

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Thursday, January 9, 2025**

**6:00 PM**

**Council Chamber,  
City Hall**

**Members Present:**

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

**Staff Present:**

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager  
Amanda Palmeira, Asst. City Attorney  
Jason Martin, Fire Chief  
Greg Seymour, Deputy Fire Chief  
Don Lussier, Public Works Director  
Terri Hood, Deputy City Clerk  
Beth Fox, Asst. City Manager/HR Director

**Members Not Present:**

*All Present*

Chair Powers called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. The Committee had no objection to Councilor Remy joining the session remotely.

**1) Continued Discussion: Councilor Filiault - Proposing that the City Council Consider a Delay in the Downtown Infrastructure Project**

City Manager Elizabeth Dragon stated that given the concerns expressed by downtown businesses, staff is not opposed to a one-year delay in the construction timeline. If the Council decides to delay the project, staff will plan to issue the bid in September or October 2025 with a target date of 2026 for construction. In the meantime, staff would apply for a federal Raise Grant. Applications for this round are due at the end of January. If the Council decides to proceed with the current construction schedule, the grant submission will focus on phases two and three of the project. However, if Council chooses to delay the staff will apply for the full project.

The Manager indicated there are no guarantees of receiving funding, the grant is a significant opportunity for funding. It is important to note that the city's initial application wasn't selected as a project of merit and hence won't be reviewed in the first round of applications. She added staff did conduct a debrief with the federal government (FHWA staff) and they provided feedback on where the city's application performed well and where the application didn't score maximum points. The staff will use that information to strengthen the submission this time around.

Additionally, staff will be asking council support in engaging the N.H. Congressional Delegation. Just yesterday, staff reached out to Pam Slack from Senator Shaheen's office, and

she has agreed to assist the city in securing a support letter. Staff will also be reaching out to Senator Hassan's office for their support. The Manager indicated having backing from our delegation is a critical component of this process.

There are financial risks to consider, particularly related to the potential escalation of construction costs and market fluctuations, as discussed at the last FOP meeting. However, delaying construction would allow the city to bid the project months ahead of the plan schedule. This additional time would enable staff to collaborate with the contractor, better understand their construction approach, and communicate those details to businesses and residents, and address concerns proactively. Moreover, it would provide an opportunity to pursue federal funding for the full project through the Raise Grant, potentially significantly reducing the burden on taxpayers.

The Manager went on to say, ultimately, the decision rests with the council. It is a matter of weighing the financial risk associated with cost uncertainties and market fluctuations, with the opportunity for substantial federal funding that could alleviate financial impacts on the community and all the while considering the concerns the committee heard from the downtown business community. City staff is prepared to move forward in 2025 or 2026 based on council direction.

Councilor Remy stated that he appreciates the update the Manager just provided and stated that he was able to obtain the information he was looking for.

Councilor Roberts stated this is a difficult decision. This is an issue that has been going on for a long time. He raised concerns about the incoming administration and the discretionary funding they would be looking to cut which this project would fall under. He stated he would begrudgingly support the delay as he knows how the price of construction can change.

Pam Slack addressed the committee and stated she could on behalf of Senator Shaheen's office indicate what the office can do to support the city. She went on to say that based on the many unknowns, she felt it was prudent to delay this project.

Mr. Rowland Russell of 77 High Street talked about a similar situation with Antioch University and their construction project. He talked about the delay with their project and the increased price of construction during the delay. Eventually, the increased price became 2 1/2 times for the budget. He stated he wanted to make sure that we do all we can to support our businesses and it is going to fall on citizens to do that hopefully not through higher taxes.

Councilor Tobin stated she has concerns about delaying the project and felt communication can be improved and she looks forward to doing that. She talked about the delay with the skate park and the increase to cost that it caused. She also referred to the increase in construction costs that could be forthcoming. The Councilor stated at last year's pumpkin fest a section of downtown was flooded, and she was relieved that this issue was going to get fixed. She agreed this issue is going to be difficult, but she will show up and support downtown businesses.

