. Door), and over what period of time, and whether it was in NH. At this time, ambiguity surrounded the legality of slavery in NH. Most historians argue that there was a gradual demise to the system of slavery, which is why she says there is a legacy of it, and why it shapes the experiences of African Americans. One scholar concludes slavery was legal in NH until 1865, so there is a

strong possibility that Ms. Plantain and/or others were enslaved in NH well into the 19th century, even if Census records do not capture that.

Ms. Baumgartner stated that she questions the usefulness of the categories “slavery” and “freedom.” Many historians argue it is a misleading binary. Jared Hardesty refers to slavery as “a continuum of unfreedom.” Slavery was one of many forms of coerced, unfree labor. She thinks the “continuum of unfreedom” concept offers a fruitful approach to exploring the experiences of African Americans, because sometimes their status could not be categorized as “free” or “enslaved.” Probing whether and how long slavery continued in NH is beyond this research’s scope, but even if they cannot be certain that some African Americans were enslaved in NH in the 19th century, they can be certain they were unfree.

Ms. Baumgartner continued that this is clear in the story of Phoebe Simmons. Ms. Carroll and her team uncovered Ms. Simmons’s story and she (Ms. Baumgartner) and her team found more about her. Born in Rockingham, VT around 1800, Ms. Simmons was separated from her parents due to some tragedy and placed with Simon and Margaret Baxter of Surrey, NH. Ms. Simmons and her sister worked for decades as domestic servants. Ms. Simmons’s unfreedom is clear when, in 1823, Ms. Baxter gave Ms. Simmons to Ms. Baxter’s granddaughter, Elvira Shawn Robinson. This is in Census records, which then identify Ms. Simmons as a “*free woman of color*” in 1840. In the 1850s, Ms. Simmons relocated to Keene with the Robinson family, continuing work as a domestic servant in their house. It is not clear whether she earned a wage. Jonathan Robinson, Elvira Robinson’s husband, died in 1870 and willed annual money “*to my servant Phoebe Simmons.*” She has seen 18th century records in which white enslavers sometimes willed money to their servants, so it is interesting to see Mr. Robinson willing money to Ms. Simmons in 1870. Ms. Simmons died in 1886 and is buried in the Robinson lot at the Woodland Cemetery.

Ms. Baumgartner continued that what happened to Ms. Simmons also happened to other children in Cheshire County who were either impoverished, orphaned, or perhaps forcibly taken from their parents. It is hard to find records about these children from their own perspective. Runaway notices published in local newspapers are interesting. She and her team found six notices, in Cheshire County newspapers, of children of color fleeing their captors/people who claimed ownership of the children. Four ads were in Keene. A notice from 1798 was for Dick Simon, an indigenous boy who was indentured in the home of a physician and innkeeper. One from 1810 was for an unnamed mulatto girl, age 13, in the household of a physician. One from 1819 was for a black boy apprentice, William Cransel Casey; and one from 1819 was for an indentured black boy, Henry Hemenway, in the home of a sea captain from MA who settled in Keene. These children’s names and condition are known to us only through their brave act of running away. The captors published the runaway ads due to wanting the child returned or not wanting to incur debts on the child’s behalf. She has many unanswered questions about these ads, such as how many children were indentured in Keene and the County, how many were children of color, the stories of children who ran away but were quickly caught, and the stories of children unable to run away. Clearly, the experiences of African Americans of all ages in 19th

century NH cannot be truly captured as “enslaved” or “free.” She would describe it as being in between enslaved and free.

Ms. Baumgartner stated that she and her research team noticed that African American families in NH often crossed geographical borders and boundaries, for a range of reasons not always clear in the archival documentation. They were surprised to not find any manuscript records for Black Keene residents in the 19th century. There are far more in other parts of New England. Thus, they had to follow their movements, and look at the NH, MA, and VT borders. They saw that most Black people in Keene were not long-term residents. She thinks this constant moving was partially due to the legacy of slavery and unfreedom. African American families and kin networks were constantly separated and broken by slavery and unfreedom. By the 1800s, even the “free” Black families sometimes did not fare any better, due to facing obstacles, insecurities, and hardships, and not having the benefit of a social welfare system.

