



Master Plan Steering Committee

AGENDA

Tuesday, February 4, 2025 6:00 PM

**City Hall,
2nd Floor Council Chambers**

- I. Call to Order and Roll Call
- II. Minutes of Previous Meeting – December 3, 2024
- III. Update on Strategic Pillar Task Forces
 - a. Review of draft goal areas for each pillar
- IV. Topical Presentations:
 - a. Keene Hazard Mitigation Planning & Floodplain Programs – Kürt Blomquist, Emergency Management Administrator & Mike Hagan, Floodplain Manager
 - b. [Housing Vulnerability Analysis](#) – Planning Staff
 - c. 21 in 21 Home Upgrade Program – Keith Thibault, Southwestern Community Services
- V. New Business
- VI. Next Meeting: Tuesday, March 4, 6:00 PM

1 City of Keene
2 New Hampshire

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5 MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE
6 MEETING MINUTES
7

Tuesday, December 3, 2024

6:00 PM

Council Chambers,
City Hall

Members Present:

Harold Farrington, Chair
Alex Henkel, Vice Chair
Councilor Michael Remy
Cody Morrison
Leatrice Oram
Joshua Meehan
Emily Lavigne-Bernier
Dr. Joseph Perras
Alexander Von Plinsky, IV
Joe Walier
Jay Kahn, Mayor, Alternate (Voting)
Councilor Philip Jones, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner
Megan Fortson, Planner

Members Not Present:

Elizabeth Wood
Juliana Bergeron
Councilor Catherine Workman, Alternate
Kenneth Kost, Alternate

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

10
11 Chair Farrington called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM.

12
13 **2) Minutes of the Previous Meeting – October 1, 2024**

14
15 A motion by Councilor Jones to adopt the minutes of the October 1, 2024 meeting was duly
16 seconded Councilor Remy and the motion carried unanimously.

17
18 **3) Future Summit Debrief**

19
20 Mari Brunner, the City's Senior Planner, recapped the first of two Future Summits and asked for
21 feedback/suggestions from those who attended so that improvements could be made for the second
22 on June 3, 2025, from 5:00–7:00 PM. The first was on a Saturday from 9:00 AM–12:00 PM with
23 the project consultants present to recap the visioning phase of the project. Then, a giant map was
24 rolled out on the floor and participants used yarn, Legos, and sticky notes to add their thoughts and

25 ideas to the map. Participants also visited stations around the room to provide feedback for each of
26 the six Strategic Pillars—or themes—that were identified. At the end, the group debriefed and
27 shared key takeaways. Some suggestions from the Summit were incorporated into the revised
28 [Vision Report](#), including suggestions about lifelong learning and fostering an educated citizenry,
29 as well as changing one Pillar name from “Healthy Community” to “Vibrant Neighborhoods.” Ms.
30 Brunner thought the Future Summit format worked pretty well, but sought feedback.

31
32 Chair Farrington thought the first Future Summit was excellent, especially with the hands-on floor
33 map activity, which he said was useful for understanding what people do and do not like about the
34 specific geography of Keene. He commented on the fact that in a planning process like this one, it
35 is common to get repeat engagement from the same people and voices, but noted that there were
36 still a limited number of regular Keene citizens who had not been reached through the various
37 activities in this Master Planning process, despite the active and good efforts. Still, Chair Farrington
38 thought the Future Summit was successful and went well. He was left with one question at the end:
39 What is the target population of Keene at the end of this time horizon? Should it go up or down?
40 Was there consensus? He thought this was an interesting question worth wrestling with as a starting
41 point.

42
43 Councilor Jones thanked Ms. Brunner and other City staff for their efforts, noting how well they
44 had done in the recent absence of a Community Development Director. He added that the six Pillars
45 were still changeable and flexible. He said a lot of work went into the map and he thought it
46 provided a lot of inspiration. He thought it might have been the first time that people were catching
47 on to what this master planning process was about because he said participants at many other
48 meetings thought that it involved the downtown project. Now, he thought people were seeing a
49 vision for Keene in 20 years, which he appreciated.