Mr. Ted McGreer stated he has been downtown for 25 years so his business has staying power compared to newer businesses that could face challenges. He is happy there is some thought being given to delaying the project. Mr. McGreer clarified with the Manager the last time the city applied for the Raise Grant they did not have a solidified plan in place. The Manager agreed. Mr. McGreer noted with a more solid plan and with the support of Senator Shaheen's office there is a higher likelihood the city could receive the grant this time around.

Councilor Filiault stated that when he originally wrote this letter it was on behalf of the downtown merchants, and he was not sure how many were going to show up. He noted that there were nearly two dozen merchants who showed up tonight to address the committee to express their deep concerns and to indicate that some won't be able to survive the construction period. He felt that there is enough reason to delay the project by a calendar year. He added as that as the City Manager just alluded to, the City has a more significant chance of getting the Raise Grant the second time around, which is close to a million dollars. He added there are also other grants the city could apply for.

Councilor Filiault agreed there is always a calculated risk that the cost could go up but in this situation the risk of putting multiple businesses out of business is a risk he didn't want to take. The City now has a good chance of receiving multi-million dollars in grants that it did not receive before and he felt there is no taxpayer who would want to turn that down because the grants would reduce what the taxpayers would have put into the downtown project. He felt that between the two calculated risks; one is going to help the downtown merchants survive another year while they can put funds away for an upcoming project and the second is a good potential of getting multi-million dollars in grant funds to reduce taxpayer burden. He felt those two are reasons enough to delay this project a year.

Mr. Jim Sterling of Jordan Road stated he was a business owner and understands the concerns being raised. He felt every small business owner has the anxiety that they could go out of business. He noted that new businesses are opening daily and felt the upcoming infrastructure issue is not slowing that down. He mentioned the three-year roundabout project on Island Street and Winchester Street and questioned if anyone went out of business due to that project.

He talked about the new administration coming in and the potential of prices going up significantly. Mr. Sterling stated receiving this grant is also unlikely with the changes coming up with the new administration.

Mr. Jared Goodell of 39 Central Square was the next speaker. Mr. Goodell stated the question before the committee is whether a major infrastructure project should be paused. He stated the committee must decide how much weight should be given to the things that are outside of the control of City government. He pointed out that the purpose of City government is limited but important. Public safety is a leading responsibility, and a close second is public infrastructure. When public infrastructure systems fail the Council and City administration have failed the City. It is undisputed that the aging infrastructure on Main Street and Central Square need to be addressed. Mr. Goodell stated it is disingenuous for many of those asking to delay the project to suggest that the downtown businesses have not had proper notice or time to prepare. He felt this project has been the talk of the town for years.

Mr. Goodell went on to say that this project has given the downtown stakeholders more time than many other businesses in other areas of the City which have had work done on their infrastructure and roadways. The Key Road project in Keene made an outlet road virtually inaccessible for more than a year and that project did not receive this level of attention or notice. Those businesses, many small locally owned businesses, survived. Mr. Goodell reminded the committee that they represent thousands of constituents not just those downtown merchants.

He did not feel the possibility that some downtown businesses may close because of this project should be given considerable weight in the committee's deliberations regarding delay. Businesses come and go every day; businesses are closing on Main Street now and there is no work being done. Business entrepreneurs are opening new businesses on the eve of a major infrastructure project. Mr. Goodell stated from the standpoint of downtown businesses, there will never be a good time for this project. For the taxpayers, now is the best time to start this project. Taxpayers in Keene are saddled with some of the highest tax rates in the state. He stated the City has a chance to mitigate further increases in taxes by getting shovels in the ground as soon as possible.

With respect to grants, Mr. Goodell stated as the Manager stated these funds are a "maybe". The City has been denied once and it could be denied again. He felt if a water or sewer line breaks this would be a higher cost to the taxpayers.