Ms. Baumgartner continued that an example is the Hemenway family. Mr. and Mrs. Hemenway were married in Peterborough in 1806. Mr. Hemenway was likely enslaved 30 miles from Keene in MA, then won his freedom and somehow purchased property in MA. The Hemenways had six children, and she believes four were born in Keene. One was Henry Hemenway, one of the runaway children she referenced earlier in the presentation. The question is how and why Henry was separated from his parents and taken away. They (Ms. Baumgartner and her team) found a journal of a homemaker in Keene, which included writings about the Hemenways and their comings and goings across the border. But something unknown happened to the Hemenways, possibly a financial catastrophe of some kind. Mr. Hemenway died in a workhouse for the poor in 1827 at age 68, and it is possible that Mrs. Hemenway and her children then became indentured and maybe that is how Henry Hemenway became indentured in Keene. Thus, by 1830, they see this once-free Black family scattered across two states, and some are unfree or otherwise in precarious positions, as seen in the ads for runaway children.

Ms. Baumgartner continued that they do not know the fate of the children in the runaway ads, but they know that Henry Hemenway was able to find freedom. He returned to Littleton, his mother’s hometown, and worked as a farmer. In 1849, he married Eliza Gigger in Gardner, MA. Ms. Gigger claimed indigenous ancestry, as did Henry. Their son, James, was born in 1851. She found no record of Henry ever returning to Keene, which seems to be a pattern for African Americans, where they are in Keene for a short time and leave, never to return.

Ms. Baumgartner stated that Sophira Mero’s story is similar. She continued that she is probably connected to the Mero family of Woodstock, VT. Little is known about her, but it is interesting to follow her movement based on letters in the post office. They see her in Hanover, NH, Windsor and Woodstock, VT, then Keene in 1850 when there was a letter for her at the post office. She was residing in the home of a ship captain, who died in 1850, and then Ms. Mero moved to Boston. She died the next year. They wish they knew more of Ms. Mero’s story, beyond the post office records, but she is another example of a child of color likely bound out to service and unable to grow up with her family. That separation ends up being lifelong.

Ms. Baumgartner stated that the US Census in 1830 lists eight African American heads of households in Cheshire County, which is interesting. None are in Keene. Something about Keene is not hospitable to a Black head of household. All African Americans in Keene in 1830 are not leading their own household, which means they are probably in some position of unfreedom. However, there are examples of African Americans who move to Keene for opportunity or business, like John Louie. He and his wife lived in Keene in the first decade of the 19th century. The newspaper identifies him as a hairdresser, one of the few professions then open to Black men, and somewhat lucrative. In 1800, Mr. Louie posted an ad reminding his clients to pay him for services rendered, and in 1804, he advertised in the newspaper for an “*active black boy*” to serve as an apprentice. Mr. Louie and his wife took in poor and indigent people; there is evidence of the Town of Keene paying Mr. Louie in 1806 for boarding Roby Gardner. Her team was glad to find that piece of information, because they wanted to see if there were connections among African Americans in Keene. They did not find many, but this was one, as they had seen Roby Gardner’s name elsewhere and then this link to Mr. Louie. Thus, there may have been a small, close-knit community.

Ms. Baumgartner continued that after Mr. Louie’s wife died in 1808, he moved to Amherst, NH, then Montpelier, VT, and they do not know what happened to him after that. There are no further records of him in Keene. Two Black barbers followed in Mr. Louie’s footsteps 40 years later and settled in Keene. One is Francis Green, his wife, and their adopted 2-year-old daughter; and the other is Philip Edge, who moved with his wife from VA to Keene. African Americans like Mr. Green and Mr. Edge have an entrepreneurial spirit, launching hairdressing businesses, seeking economic independence. However, going with the pattern, neither of them stay in Keene long. By 1855, Mr. Edge had moved to MA. The Francis family left Keene, too, but they do not know why or where they went. It could have been business failure, racial prejudice, both, or some other factor. In the Civil War era, there are not many African Americans in Keene. The 1860 US Census only counts three: Phoebe Simmons, Harriet Hemenway, and Fannie Armstead. The trend is similar in the 1870 and 1880 Censuses.