50
51 Mayor Kahn asked what would happen to the map now. Ms. Brunner said it was in the Community
52 Development Department. It had been displayed at Birdies on Main Street during the Pumpkin
53 Festival so people could look at it. Because it is so big, Ms. Brunner noted the limitations on where
54 it could be displayed. Mayor Kahn was curious about how else the map could be used, noting that
55 many community members suggested zoning considerations, which were key takeaways that the
56 Mayor hoped would evolve from this process relative to the Pillars. He thought there might have
57 been some confusion in how some of the pillars had evolved.

58
59 For example, in “Flourishing Environment,” he was unsure that “*flourishing*” was the right word,
60 noting that “*sustainable*” tends to be a more commonly used word in the community. He was also
61 unsure that all these Pillars needed two words, stating that perhaps they could be simplified to:
62 Environment, Neighborhoods, Workforce, Housing, Mobility, Economy. The Mayor added that
63 healthy lifestyles and healthcare are not things that only Cheshire Medical Center (CMC) cares
64 about; the community has a broader role. He also agreed that the “Vibrant Neighborhoods” Pillar
65 still needed work and the Committee would need to hear more voices from the neighborhoods.

66

67 Mr. Morrison was only present for one hour of the Future Summit, but he thought it was very
68 interactive. He thought the format of using the large map engaged more people than would
69 otherwise have participated. He noted that if someone had accessibility issues, they might not have
70 been able to take part with the map on the floor, so he wondered what other options there could be
71 next time.

72
73 Councilor Remy responded to the Chair’s question of whether the City’s population should shrink,
74 stay the same size, or grow. The Councilor’s personal opinion was that the City should grow
75 because if the City is not growing, then the population would be declining. He noted that Keene’s
76 average population has been shifting older and he thought the community needed to be thoughtfully
77 growing. He was not suggesting a 40% spike in population, but something like 10% every five
78 years, for example. Councilor Remy agreed that it would be important to find an answer to this
79 question that the community could live with.

80
81 The Deputy City Manager, Andy Bohannon, spoke from his perspective as the former Parks &
82 Recreation Director to echo the Mayor’s comments on public health. Mr. Bohannon had spoken
83 with Ms. Brunner about the importance of public health being a strong piece of this Master Plan.
84 He spoke about how some of the Vision 2020 and Healthy Monadnock public health initiatives that
85 came from the 2010 Master Plan had lost momentum since. However, Mr. Bohannon knew of
86 existing programs across the state that could be brought to Keene (e.g., 10-minute walking
87 initiatives) that he said should be worked into the Master Plan in collaboration with CMC because
88 this is a very health-focused community. It would be a matter of connecting all these resources to
89 the people who need them in the community.

90
91 Dr. Perras said those were great points. He noted that CMC would be kicking off another Health
92 Needs Assessment in the spring; these occur every three years. CMC has a Community &
93 Population Health Department run by Tricia Zahn and Dr. Perras had started attending the
94 community meetings, though he said there did not seem to be momentum. He was not local when
95 the group’s work began in 2020, but said it was a great process and the goal was to re-energize it.
96 Dr. Perras would be happy to bring the initial results of the Health Needs Assessment to this
97 Steering Committee and suggested inviting Dr. Zahn to speak to this Committee too when talking
98 about healthy communities and vibrant neighborhoods. Dr. Perras shared Mayor Kahn’s concern
99 about losing the word “health” from some part of the Master Plan.

100
101 Mayor Kahn also suggested contacting Julie Schoelzel at the Chamber of Commerce for a
102 presentation on its Northern Borders Grant, the initiative to grow the community’s population. He
103 said they put together a nice, descriptive slide show, describing how to help the community grow
104 in a variety of age demographics, particularly ages 16–29, to Councilor Remy’s point. Chair
105 Farrington asked Ms. Brunner to add this as an agenda item in January.