Mr. Goodell in closing stated, Councilor Roberts had stated he would begrudgingly support a delay and asked that the committee not begrudgingly make significant financial decisions for the City. Do what is right for the City – which means every taxpayer.

Ms. Roberta Mastrogiovanni, owner of Corner News, addressed the committee and stated she agrees with Councilor Filiault. She stated that being able to perhaps get a grant and giving some thought to downtown businesses should be reason enough to delay this project by a year. She noted no downtown merchants' numbers have increased but they would be able to rally after a year.

Mr. Sterling addressed the committee again and stated what the downtown businesses are asking for is a grant from the taxpayers of Keene. He felt the City should be asking for financial statements from downtown businesses before it decides to delay the project. He did not feel the anxiety of downtown businesses should be a reason to increase our taxes.

Mr. Russell spoke for a second time stating he would like to stress the need to preserve the integrity of the plan regardless of when it is done. He stated the committee working on this project has come up with a good plan and wanted to make sure that plan is preserved; making downtown pedestrian friendly, raised sidewalks, etc.

Ms. Beth Doyle, Owner of Moe, stated she has been in business for 29 years. She stated she came in after the last beautification project and got her space when most businesses were put out. She indicated a new business doesn't start making money for the first three years. And traffic is what helps make businesses thrive and the project would have an effect on that. Ms. Doyle

agreed that they have heard about this project, but the information provided has not been consistent. She stated that downtown thrives because of all the businesses that exist, if one or two fail that would have an impact on everyone. She asked the City to give them one more year to be better prepared.

Chair Powers stated the City Clerk's office received a letter from a local business owner who has asked that the project not be delayed.

Councilor Lake stated he did speak for and against delaying this project. He stated he is glad to hear about the City going out for funding again. The Councilor stated from an infrastructure perspective extending the period that the City might be able to work with the construction companies, speaks a lot to him of instead of trying to rush the bid process. He felt going out to bid in the fall, giving additional time over the winter and into the spring to collaborate with the construction company and downtown businesses was a great piece of information he was able to receive tonight.

Councilor Chadbourne felt that there have been good points raised both in support of delaying and in support of not delaying the project. She stated she has heard from taxpayers about the increase in taxes and what kind of effect the new administration coming in would have on this issue. The Councilor stated she likes the idea of being able to apply for this grant and be more prepared but added it is a risk. She referred to the various stories she had heard about people falling in love with the downtown, which is the heart of our city.

Councilor Remy stated he likes the opportunity for the grant and the extra time for communication. He stated he is also apprehensive about the cost of items going up in the future but wasn't sure how much of that could be taken to heart. The Councilor stated there was a business owner who worked against the City to get this grant last year and asked if staff could work with businesses in support of getting the grant. The Manager stated she would be happy to reach out to businesses for their support. The Councilor stated this is not a light decision the council can make.

Chair Powers stated somewhere down the line the city has lost the process with this project but agreed it must go forward. He felt a decision should have been made a long time ago. He felt the City would hurt but felt we could withstand it.

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 bid the downtown infrastructure project in the fall of 2025 with construction in 2026 and to pursue funding for all phases of the project through the Federal Raise Grant.

- 2) **Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program - 2024 - Police Department**  
**Mike Kopcha, Police Captain**

Police Captain Kopcha addressed the committee and stated that this item is in reference to a bulletproof vest grant, which is an annual federal grant. This is a 50/50 grant that helps offset some of the costs of replacing ballistic vests that the officers wear on duty, which only last four or five years before they need to be replaced. New officers who are hired need vests tailored to fit them specifically.

The department budgeted for \$3,950 which with the terms of the grant would allow the city to expend a total of over \$12,000.

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

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 \$6,259 from the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program funds of the US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Programs.

**3) 2025 Keene PD Highway Safety Grant - Police Department**

Captain Kopcha stated this is another annual grant the Keene Police Department applies for. This is a state grant and funds various initiatives; extra duty details for officers that are working in addition to their regular shift, special directed patrols for speed, drunk driving enforcement, seat belt violations, distracted driving. This grant used to be separated into those individual initiatives. It is now a combined grant in the amount of \$10,200.