Ms. Baumgartner stated that tracing the experiences of African Americans is elusive, given the lack of archival records, but they do have these small slivers and stories, although incomplete. They lead to more questions than answers, but provoking questions that lead researchers toward interesting historical patterns and findings is important. It is important to think about the legacy of slavery in NH, and unfreedom as a major problem, and how African Americans are moving across borders and why. It is important to think about African Americans’ struggles to thrive in ‘small town NH.’ If asked what the profile was of Black Keene residents in the 19th century, she would say that life was difficult, unpredictable, isolating, and challenging. The only Black residents who stayed in Keene long term were Phoebe Simmons and Harriet Hemenway, seen in the Census from about 1850 to 1880. They were domestic servants, unmarried, and without children, serving white households their entire lives. Although she and her researchers did not find other Black residents or families who stayed in Keene for a long period of time, it does not mean African Americans did not shape the town/city. They absolutely did.

Ms. Baumgartner stated that finally, she will talk briefly about the recommendations she has, based on her findings. One is historical exhibits on Keene's Black History, which she is sure Ms. Carroll is working on. Her (Ms. Baumgartner's) student, Laurel Schlegel, created a website called Escaped Ads New Hampshire. She looked at the first 15 years of the New Hampshire Sentinel, and it is stark thinking about how many people were indentured/unfree and how many ads were placed in the paper. That could be an interesting exhibit, leading to discussions of unfreedom, poverty, and orphaned children in the 19th century before a child welfare system existed.

Ms. Baumgartner continued that she strongly recommends interpretive signs. The physical location of a marker or interpretative panel depends on many factors, such as accessibility and pricing. Such an initiative acknowledges place-based history and highlights lesser-known stories and people. Keene has sites that would be good spots for such signs or markers. Partnering with the Black Heritage Trail of NH would be helpful, as they already have a successful program like this, with fantastic unveilings. Much research goes into crafting the wordings of the signs.

She continued that the final recommendation is a lecture series, which can convey nuance and historical context in ways that interpretive markers and historical exhibits cannot. This would be an important space for the hardworking volunteers who have done so much research, to foster or continue that kind of community engagement. A lecture series could be in partnership with the Keene Public Library or a similar organization and could spotlight the citizen archivists' work.

Ms. Baumgartner stated that it has been great pursuing this work and this research, and there is more to be done. This is an ongoing story.

Chair Powell thanked Ms. Baumgartner for her wonderful presentation. She continued that she was surprised to hear that Keene was not a hub, because she thought it would have been. She asked if Ms. Baumgartner had any idea why that might have been the case. She would imagine that a hub would be where you would find people, and the rural farming communities surrounding Keene would be less likely, but it sounds like the reverse was true.

Ms. Baumgartner replied that she was surprised, too. She continued that she fully expected to see a couple African American heads of households in the 1830 Census, and there were none. Keene had a relatively small population from the 1790s into the first few decades of the 19th century, and many of the African Americans in the farming towns had ties to those areas via enslavement. She found that if those African Americans in NH farming towns moved, they went not to Keene, but to a larger community in the urban north.

Ms. Ellis stated that she had a question about the reward money regarding the runaway ads. She continued that she sees that the offered rewards were one cent or five cents, which is so tiny. She asked if those were just token rewards, or if they were really meant to lure people.