106
107 **4) Online Discussion Boards**

108
109

110 Ms. Brunner said that all committee members received an e-mail with the link to the online
111 discussion boards and she hoped everyone would look at them and provide feedback because it was
112 still possible to add information or change the format if Committee members thought it would be
113 helpful. Specifically, she asked for the Committee’s help completing the “History” and “Currently
114 Happening” sections of each discussion board. Ms. Brunner looked forward to hearing everyone’s
115 input and thoughts via the discussion boards, which would be the forum to provide input and
116 feedback for anyone not participating in the upcoming task forces. The discussion boards would be
117 the vehicle for members of the community to provide input on this process while the task forces are
118 running. She noted that people are more likely to leave a comment if they see other people
119 commenting—it could help spark ideas or they might feel more comfortable—so she encouraged
120 Committee members to comment.

121
122 Ms. Oram asked if the minutes of the task force meetings would be uploaded online to spur
123 discussion. Ms. Brunner did not believe so because they are not official public bodies, but said that
124 presentation materials could be posted. She said staff and the consultants had also talked about
125 posting notes from each task force in some form.

126
127 Chair Farrington was unsure everyone had done their homework prior to the meeting, so he
128 encouraged everyone to review and complete those steps.

129
130 Mr. Von Plinsky liked how each Pillar had its own page on the website so he could quickly read
131 through the history, macro trends (which was helpful; what is affecting us that we cannot control?),
132 and what is currently happening (focused on what people literally talked about on the survey). He
133 said the snapshot highlights were helpful because the City is paying the consultant for those insights
134 and their expertise. So, Mr. Von Plinsky said that overall, the website was designed well for starting
135 the discussion.

136
137 Ms. Brunner described the “Office Hours” that Community Development Department staff would
138 be hosting at the Keene Public Library from December 11th–13th from 10:00 AM–4:30 PM. For
139 anyone in the community unable/unwilling to use computers, staff would be available to assist with
140 the discussion boards, with a TV screen set up to enter comments in real time.

141
142 **5) Strategic Pillar Task Forces**

143
144 Ms. Brunner recapped the Strategic Pillar task forces: community leaders have been reached out to
145 and engaged as part of the process because of their specific interest in one of the six Strategic Pillars.
146 Following an introductory meeting, each task force will be meeting in January, February, and March
147 and will have a consultant assigned to help lead it. The consultants are researching, looking at other
148 communities similar to Keene, and finding case studies Keene could learn from. The task force
149 meetings will not have a specific format. The first meeting for each task force will set the stage,
150 present data and case studies, and orient everyone to what has been learned from the community so far.
151 The next two meetings will be to hear from the task force members about specific ideas and actions
152 that they think the community, the City, or its partners should be taking to achieve the goals

153 articulated in the Community Vision Report. This is the part of the project in which the community
154 would be asked to help develop an Action Plan, and the discussion boards would be the opportunity
155 for members of the public to weigh in on that. So, any information and comments from the
156 discussion boards would be shared with the task forces as well.

157
158 Councilor Remy asked about the process for deciding on the membership of the task forces. Ms.
159 Brunner said the task forces will not be formal public bodies. Members of this Steering Committee
160 could join a task force and the other members had either volunteered or signed up to participate at
161 meetings or outreach events. There was also specific outreach to organizations like the Chamber of
162 Commerce, Keene State College (KSC), and CMC. Councilor Remy asked if the membership of
163 each task force would be published.

164
165 Ms. Brunner was unsure and said she would get back to him, though she did not necessarily see it
166 as a problem; she would want to notify the members first. The Councilor stressed the importance
167 of membership of groups like these being balanced, similar to when the Mayor vets members to
168 form City committees. Ms. Brunner did not think these task forces would be creating any actual
169 deliverables, which would only be done by this Steering Committee. The task forces would more
170 so be generating ideas to share with staff and the project consultants.

171
172 Ms. Lavigne-Bernier asked about the cap of members on each task force. Ms. Brunner said roughly
173 12, with the “Livable Housing” task force having the most. There will be City staff members on
174 each as well.