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

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 to expend the grant from the New Hampshire Highway Safety Agency to fund the Highway Safety Grant - Keene.

**4) Councilor Ed Haas - Annual Reports of Boards and Commissions**

Councilor Haas stated he is before the committee on behalf of the volunteers who serve on of the various City Boards and Commissions. He felt these individuals don't get the recognition and appreciation they deserve. He stated he would like to call for an annual report from these various Bodies, giving them a chance to bring forward their challenges, their goals, and how they can do a better job in advising the city.

The Councilor also suggested deleting from the website those public bodies that don't meet anymore, such as the Agriculture Commission. He asked to resurrect the City College Commission. He felt the same extends to Standing Committees. He felt this could be a one-page description of what they did and what they want to do.

The Manager stated she likes the idea of requesting an annual report, but wasn't sure it can be required based on different statutes.

Councilor Lake felt it was a good idea to get periodic reports from the committees. He asked what the process for requesting these reports would look like. The City Manager suggested a motion be made that the Council requests annual reports from Boards and Commissions – staff can then pass that message along.

Councilor Jones began by thanking Councilor Haas for recognizing the City College Commission which the Councilor stated he had served on. He stated during the tenure of Mayor Lane there was a process to obtain such reports from Board and Commissions. Further, it is a process that worked in the past and he felt it is something that could be accomplished by staff and the Mayor.

The Manager stated she did speak with the City Clerk about this and added it was a process to request all Bodies to come before Council and that is not what staff is proposing here. What staff is proposing now is an annual report and if there is a committee that Council would like to hear from, they could be requested to attend a Council meeting. In addition, there could be a topic the Council is deciding on and would like input from a specific Board or Commission, staff could also coordinate that.

Mayor Kahn addressed the committee and stated he wanted to assure the public that the City has on its website is information regarding all its Boards and Commissions. He indicated that recommendations that need to reach the Council are being conveyed to the Boards and Commissions. He felt that if staff could obtain this information in a less labor-intensive manner that would be prudent. He also suggested adding an expected date as well. With respect to the City College Commission, he noted there is a lot of dialogue that goes on between the City and the college. It is an important part of the City. He stated the City Manager and Mayor meet with college staff frequently and the college will be presenting their master plan to the Planning Board later this month. He stated there is continuing dialogue that happens with the college regarding housing, neighborhoods – there is Keene Police Officer working on neighborhood issues.

The Mayor indicated if there is purpose, it will be brought back to the City Council because that charge was written in 2008; it is a dated charge and needs to be refreshed if there is going to be an ongoing effort.

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 Council request that City Boards and Commissions submit an annual report to the City Council on or about July 1st, 2025.

5) **Relating to Class Allocation and Salary Schedule - Ordinance O-2025-01**

Asst. City Manager/HR Director Beth Fox addressed the committee next. Ms. Fox stated that this proposal is to make title adjustments to the existing class allocation listing that relates to the Public Works Department. She noted that there are two that are requested for consideration.

The first is an adjustment to the existing title of Transportation/Storm Water Operations Manager. The department has requested that the title be changed to Highway Operations Manager. The department feels this describes what the position is charged with and is easier for the public understand.

The second adjustment is a proposed reclassification position. The department has reviewed the job description for the Infrastructure Project Manager and made some changes. Those changes warrant a regrading of the position to an S18 versus S19.

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

On a 5-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the adoption of Ordinance O-2025-01.

**6) Relating to Boards and Commission - Ordinance O-2025-02**

Deputy City Clerk Terri Hood was the next speaker. Ms. Hood stated she was before the committee to represent the ordinance that was submitted by the City Clerk related to Boards and Commissions, specifically, to some changes in the membership make up for the Bicycle/Pedestrian Committee and the Conservation Commission. Ms. Hood noted this is more of a housekeeping issue.