Ms. Baumgartner replied that she thinks it had more to do with the captors/guardians trying to establish that they were not going to incur debts on behalf of those runaway children. She continued that there are examples, too, of runaway adults, such as wives. She thinks the ads' intentions were sometimes more about ensuring no debts were being incurred, and less about trying to get help finding the person, because yes, the rewards were not high. It is interesting that this was not uncommon in Keene or NH. It was particularly prevalent in Portsmouth and Manchester, too. Ads for (runaway) indentured children were widespread.

Ms. Huston stated that she has been researching Mary Dolby. She continued that she found that she was interned with the Amos Fortune family, information she found in a book about slavery in NH, written about five years ago. It has other names, too; it was an exciting find. She asked what part the Amos Fortune family played with the other Black families. She wonders if they helped those who were enslaved or indentured then freed, because they (the Amos Fortune family) seemed to be better off.

Ms. Baumgartner replied that that is an exciting find, because she found Mary Dolby in the 1850 Census living in the household of George Balch. She continued that Ms. Dolby was 18 then, and thus fits the profile of an indentured young woman. She asked who Ms. Huston means by "Amos Fortune," because there are a couple in New England, but the one she knows of was not necessarily connected to Keene. Ms. Huston replied he was in Peterborough. Ms. Baumgartner replied that there are these small enclaves of African American families, who do have some connection, but the archives do not allow her a full understanding of that connection. Seeing Roby Gardner and John Louie in the same household led her to believe there was a connection there, which is so hard to find when looking at some of these Black families in Keene, Peterborough, other parts of NH, and VT. There is a much larger Black population in MA, but in NH and VT, she does not have those manuscript sources that would tell her how the families were connected.

Ms. Huston asked if Ms. Baumgartner's research students went to the Jaffrey Library, because it has a whole floor dedicated to Amos Fortune. Ms. Baumgartner replied no, their remit was just Keene. Ms. Huston replied that she was wondering if there was more information at the Jaffrey Library that could be obtained. Ms. Baumgartner replied that she thinks there is a lecture series in Jaffrey that has the Amos Fortune name. She continued that those archivists have done great work to uncover his story.

Chair Powell asked what Ms. Baumgartner was referring to when she mentioned the letters being listed in the newspaper. She asked if that was uncollected mail people were trying to recover, or something else. Ms. Baumgartner replied yes, it could be uncollected mail; it was usually an announcement saying, 'There are letters for you in the post office that you ought to pick up.'

Chair Powell stated that she had not realized that NH had not created any sort of legal designation until the 13th Amendment, which would have overridden it. She asked if there is

nothing in the NH State Constitution that would include that language. MA did this very early in their State Constitution.

Ms. Baumgartner replied that she thinks it is worth examining more of that legal history. She continued that she thinks scholars are divided on the issue. There is often a myth that MA abolished slavery in 1783, and it did not. The State encouraged people to stop enslaving other people, so it was more of a cultural kind of push. Some people cite the Quock Walker case. Quock Walker was freed, but not all enslaved people were. Historian Gloria Whiting has examples of enslaved people in MA well into the 1790s, even though the MA Census says there are zero enslaved people then. This is why Census records are not reliable. They need to look at the categorization and how they are thinking of “slavery” and “freedom.” Some NH scholars say it was very ambiguous. She saw a Census record showing zero enslaved people in NH for a certain decade, and 30 years later, the Census showed three enslaved people. There is an undercount, and she thinks people are being miscategorized. Slavery was still shaping NH well into the 1840s and 1850s. A law passed in about 1857 declared citizenship for people of color, and some historians argue that that is when slavery ended in NH, but another historian says no, it did not really end until the 13th Amendment in 1865.

Ms. Ellis asked if Ms. Baumgartner has ideas about what other reasons might be that Keene and the Cheshire County area in general were off-putting to Black families, and why they kept coming and leaving. She wonders if it was the culture, or if they were just looking for more business opportunities, or something else.