175
176 Mr. Morrison thought that when signing up for a group with a broader municipal process there
177 should be some expectation of one’s name being published. He added that he thought the task force
178 membership would be retrievable via a public Right-to-Know request and Ms. Brunner agreed, but
179 she wanted to consider it before adding the participant lists to the website.

180
181 Dr. Perras asked if people had requested to participate on the task forces. Ms. Brunner said some
182 came to meetings, heard about the task forces, and signed up there. Some signed up at tabling
183 events—the Future Summit being the main one—and the Steering Committee meetings.

184
185 Mr. Meehan wondered if those who signed up had mainly been those who were engaged in the
186 process otherwise, to the Chair’s initial question. Councilor Remy wondered—if there was no
187 process for deciding the task forces—if there was a chance for the membership of those who signed
188 up for a task force to not be those best suited to guide that task force’s development, in which case
189 Mr. Meehan said the Steering Committee might recommend that staff seek additional members to
190 supplement the task force and Councilor Remy agreed. Chair Farrington said he thought staff might
191 already have been doing that and that the consultants might already have been aware of that.

192
193 Chair Farrington asked if Steering Committee participation was needed on the task forces. Ms.
194 Brunner said that if available, that direct connection would be helpful. Ms. Brunner still welcomed
195 recommendations for more task force members. She offered to email the existing task force

196 membership to the Steering Committee after this meeting. Mayor Kahn thought that would be
197 essential, stating that as this Master Plan process moves forward, this Steering Committee will have
198 to take responsibility for who is on those task forces. Also, he said there was buzz in the community
199 at this time because there was a high level of engagement in this project, and he thought it would
200 be important not to lose that. The Mayor commented on the importance of these interconnected
201 relationships and urged his fellow Committee members to suggest more task force members before
202 the January meeting.

203
204 Chair Farrington asked Ms. Brunner to email the list of task force members and asked Steering
205 Committee members to send Ms. Brunner suggestions of community members to serve on the
206 various task forces before the January meeting, or to reach out to them personally.

207
208 Ms. Oram asked what information would be used to establish balance on the task forces? Based on
209 what information? Would the individuals be asked to identify a role or demographic information?
210 Ms. Brunner said she knew a little bit about some people because she had met them before, but
211 noted that there were some she did not know. Councilor Remy said it was a good question and his
212 point was that if he did not see someone on the list for a task force that he would have expected to
213 see because of their expertise, he would make sure they had been asked.

214
215 Chair Farrington asked if there was an application. Ms. Brunner said it had mostly been people who
216 signed up or who were volunteered. Staff reached out to some because they felt strongly that KSC
217 and CMC should have representation, for example.

218
219 Mr. Von Plinsky returned to discussion about wordsmithing some of the particular Pillar names.
220 He said words matter, and he suggested considering some of these now before sending them to the
221 task forces since it seems that not everyone is fully content with the language. Ms. Brunner said
222 “Vibrant Neighborhoods” has been challenging because it focuses on the strong social fabric. For
223 “Flourishing Environment,” she saw the Mayor’s point, and suggested *healthy* instead of
224 *flourishing*. She agreed that the names of the Pillars are important, and the Committee could
225 workshop those, but she advised that if the Committee had substantive changes for the descriptive
226 content under each one, she would want to bring the consultant in for that. Mr. Von Plinsky was
227 clear that he was only concerned with wordsmithing and only with the two mentioned. Instead of
228 “Vibrant Neighborhoods” he suggested “Healthy Neighborhoods” to align with the earlier
229 discussion of a healthy community; “community” felt more abstract than “neighborhood” to him.

230
231 Councilor Remy liked the idea of “Vibrant, Healthy Community.”

232
233 Ms. Lavigne-Bernier said she felt that there was a hole in the “Vibrant Neighborhoods” Pillar
234 regarding the social fabric idea Ms. Brunner spoke about. Ms. Lavigne-Bernier spoke of personal
235 experience since moving to East Keene the previous year and experiencing how Keene has very
236 strong neighborhoods, and how each neighborhood has its own identity. She suggested, “Vibrant
237 Neighborhoods: Healthy Neighbors, Healthy Community.”