In terms of the Bicycle/Pedestrian Committee there has been a desire to have a City Council member serve as ex officio on this Board for a couple of years; this is putting that into place. The City Councilor currently serving will go from being a citizen member to an ex officio on that Board.

The second change is the Conservation Commission membership. There was an ex officio member on the Conservation Commission for some time. State Statute dictates who can serve on land use boards and having an ex officio member of the City Council is not contemplated in that statute. Hence it is being removed for that reason.

Councilor Chadbourne asked if a Council member could be added to the Commission if the city wished to do so. Ms. Hood deferred to the attorney for a response. Attorney Palmeira stated a Councilor could serve as a member of the public, but the city cannot add into its code that one of the members has to be a City Councilor because this is subject to what the RSA allows the city to do.

Ms. Hood stated there is a Councilor serving on the Board right now and her understanding is they will remain on the Board but will convert to a citizen member.

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

On a 5-0 roll call vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the adoption of Ordinance O-2025-02.



7) **Relating to Appropriations for Tree Removal Work - Resolution R-2025-01**

Public Works Director Don Lussier stated the request tonight is a request for a new appropriation, \$50,000 to help clean up some storm damage that occurred in July 2024. Mr. Lussier stated that it took some time to figure out whether these trees were actually City responsibility. He stated the boundary line along the back of the property on Sesame Street and where the City parcels are located is not clearly defined. It has now been determined that they are City trees, and they need to be cleaned up. He reminded the committee of the damage that occurred to the Tanglewood neighborhood and Pako Park area last July. There are a number of trees either leaning over private property or on paths where kids walk to school, and it is a safety concern. Mr. Lussier stated the City worked with its tree removal contractor to come up with an estimate but the biggest challenge with this issue is the access. A lot of the work will have to be done with cranes lifting trees over houses and backyards. The estimate for this work is \$50,000.

Councilor Chadbourne noted that because this is an estimate there could be money left over and asked if that money could be used for planting of trees in certain neighborhoods. Mr. Lussier stated the estimate that was developed with the contractor was between \$45,000 and \$50,000, staff asked for \$50,000 to have a cushion. The Parks and Recreation Department needed tree removal completed in Dinsmore Woods for which they did not have a budget, if there is money left over from this estimate, the plan is to use those funds to chip and remove those trees that have been left in the Dinsmore Woods. Chair Powers stated there is a plan to replace some of the trees that have been lost throughout the City for any number of reasons.

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 the adoption of Resolution R-2025-01.

8) **PowerPoint Presentation: Call Volume and Staffing Needs - Fire Department**

Fire Chief Jason Martin and Deputy Fire Chief Gregory Seymour addressed the committee next. The Fire Chief stated that in October 2024, the City Manager put together a team to look at the current staffing level at the Fire Department. They looked at trends and at ways the department could become more efficient. It has been determined that the Fire Department has reached its saturation capacity to handle the increased volume of calls. Chief Martin turned the presentation over to Deputy Chief Seymour for a detailed analysis of the Fire Department staffing.

Deputy Fire Chief Seymour displayed a PowerPoint presentation. He explained the Keene Fire Department is headed by the Fire Chief and has two divisions. First is Prevention Division which is headed by the Fire Marshall. Second is the Operations Division which is headed by the Deputy Fire Chief. The Operations Division is split into four shifts covered by four shift commanders, eight lieutenants, and 32 firefighters each shift working one 24-hour period. The daily operation staffing is one shift commander, one lieutenant, three personnel on engine 1, two personnel on ladder 2, two firefighters on ambulance 1 downtown and two firefighters and paramedics on ambulance 2 out of station two. He added the department also has daily administrative staffing available.

Deputy Seymour went on to say that Engine 1 is the primary engine out of downtown coupled with A1 (primary ambulance). Engine 1 has a company officer, a driver and a firefighter. A1 has a company of two. At any time, they could be combined to create a company of five if they are all available. Engine one on busy days will drop down to two individuals to cover another ambulance out of downtown.