Ms. Baumgartner replied that larger urban areas such as Portsmouth, Boston, Providence, and Worcester had religious, social, and educational institutions, and Portsmouth had a school for African American children. She continued that those made a huge difference and made it possible for an African American community to emerge and thrive. She does not have any examples of that in Keene. She cannot find a single literary society for Black children or adults, or a religious or educational institution. It does not mean those things do not exist, but she cannot find them. She is reminded of the story of Harriet Wilson, who was indentured in Milford and suffered abuse in that household. Ms. Wilson talks about how isolating it was. When she had the opportunity to move, she did, and moved to Boston. The institutions that glued Black communities together are just not seen in Keene.

Chair Powell stated that the HC is so appreciative of the work Ms. Baumgartner and her students have put into this project, and the contribution they are making to the community by doing this work. She continued that she cannot wait to see the final report, and she hopes they will then have time and opportunities to consider the recommendations Ms. Baumgartner proposes for the next steps. She hopes this can be considered just an early stage in this kind of research.

Ms. Baumgartner replied yes, that is her hope. She continued that she is happy to help and support in any way, especially with the marker program, which has a nice structure established by the Black Heritage Trail. That is one of the more immediate things they absolutely could do.

B) Project Hours

Mr. Clements stated that some people had emailed him regarding the number of hours they worked on the project as part of the grant agreement included a contribution of volunteer and staff hours worked in lieu of a monetary commitment. He asked Chair Powell how many hours she worked. Chair Powell replied she worked 20 hours total on the project.

Ms. Huston stated that she found out that when Black slaves passed away, they were buried in the back of the cemetery with a number, and she sees in (Ms. Baumgartner's presentation) a copy of the book "*Properties Ledger and Account Book, Town Expenses, City of Keene.*" She continued that she found out yesterday that that book is downstairs in the Clerk's office. She was wondering if anyone came across that book when they were doing research. Chair Powell replied that she thinks Ms. Baumgartner might have looked at it here.

Chair Powell stated that she thinks at the HC's next meeting, they will sort of dot the Is and cross the Ts. She asked, regarding the website links, if the newspaper website Ms. Baumgartner mentioned is linked within the project specific website. It sounds very interesting. Mr. Clements replied that he thinks Ms. Baumgartner sent it to him separately, with a note saying it was not quite ready, but it sounds like it is now, so he will send it around. The overall project website that her students put together will be part of the package that they sent to DHR for the grant. Chair Powell stated that it is great to be able to go through that website, the Google Drive, and all the photos and archival elements they found. She continued that it is interesting that the results show Keene was not a place of continual residency during that time period.

Ms. Huston stated that several of the females, on her list of people to research, were very prominent during the plague. She continued that they took care of the community, going house to house to take care of people. They were highly regarded for their care. She wonders if they were taught to take care of people, or if they were used, put in a situation that could backfire on them. There was not enough information.

Chair Powell stated that she was curious about, and should have asked about Keene's location at this corner between VT, NH, and MA, the different policies within those states and communities, and whether there was something that suggested that traveling to a different state, where in other circumstances you might just be going to a different town. Keene is so close to all these borders, that maybe there is an advantage. Or maybe people just did not want to live here.

Ms. Emineth replied that at the time, Keene was not as big as what they are thinking of, and as Ms. Baumgartner said, there were no support systems. Others agreed.

Chair Powell stated that they will talk about the project at their next meeting.

4) Staff Updates

A) Downtown Project Design Elements Discussion

Mr. Clements stated that quite a while ago when the Downtown Project was getting a lot of attention and getting people riled up, the HC wrote a letter of general support for the project, reminding the City Council to think of not just the present but also the future and the heritage of the community. He continued that the Public Works Director at the time said that once they get into the design details for the streetscape, they would be interested in getting input from the HC. He (Mr. Clements) has started that conversation with Brett Rusnock from Public Works, who is the Project Manager for this. Mr. Rusnock is working with Stantec, the consultant, to put together a design presentation. They would present it to the HC at one of the HC's meetings, to go over the design ideas and get the HC's feedback. The HC members should start thinking, in the back of their minds, about "what makes Keene, Keene," in terms of a streetscape design. He will keep them updated on when that presentation might be; it is nebulous now.

