

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

**MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Wednesday, July 21, 2021**

**5:30 PM**

**Council Chambers**

**Members Present:**

Janis O. Manwaring, Chair  
Michael Giacomo, Vice Chair  
Randy L. Filiault  
Robert C. Williams

**Staff Present:**

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager  
Thomas P. Mullins, City Attorney  
Kürt Blomquist, Director of Public Works  
Don Lussier, City Engineer  
Rebecca Landry, IT Director/ACM

**Members Not Present:**

Andrew M. Madison

Chair Manwaring called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM.

**1) Sidewalk Asset Management Plan – Director of Public Works**

Chair Manwaring welcomed the Director of Public Works, Kürt Blomquist, and City Engineer, Don Lussier. The Director of Public Works began by thanking his crews for their work during recent heavy rain events. The City Engineer continued his presentation from the previous meeting, specifically on the costs of replacing sidewalks per linear foot. The Committee would see a longer list of priorities during Capital Improvement Program (CIP) time.

The City Engineer recounted what he presented two MSFI meetings ago. The City owns and is responsible for about 53 miles of sidewalks. That includes approximately 23 miles of asphalt sidewalks and 30 miles of concrete sidewalks. He recalled that asphalt sidewalks are common but that concrete is preferred closer to the City center. The current network condition overall is scored as a 67 or C-. Overall, throughout the network, asphalt sidewalks are in much poorer condition, with an average score of 57 compared to concrete sidewalks at 74. The City Engineer showed examples of sidewalks at various scores. He said that very poor sidewalks scored 20 are exclusively asphalt. Going up in scale to scores of 40, more concrete sidewalks are seen with some tripping hazards that need attention. Scores of 60 to 80, for example, are in good to excellent condition and require very little work.

The City Engineer began discussing costs to achieve a particular level of service that the Council will decide, meaning the City-wide acceptable standard. He agreed with the Chair that it is difficult to choose an acceptable level of service without understanding the costs to achieve that level. Before the costs, the City Engineer reviewed the current City sidewalk standards. He said that the current section of City Code that addresses sidewalks is Section 70-127, which calls for

the minimum five-foot sidewalks within residential zones and all other zones require six-foot widths, with a minimum four inches of concrete. While not listed in the City Code, there is a Department of Public Works standard for where sidewalks cross driveways and where there are heavy truck crossings, where sidewalks must have a thicker cross section of eight inches. Additionally, the City Code states that where there is sufficient right of way there should be at least five feet from the travelled surface of the roadway to the sidewalk to create a buffer for pedestrians and to create a place where snow can gather in the winter. The Director of Public Works and the City Council have developed set policies for these standards over the years, specifically when there is significant repair over 100 feet, that section of sidewalk must be upgraded to meet current standards, meaning that the sidewalk must be concrete. However, the Department also gets complaints about a very discrete small area of isolated maintenance less than 100 feet and does spot repairs in kind, meaning that if it is asphalt today, then it would be replaced with asphalt at the same width. For example, crews would not install a five-foot sidewalk (standard) patch in an existing 4 foot asphalt sidewalk.

To begin the discussion of costs, the City Engineer discussed unit costs, such as how much it would cost to replace one linear foot of sidewalk at different condition levels. Then he would discuss overall programmatic costs to put this all into context. Beginning with very poor sidewalks, where it assumed that not just the asphalt surface has failed but the underlying gravel as well, creating heaves and what are called alligator cracks; he showed examples from Main Street, Colby Street, and Hardy Court. In these situations, the gravel has deteriorated because of the weather over time and fixing it properly would require removing the sidewalk, replacing the gravel, and building an entirely new sidewalk. To replace these asphalt sidewalks and bases it would cost \$65 per foot, which would upgrade the sidewalk to current concrete standards, which the Director of Public Works stated in response to Councilor Filiault. If a sidewalk is under 100 feet it is replaced in kind and if over 100 feet, it is replaced to meet the current concrete standard. Most work under 100 feet is done in-house. The City Engineer noted that costs discussed at this meeting would just be for the sidewalks and not any ancillary work that often goes along with sidewalks such as curbing or improvements to grass belts trees and drainage, which would all have to be done separately.