Station 2 houses Ladder 2 and A2. Ladder 2 is staffed with a single officer and a driver, and A2 has two personnel. On fire incidents, one member from A2 is put on Ladder 2 to have a company of three. Both stations are supervised by a shift commander who acts as the kind of mobile command post for the city. The shift commander deals with daily operations, movement of those assets in and out as well as emergency scene management and instant command, coordination of mutual aid as well as emergency call back of off duty personnel. The Deputy added some of the apparatus is staffed by callback personnel - those are the Tower Ladder Tanker 1, Engine 2, and Rescue 1. The department also has two backup ambulances (A3) which is staffed by Engine 1 and A4 which is the second backup truck out of downtown.

The Deputy next reviewed “Responsibilities” – The City of Keene primarily provides paramedic emergency services for the City of Keene and surrounding contract towns. Structural fire protection, aircraft fire response, high angle technical rescue, confined space technical rescue, trench collapse, structural collapse, hazardous materials response (technician level one of just a few teams in the state), surface water rescue and emergent and non-emergent event standby. He noted the City of Keene Fire Department is the only department in New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts that undertakes all those disciplines. The next closest would be in Portland, Maine.

The Deputy next referred to a map showing the career fire departments in the State of New Hampshire. He noted the City of Keene sits by itself in the southwest corner of the State with very little resources to help back us up. Our closest career support with specialties is the Brattleboro Fire Department in Vermont, which is 32 minutes away, other than that it would be Claremont and Concord, which are both about an hour.

He made note to a slide which shows a steady increase in call volume since 2009, it was the last time any apparatus was added, and a shift commander was added to the car. Projected numbers for 2024 were 6,366 (emergency calls) - actual total volume of emergency calls for 2024 were 6,373 with required 10,880-unit responses. He explained what this means is that some incidents may require more personnel in a single apparatus. A building fire could require eight-to-ten-unit responses.

Call Volume – Deputy Seymour explained the green bars on the graph represent the City of Keene. Keene is where the biggest increase has been. Out of town calls as a percentage have gone down from 10% to 6.61%. He referred to another slide where the calls are split between fire-related incidents and emergency medical-related incidents. The lines that run across represent staffing. He noted the bars don’t correlate with staffing levels. They show an overall number; it increases as the call volumes increase. He noted one thing that is not reflected in this slide is how the department has changed manpower usage. In the past, the department used to

promote staff positions (Fire Marshall's office, Fire Prevention and Fire Alarm) from within. They used to be the third engine out of downtown if there was the need. As the department has had to hire from outside, the department is no longer able to dual role those positions. Actual availability of personnel to respond has decreased.

Overlapping Incidents - 2,700 of the 6,316 calls were overlapping – which means at one time if a call goes out there is a 43% chance another one is going to come right behind it. This means resources must be split which makes it difficult to respond to a major incident. The department uses callbacks for this type of incident, but it takes time to get resources in to cover emergencies. Anyone who is called for an ambulance or fire truck knows that every minute that they are not there can be a big change.

The next graph represents emergency medical calls, motor vehicle crashes, and other fire-related calls.

Where do the bulk of calls come from? It is mostly from EMS - the bulk of that is in nursing home responses. In the past, most of those calls were handled by Diluzio Ambulance and once they dissolved that became the City's responsibility. He noted a graph and explained it is not a single nursing home that is causing this issue; it is spread across all nursing homes in the City. Post Covid, people seem to be getting sicker.

Revenue – Revenue has increased. Total collected revenue in 2015 - \$860,000 to \$1.65 million.

Contract Town Responses – 6% of total call volume. The towns that the City responds to are Chesterfield, Sullivan, Nelson, Surry, Roxbury, and Westmoreland. The non-contract town responses – Swanzey has the highest call volume. Contract town revenue – has stayed consistent, Westmoreland has depreciated. Contract town revenue accounts for around 11% of the total revenue.