In response to a question, Mr. Clements clarified that they are not talking about street orientation or any of those "big" elements, which have already been decided. He continued that the HC would be giving feedback just on design details, such as benches, light poles, ideas of entryway arches, and so on and so forth.

Ms. Huston stated that she does not understand why the City pays so much money to consultants, instead of relying on the wonderful staff the City already has. Mr. Clements replied that it is mostly about capacity. He explained the abilities and limitations of various City departments and job positions, in relation to the wide variety of elements of the Downtown Project and in relation to the other job duties staff members perform beyond working on the Downtown Project. He gave examples of how City staff have expertise in certain project elements but not others, so hiring consultants makes sense and is cost effective. Ms. Huston thanked him for the explanation. Brief discussion continued about City staff positions and the work they do, and Keene in general as a good place to live.

Ms. Ellis stated that to her, Keene has been a wonderful place to live and has many wonderful community institutions and she never wants to leave, but it is good to look at it through the lens of whether Keene has community institutions/support for other people, people who differ from her and her family in various ways. She wants Keene to be a good place to live for any/all people. Ms. Huston replied that she recently met someone who had just moved to Keene from Seattle, after having carefully researched Keene and deciding it was the place for him. She continued that there are people like him who are doing their research.

Chair Powell stated that Ms. Ellis makes a good point, and they should keep those thoughts in mind.

B) Master Plan Future Summit – Saturday, October 5, 2024

Mr. Clements stated that the Master Plan Future Summit on October 5 is the next step in Phase I of the Master Plan update. He continued that all of Phase I is public input, public engagement, and the questions, “What is Keene?” “What is working?” “Where do we sit in the region and where do we want to go?” “What are our goals and aspirations for the community?” The conversation started way out there, and they are now slowly solidifying those ideas into five strategic pillars for strategic positioning and growth to maintain the healthy community that already exists. Many times, master plans are created as a result of people not being entirely happy with where the community is at, but what is exciting is that Keene is already doing very well. That is what the consultants who have been doing a lot of research on Keene have found. The consultants have done many master plan projects for communities that, for example, do not have jobs, are not strategically located, or are struggling to carve a niche for themselves. When the consultants then look at Keene and say, “Wow, you’re in really good shape,” that feels good to hear.

Mr. Clements continued that however, Keene has a declining and aging population, and one of the measures of health in a community is a stable, slowly growing population. A question is how to attract young people to Keene and get them to stay. Another question is how Keene prepares for an uncertain future. The next step is the Summit, at which they will talk about those five pillars, which relate to economic health, climate adaptation, cultural impacts, and so on and so forth. They want public feedback on what they have so far, and then they will move into Phase II. Phase II is the document design and the nitty gritty details, such as the goals and strategies to actually achieve where we want to be in 20 years. To see what has been done so far, people can go to keenemasterplan.com. It shows the questions and results of the community survey that has already been done, demographic data, the “community life score” from the AARP, and more.

Mr. Clements stated that one of Keene’s biggest challenges is that it is a community of about 23,000 people, which swells to about 50,000 people every working day. Public Works, for example, budgets for 50,000 users on a 23,000-person taxpayer budget. Discussion continued. Mr. Clements continued that one question is how to get some of those people who come into Keene for work every day to actually live in Keene. HC members replied that the lack of housing makes it hard. Mr. Clements replied absolutely, and that is a huge component of the master plan update.

5) **New Business**

Chair Powell asked if there was any new business. (No)

6) **Next Meeting – November 13, 2024**

Chair Powell stated that the next meeting is in November, because the HC is returning to meeting every other month. She continued that if something comes up before then and Mr. Clements wants them to consider an October meeting, they could do that.

7) **Adjourn**

There being no further business, Chair Powell adjourned the meeting at 6:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Evan J. Clements, AICP
Planner