The City Engineer continued explaining that there are poor clusters of sidewalks throughout the City that need to be replaced but the underlying gravel can often be reused and smoothed. He showed examples from Main Street, Island Street, and Greenwood Avenue. For example, he showed a photo of a sidewalk sitting below the grass on either side of it in, for which case crews would go in and make the underlying gravel flush with the lawn so that the sidewalk does not fill with water every time it rains. In such a situation, the City reuses existing gravel, which brings costs down, but it is not a significant reduction in cost at approximately \$58 per square foot of gravel material.

The City Engineer continued discussing sidewalks categorized as fair with scores between 40 and 60. He showed examples from Main Street, Maple Avenue, and Roxbury Plaza. These fair sidewalks would have more varied costs as he depicted, from \$30-\$58 per linear foot. An existing concrete sidewalk scored in this fair range means that there are still sections in good

condition and some sections that are in worse condition; those conditions are averaged to arrive at a unit price basis for a contract, which can be very expensive. However, when averaged across all sidewalks in the City, the cost is more reasonable, which is why there was a price range shown. Sidewalks that are currently scored as 60 or higher need very little work, essentially only spot repairs, which reduces prices dramatically. Once the City Council understands associated costs they can determine the acceptable level of service throughout the community, meaning the condition that the community finds to be reasonable and acceptable. The current score is a 67 or C- and if the City were to set a goal of raising that by one letter grade to B minus, 11.5 miles of sidewalk would need to be replaced, with approximately nine of those miles being asphalt sidewalks in poor condition below score 60 (\$2.72 million), and 2.5 miles of replacement would be of concrete sidewalks scored below 40 (\$60,000), with repairs to concrete walkways scored between 40-60 (\$390,000), and the total program cost would be \$3.2 million as priced today. The City Engineer said that upgrading sidewalks in this way is an obvious investment and it would take several years to accomplish.

The City Engineer continued discussing things to consider for prioritizing sidewalk upgrades. He said the current condition is one of the primary things that needs to be considered, but the City also wants to serve the highest number of people and give the benefit of sidewalks to the greatest number of people. Therefore, in determining a level of service, user demand should be considered. He said that current counts do not exist of how many people use every sidewalk in the City on a given day and to collect that information will be very expensive and time-consuming, so he does not suggest it. Instead, he suggested using the proximity of a section of sidewalk to a destination as a proxy for user demand so that sidewalks within 1/4 mile or 1/2 mile of a school, for example, would be given extra points and therefore higher priority; as opposed to a sidewalk that is far from anywhere someone might want to walk to, for example. He said the same would be true of recreational facilities, parks, playgrounds, and shopping destinations where the City wants to encourage sidewalk access.

The Director of Public Works continued explaining that during the road survey conducted a few years ago, there were notes of all the sidewalks in the City that presented tripping hazards, which he said should be given additional priority as safety concerns are always more important than aesthetics. At one time when talking about new sidewalks, the City Council had discussed long walksheds, which was the idea of prioritizing where people are coming from and going to. For example, the walkshed for a school was approximately 1/2 mile because today schools do not bus children living within 1/2 mile of the school, so an exception would be given to keep children within that distance safe. The same would be true with proximity to recreation facilities or within the commercial district based on standards for how long people are willing to walk to arrive at certain locations. The Director of Public Works said that the focus remains on repairing the small sidewalks that are most heavily used versus those that are less traveled. He used Adams St as an example of a main walk to a school that should have a higher rating than it currently does. Just like the road program, he said that this program would take a number of years as well, and he hoped these presentations gave the Committee an idea of the trajectory for a sidewalk asset management plan and the types of sidewalks that would be higher priorities for repair or replacement. The City Engineer added that the half mile range equates to essentially a 10-minute

walk and if a typical walker proceeds at approximately 3mph, or a brisk pace, it would be considered a reasonable walk shed.