Working Hours – The Deputy referred to a graph and explained that 2100 is the minimum working hours based on the 42-hour work week. In FY23 the top earners worked close to 3,250 hours, FY24 and FY25 will significantly increase. He explained 3,250 equates to working two full-time jobs which eventually causes burnout for employees. In FY23 the top person responded individually to 900 calls. Compared to other towns and cities in New Hampshire, Keene is the highest. In FY24 that number increased to 1,000 which he indicated is a large increase for one individual. This concluded the Deputy's presentation.

The Manager stated that when staff last looked at this issue a couple years ago, there was a staffing committee that spent quite a bit of time looking at the trends in the fire department and analyzing where the City was going, what we were going for, what types of calls, who was helping us, and who are we helping. This allowed the City to get a good understanding of what was occurring at the department. She stated the Council supported the addition of four firefighters. Four firefighters are one per shift. She added that unfortunately it takes a long time to get up to full-staffing level. The Manager stated soon we might be at a point where we are at full-staffing level.

The Manager went on to say that the call volume is still growing. New Hampshire is one of the states with the highest old-age population and much of the call volume is from our skilled-nursing facilities or our nursing homes. The change with Diluzio and losing their service to the community has impacted the city dramatically.

The Manager stated that tonight is the first presentation of data, and the staff intends to come back at the next FOP to request support of the City Council to apply for a Safer Grant. This is a grant through FEMA that assists communities who are looking to add staffing. The grant provides 75% of the first year, 75% of the cost for the second year and 35% in the third year and then it is fully funded by the City. The deadline for grant submission is February.

Councilor Roberts stated he was concerned about the hours being requested of some of these individuals because at some point they will break down and that could cause issues to their co-workers. He felt this is a highly stressful job and people need time to regenerate. The Manager stated this is causing for a higher rate of burnout and these individuals are highly unlikely to want to return to work when called back.

Chair Powers agreed the call volume has gone up. The Manager stated the private nursing homes are adding to the burden. She noted with Diluzio terminating its services, the County has been assisting the City at no charge but their model is also likely to change in the future. She felt the more we can cover ourselves the better off the City would be.

Councilor Chadbourne stated she is concerned about the well-being of these very dedicated individuals. She added many of the graphs indicate 2024 as projected and asked how close they are to the actual numbers. Deputy Seymour stated it is within ten. The Councilor asked about Smart Ride and asked if this service has replaced Diluzio. The Manager stated Smart Ride is for non-emergency rides (doctor's appointments). Councilor Chadbourne asked whether the City calls on out-of-town volunteer fire departments for assistance. Chief Martin stated they do, but the City pays them more than it gets back.

Councilor Chadbourne asked a question on behalf of her neighbors: Why does a ladder truck accompany an ambulance on a call? Deputy Seymour stated that most firefighters are trained in many disciplines. Depending on where the paramedics are staffed on a particular day, that patient may need a higher level of care, so more people are sent to shorten the duration of the call, to help carry some out from multi-stories. If that staff is not needed, they will move on to a different call. He added every minute they do not have the necessary help the situation gets worse. The Councilor stated the question was why a ladder truck needs to be dispatched versus perhaps a suburban. The Deputy stated 42% of their incidents are over-lapping. That ladder truck is just not a ladder truck it is a toolbox, etc. They could need to respond from that call to another fire call. She also asked why the trucks are left running. The deputy stated to operate the radios, lights, and electronics the trucks must stay running. He also added due to the new high emissions in the vehicles they must stay at a high idle to burn off a lot of that soot. He added that it also does not help if a firetruck does not start when it is turned off.

Jared Goodell addressed the committee again and stated that the Keene Fire Department is currently the most expensive department in the City as of 2023-2024 now standing at \$9 million

dollars, which is nearly 20% of the City's overall budget. He noted that between 2019 and 2024, the department's calls increased by 11%, but its budget in the same period increased by 18%. He indicated EMS makes up the lion share of calls that the Keene Fire Department responds to. He stated that as just mentioned it has always confused him that a very expensive piece of equipment and that very highly trained professionals who are on board respond to a low-acuity type of call and added he does not minimize what any community member goes through at any moment. However, he felt there were more efficient ways that involve better resources to get those members of the community proper help at the time and to get them moving forward. He questioned how many repeat calls are for the same citizens experiencing substance abuse or mental health issues? He felt the Fire Department in much the same way as the Police Department, has become a catch-all for the most vulnerable in our population.