238

239 Dr. Perras wondered if the task forces could help with the wordsmithing. To an earlier point, he
240 also wondered if focusing on the second word in these phrases would help to streamline this in a
241 way the Steering Committee, staff, and consultants had been grappling with. Mayor Kahn agreed
242 that focusing on the noun and not the adjective was more important, and the adjective could evolve;
243 or he was unsure an adjective was needed at all. He added that “Neighborhoods” are not public
244 health, but he said—at this time in Keene—that health was the pressing issue of the day, whether
245 pandemic, disease, lifestyle, or mental health and as task forces were popping up, people were
246 expressing concern that the community as a whole was not doing what it should. Dr. Perras said
247 CMC’s focus would be health equity and ensuring that no matter what neighborhoods are called,
248 that people in each neighborhood have equitable health outcomes and the same access to care. So,
249 he suggested focusing the task force’s insight on that.

250
251 Ms. Lavigne-Bernier was concerned that prospective members of a “Vibrant Neighborhood” task
252 force would not know what they are signing up for: What they want their neighborhood to look like
253 in the future? Public health? Ms. Brunner learned at the Future Summit that people thought what
254 the Planners were calling “Healthy Community” was really about public health, whereas it is
255 actually about place making, neighborhood characteristics, and historic preservation, among other
256 characteristics.

257
258 Ms. Lavigne-Bernier said that was her point. She asked which of the existing task forces Dr. Perras
259 would sign up for as a public health expert and guessed probably not “Vibrant Neighborhoods.” Dr.
260 Perras said probably not and added that as an employer and from a public health perspective he
261 would likely sign up for “Adaptable Workforce.” He shared Ms. Lavigne-Bernier’s concern that
262 what they thought about the public health importance might not have matched the public’s
263 feedback. Still, he said they were at risk of losing the health focus because it would not fit neatly
264 into any of the other Pillars.

265
266 Councilor Remy questioned whether public health is within the purview of a Master Plan or just
267 something the Steering Committee was passionate about. He knew it was a focus of the 2010 Plan,
268 but he was unsure if it was within the City’s scope of control. Councilor Remy also said that he
269 thought there could be confusion or overlapping interest between “Livable Housing” and “Vibrant
270 Neighborhoods”; as well as between “Adaptable Workforce” and “Thriving Economy.” He was
271 unsure that health needed to fit into one of the Pillars.

272
273 Mr. Meehan noted that the “Vibrant Neighborhoods” Pillar talked about social and emotional well-
274 being, and while it would need more work, he said health could fit there.

275
276 Councilor Jones referred back to the term “neighborhood fabric” and said many things could fall
277 under the umbrella of a neighborhood: safety, bug resistance, walkability, and commercial nodes,
278 for example. So, he thought this needed to stay more generalized, while everyone was being specific
279 in their minds.

280

281 Ms. Oram referred to her experience with strategic planning and said that there could be an impulse
282 to categorize, pull together, and cohere. She wondered if the Steering Committee had spent enough
283 time having this conversation and she considered what the group might be missing vs. what was
284 adequately categorized or captured. Chair Farrington said it was a good thought. Ms. Brunner said
285 that one overarching theme had been collaboration, which was identified early on in this project as
286 a key strength of this community and region. So, she said there had been some discussions with the
287 consultant team about emphasizing collaboration as part every Pillar.

288
289 Ms. Brunner also spoke about weaving sustainability and the economy throughout all the Pillars,
290 and she wondered if population/community health would fit similarly throughout. She provided the
291 example of housing and issues like lead paint remediation or mold aligning with population health.
292 She could envision overarching themes relevant to all the Pillars that the six task forces could
293 workshop. Chair Farrington said that energy emerged as a similar overarching theme during some
294 of the community meetings, but he said that would need to be defined (i.e., individual, gasoline,
295 heating, etc.). Ms. Oram said there could be cross cutting themes about desired outcomes for
296 community health, sustainability, renewable energy, etc. Perhaps they are not Pillars.