When discussing safety, Vice Chair Giacomo asked whether it was a discussion of the safety hazards caused by the sidewalks themselves or actual proximity to roadways, like talk in the last year of Eastern Avenue and Union Street, where the sidewalk is literally part of the road. He knew there were some other streets that were similar and said that taking safety into consideration is much more than a bump in the sidewalk creating a tripping hazard but other issues that are very dangerous like proximity to the street. From his perspective, the City Engineer said he first considers whether the sidewalk needs to be repaired and the Vice Chair's second question enters the issue of right-of-way limitations. When discussing Eastern Avenue for example, the Director of Public Works said that the right of way on the western side essentially reaches the front doors of most houses there, which was established when Eastern Avenue was built; because most homes were constructed on the east side of Eastern Avenue, that is where sidewalks were built. He said that unfortunately, under the current repair program such sidewalks are not being relocated and they typically replaced in their same location. In many of the City's older neighborhoods, many people do not realize that the City's right-of-way goes up to their front steps, which makes it challenging when talking about sidewalk replacement from an operational standpoint. The Director of Public works referred to "pick" streets, meaning that when snow is finished crews use equipment to pull snow from sidewalks and haul it away three to five days after a storm event to provide space for sidewalk use. Unfortunately, in the older areas of town, there is insufficient right-of-way.

Councilor Giacomo asked whether the Cheshire Rail Trail access points were considered as recreational facilities. The City Engineer thought that was a great question and asked the Committee what they thought priority criteria should be, such as Rail Trail access. He welcomed Committee feedback. The Director of Public Works said he thought that in general, the Parks, Recreation, & Facilities team was always included in these decisions, and he thought the Parks, Recreation, & Facilities could be certainly included; he had not considered the access points but could certainly prioritize such facilities and the same would be true for high priority commercial areas, for example.

Councilor Williams provided feedback. He said that he wanted to see priority for user demand closer to where elderly or seniors live who could be at greater risk of tripping hazards or who may use the sidewalks more during the daytime. In many ways, the Councilor thought that a replacement and repair program could follow the housing density patterns in town, thinking that there would be much more demand outside of an apartment than a single-family home. He talked about flood areas, and he had learned something looking at recent flood damage, including a lot of pavements that have been underwater for a certain amounts of time and are no good anymore, shortening the lifespan, and requiring more frequent replacements. He said he thought that was true for Spring Street and Court Street, for example.

Councilor Filiault complimented City Staff and especially the Public Works Department for how they had handled recent flooding. He said that he knew the City standard was concrete but said that the Council also needed to consider the cost to taxpayers, stating that Councilors are always

concerned about taxes and the budget. In his opinion, there are areas of Keene that do not need concrete sidewalks because they are perhaps less traveled, but sidewalks are still located there for safety. He knew some of those less used sidewalks needed to be replaced and thought that they could be easily fixed-up with asphalt; however, the City standard disallows such spot repairs because everything is required to be concrete. As a Council, he thought they needed to look at that sidewalk policy because, in his opinion, some areas simply do not need completely new concrete sidewalks when they could be easily fixed with asphalt and save money down the road. To his fellow Councilors, he said we really need to look at this policy and determine if there is a middle road, which he felt there certainly could be. The Public Works Director replied saying that was certainly a discussion that could occur. However, he said he did not want to delay this and said that when the CIP program comes forward, Councilors would have a better understanding of costs and impacts. The Public Works Department continued that before the Citywide concrete sidewalk standard, there were opportunities for different sidewalks in certain areas, with residential areas being asphalt sidewalks, for example. Of course, he said that concrete would last two times longer than asphalt, which was a deciding factor when the standard was enacted. This longevity was clear from the Main Street sidewalks that were installed in 1988, but he thought that it was important to start determining a funding profile through the City Manager. He said the concrete is a fairly good capital investment, but that the capital invested could be reduced by making certain choices like he described. He said this often goes back to an issue though of neighbors disagreeing because one has concrete sidewalks and another home four houses down has asphalt sidewalks. Councilor Filiault provided the example of one mile of asphalt and only 10-15 feet were in need of replacement and said officially right now, it would have to be replaced with concrete and suggested more spot repairs; he said he partially agreed with the Director of Public Works. In response to a comment by Councilor Filiault, the Director of Public Works cited past debates on leaf collection and said the goal is to always provide a cost-effective program.