Mr. Goodell noted other jurisdictions have recently developed and implemented what they call alternative response units or crisis response units. These units are much more focused on those high frequency calls that don't require a \$1,000,000 fire equipment to respond. They may operate out of a standard vehicle as Councilor Chadbourne brought up and carry things like Narcan or over-the-counter medicine, which could be administered, and these units could also be staffed by not firefighters but social workers who can help connect these citizens with resources instead of another ride to the ER. As an alternative, this type of response unit could also help with low acuity nursing, home transport calls and substance-use such as a transport van instead of the more expensive ambulance. He noted the Keene Police Department has recently moved in the same direction with its staff by bringing on board a social worker. This position allows expensive Police Department resources to be directed at more resource-appropriate calls while simultaneously providing a more impactful response to the citizen in need.

Mr. Goodell urged the City Council, the Fire Department and City staff to research different ways to solve this staffing issue without simply hiring more firefighters and EMTs which does not really seem to be working. He noted the population is not growing in Keene, but we are getting more calls and felt there is probably a mental-health aspect that goes along with that. He asked if it was perhaps time to take a different approach as the Police Department did to see if that would be a solution to help the citizens in Keene.

Councilor Roberts made mention of a situation in his neighborhood where the ambulance responded to the same address on multiple occasions. He also noted that a bariatric individual would require additional personnel to move.

The Deputy Chief agreed they make repeated calls to the same location. He stated that opioid crisis is an issue, and they have looked at many different ways to utilize staff. He stated they have not added extra firefighters in many years. He added moving staff around has made them less efficient and less able to manage emergencies. He stated that there are creative ways to do things, but it does require personnel.

Councilor Powers asked the Deputy to address bariatric needs. Deputy Seymour stated that they recently put out a cache of equipment to handle bariatric patients who cannot be assisted by normal equipment. He stated these calls are manpower intensive and they do respond quite frequently to such calls.

The Manager stated she has been talking to the Fire Department and have discussed different models. She indicated that what was discovered is that the department does not have enough personnel to handle a large fire and asked that at the next meeting, a presentation is undertaken as to how a structural fire is handled. She noted this is an issue for Keene as Keene is isolated and relies on volunteers, whose numbers are declining. The Manager stated that for her it was not just EMS calls but also how a fire call is handled.

Councilor Chadbourne in response to Mr. Goodell's comments stated there has been discussion about adding mental health workers, which is an ongoing discussion. The Chief agreed Cheshire Medical Center is also looking into this issue.

Mr. Rob Skrocki of the Professional Firefighters of Keene addressed the committee next and began by thanking the City Manager for putting this working group in place and including the Professional Firefighters of Keene in the discussion. He stated that it is obvious throughout the presentation that the City is in some tough times and the Fire Department is at the brink of failure. With respect to what Councilor Chadbourne had raised about the ladder truck and an ambulance showing up together, he noted that an item that was not pointed out is that the 911 system codes how a call is responded to, which triggers how the department would respond to a call. There is a predetermined equation as to the severity of the call and how it is responded to.

Councilor Chadbourne stated that some of the drug overdose calls could bring about unpredictable behaviors and asked at what point police backup is called in. The Deputy stated the police also have access to calls, have their own level of suspicion, and respond. He stated Fire personnel have been injured while on a call.

The Chair encouraged the public to look at the website to learn more about what the Fire Department does.

The consensus of the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee was to accept the presentation relating to Fire Department call volume and staffing needs as informational.

There being no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 8:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

Edits submitted by,  
Terri M. Hood and Kathleen Richards