297
298 Chair Farrington asked staff to work on these ideas with the consultants.

299
300 **6) Phase II Schedule**
301

302 Ms. Brunner described Phase II of the Master Planning schedule as shown in the [Community Vision](#)
303 [Report](#). Phase II would be the process of developing the Action/Implementation Plan and Future
304 Land Use Map. The discussion boards, task force meetings, and Steering Committee meetings
305 would inform the Action and Implementation Plans. The consultants will be putting together online
306 story maps to help with the future land use discussion. She explained that a story map was posted
307 on the Keene Parks and Recreation website, for example, to help people visualize different areas of
308 Keene and provide feedback.

309
310 She explained that there would be a second community survey in April 2025 to ask the community
311 for ideas and input to prioritize the ideas and action items that came from the task forces. These
312 activities would lead up to the next Future Summit on June 3, 2025, in advance of drafting the
313 Master Plan, which would be presented to this Steering Committee for final approval. Once this
314 Steering Committee approves the Master Plan, it would be presented to the City Council for its vote
315 and endorsement before being presented to the Planning Board for adoption. There would be public
316 hearings before both the Planning Board and City Council.

317
318 Ms. Oram asked if City staff or the consultants felt that the process was behind schedule at all; she
319 felt that things were on schedule. Ms. Brunner said that the two-year project was on schedule at this
320 time and said it was a very ambitious schedule, but if adhered to, the City would stay on track with
321 its consultant contract.

322
323 **7) New Business**

324
325 Chair Farrington recalled the requests for the Chamber of Commerce presentation and a discussion
326 of target populations in an organized way. Additionally, the Chair noted that bringing data into
327 these discussions would be useful. He also noted that the Steering Committee had not discussed
328 attracting target industries to Keene, and he thought it would be good to discuss developing a City–
329 industry collaboration plan.

330
331 To the Chair’s latter point, Mayor Kahn said that on December 4th, he was convening the Keene
332 Area Manufacturing Consortium, including people from Markem-Imaje, Timken, and more. He
333 said it is amazing what can happen in this community when you reach out to people directly. He
334 added that in January, Taylor Caswell, the first NH Commissioner of the Department of Business
335 and Economic Affairs, would be coming to Keene to follow up with this Consortium. Mayor Kahn
336 said he would be pitching to Mr. Caswell, the Governor, and others that the optics, engineering, and
337 manufacturing industries in Keene are what bio-fabrication is to Manchester and that the
338 concentrations in these two areas are what could propel NH in economic prosperity and growth.
339 The Mayor noted the concern that with a Master Plan, there could be an attempt to do everything
340 for every group. He thought there were opportunities to hone messages and articulate synergies.
341 Chair Farrington appreciated the Mayor’s leadership focused on smart growth. Mayor Kahn noted
342 that Vice Chair Henkel leads an innovative business.

343
344 Councilor Jones discussed environmental and flooding standards related to pervious and
345 impervious surfaces and a long-term plan for future technologies. He referenced the area behind
346 800 Park Avenue that had consistently started flooding since the Black Brook Industrial Park was
347 built upstream. He noted that it had never flooded like that before. He suggested considering future
348 technology for parking lots and sidewalks with pervious surfaces to mitigate flooding. Chair
349 Farrington said that the Planning Board was dealing with that issue at this time, noting that pervious
350 surfaces allow water to drain through them as opposed to off them.

351
352 Councilor Jones reiterated his thanks to Ms. Brunner and City staff for their efforts. Ms. Brunner
353 thanked the Steering Committee.

354

355 **8) Next Meeting: Tuesday, January 7, 2025, 6:00 PM (to be confirmed)**

356 **9) Adjournment**

357

358 There being no further business, Chair Farrington adjourned the meeting at 7:26 PM.

359

360 Respectfully submitted by,
361 Katie Kibler, Minute Taker
362 December 10, 2024

363

364 Reviewed and edited by,
365 Megan Fortson, Planner