Chair Manwaring recalled representing a minority opinion at previous meetings because she advocated for installing sidewalks in parts of the City where they lack currently, which concerns her. She said there are many locations, including to access the Rail Trail, where there are insufficient facilities for walkers to stand off the street, which makes her nervous. She asked Staff to imagine what could be done to address these issues. The Director of Public Works thought the Chair identified a few interesting challenges, with one being to create some space in the areas of Rail Trail crossings where people can wait or take a break, especially during winter months. He said that installing sidewalks in lesser-used remote locations presents another challenge, because the Department does not have sufficient equipment to access and clear those areas in the winter. He thought it was worth looking at some of the areas in question to think about creating small stopping facilities for pedestrians to get out of the street when needed in more remote areas. He referred to the Chair's statement on Bradford Road and recalled that the Council approved a new sidewalk there, but the neighborhood defeated it because neither side of the street would accept the sidewalk. He recalled that some years back there was a program for new sidewalks that was frozen by the Council due to fiscal constraints and eight years passed with no new sidewalks constructed in the City. At this time, he suggested letting one CIP cycle pass to get the Council interested in new sidewalks again. He said the Community Development

Department and Public Works Department worked together to consider how to prioritize new sidewalks, but part of the challenge is that it would be a long-term program that could take a decade to accomplish, at which point the requesting families' children are no longer walking the neighborhood. If the Council were interested, however, the Director of Public Works believed that there could be refocus on new sidewalks in the next CIP cycle to discuss locations and priorities. He recalled how expensive new sidewalks are because of ancillary issues like drainage, which could be double the costs of repairs or replacement alone. Historically, the Council has not wanted to take or pay for private land to install sidewalks, which was another issue on Bradford Road. As a good Director of Public Works, he wanted to start with caring for what the City already owns and ensuring it is at a reasonable level of service for the community before installing new sidewalk.

Vice Chair Giacomo said that by the time the \$3.2 million were spent, other sidewalks in town would have degraded further, particularly if the rain events of late continue. He said if Staff know what is expected to ongoing capital that would be needed after this initial capital investment. The City Engineer replied that it is an ongoing program that will never end but with current standards being concrete, the good news is that once everything is upgraded, the City can be sure that the lifespans of new infrastructure would exceed 50 years. He said that after initial investment would occur over a decade, the annual costs would decrease as it would be more for maintenance than replacement. From his experience, the Director of Public Works said that if considering a \$200,000/year repair program, which is something that could likely work from a fiscal and capacity standpoint, that is likely what the City would invest in perpetuity and costs would go up over time. When he began his position, the Director of Public Works said the City was spending less than \$250,000 annually on sidewalks, which increased to \$1 million annually for the next 20 years. He thought the Council's commitment to infrastructure over the long-term is important, such as the 1990s road program bringing that infrastructure to today's status; their commitment to sidewalks should pay off similarly. Still, the commitment to City sidewalks would take 10-20 years because sidewalks will always be deteriorating and needing repair. Vice Chair Giacomo said it was evident that once a sidewalk reaches a score of 40 it is not long before it declines to a 20 and asked if there were efficiencies to be gained by coupling sidewalks with already occurring road work. The Director of Public Works said that had been occurring in general, but the challenge comes if the road and sidewalk are not at matching conditions and a perfectly good sidewalk is repaired while a lower quality one elsewhere is not; people notice that. He said this program would be more about doing sidewalks independently, but we always try to combine the work.

The City Engineer said that the Director of Public Works made a good point about costs increasing over time. The costs presented at this meeting were based on present 2021 costs and recent project experiences over the last year, with projected 4.5% inflations. Therefore, when putting a sidewalk plan into the CIP, the \$3.2 million presented would change with time and increase each year. The Director of Public Works said the cost would increase annually with projections for inflation. He said the Council could choose to identify a funding level based on all other fiscal constraints but unfortunately over time, the scope will decrease. These discussions will be ongoing with the City Manager and Council through CIP and if the budget cannot

contend with annual inflation, the Council could choose a specific dollar level investment. These are all things the Council must balance, getting a certain amount of work done with a certain amount of fiscal responsibility to residents and the Director of Public Works said the Council does a good job.

The Chair asked the City Manager to provide a brief review of the CIP. The City Manager said that the CIP is the City's capital budget for the next six years, including projects known for beyond six years in the appendix. The CIP is updated comprehensively biannually and during the budget in off-CIP years, any items are amended as necessary for items that changed during the fiscal year. The CIP is for assets that are over \$20,000 and 10 years in life, and one challenge over time had been building capital reserve accounts. Over the past few CIPs, the City Manager said that more was added to the reserve accounts so that when a project is about to be awarded, there are funds ready. So, for a project like this, would involve initial outlay of cash in the beginning and eventually would move into a capital reserve account so that when ready to replace sidewalks in the future, the funds exist. This is how she tries to stabilize the impact on the municipal tax rate from these larger projects.

Councilor Williams noted that road projects are funded 80% by the federal government and asked if there were similar programs for sidewalks. The City Manager replied that bridge projects are eligible for funding. Additionally, when a project is in the state's 10-year plan, like the current Winchester Street project, 80% funding is available. Other road projects, such as Roxbury Street, fall on the taxpayer. She said there is no state or federal funding for sidewalks, but if there is a grant opportunity for roads, she tries to build sidewalks into the project, as with Winchester Street. The City Engineer said that Safe Routes to School and Transportation Alternatives Programs. For example, the Marlboro Street streetscapes project that was divorced from the utility project last year because the City received a grant that would pay for sidewalk improvements, crosswalks, pedestrian beacons, and connection to the Rail Trail. That grant is competitive. The Director of Public Works said that unfortunately the state of NH offers very little funding for this sort of work. Annually, the City gets a \$538,000 Block Grant from the state for roads; he said that compares to his approximately \$750,000 winter budget. He agreed with the City Manager that he works to tie ancillary work, like sewer and water, into road projects. Unfortunately, he would not say that is a regular type of program and maintaining a program will compete for dollars from the tax base.

Chair Manwaring recognized Councilor Mitch Greenwald, who asked the City Manager to review the short sheet of what is upcoming for sidewalks in the CIP. He wondered if somehow \$100,000 was available in fund balances, which the City Manager and Director of Public Works have access to, what the priority would be. The City Manager replied that the CIP has \$68,000 allotted for a mixture of miscellaneous repair and replacement; in fiscal year 2021, priority streets were Lamson Street, St. James Street, and School Street and in fiscal year 2022 priorities are Timberlane Road, Darling Road, and Old Walpole Road. She added that there are some funds available, and she advertised a request for proposals for a \$137,000 sidewalk project recently and received zero bids. Staff had a recent meeting about how to encourage bids, some of which had to do with timing post-Covid-19, and one idea from the City Engineer was to each year combine

a sidewalk project with a miscellaneous road project so the bulk offer would be enough to attract multiple bids. She said that typically the contractor is interested in road projects but will subcontract out for the sidewalk work. Staff is also looking at whether there is a way to accomplish these \$50,000-\$100,000 sidewalk projects with the City's annual road work. Councilor Greenwald thought that his fellow Councilors would agree that they hear from constituents more and more about smaller projects, not necessarily on the roads the City Manager mentioned, and said that perhaps more spot repairs were needed. He agreed that finding someone to work this season was likely a lost cause and that accomplishing these tasks in-house would be difficult with Director of Public Works crews stretched thin. Councilor Greenwald asked Staff to pay attention to smaller contractors.

The Director of Public Works agreed with the City Manager's surprise that there were no bids for a \$137,000 contract. He said that there is a fairly limited pool of small contractors in the Monadnock Region and a lot of work occurring. He referred a presentation at the next Finance, Organization, and Personnel Committee meeting on necessary emergency repairs, for which he was struggling to find contractors. Unfortunately, he did not think much more would be accomplished this year but the City Engineer was urged by the City Manager to begin working on next year's program, to continue addressing the worst areas in-house. Looking ahead, the Director of Public Works said storm recovery will be prioritized in August and leaf collection planning would begin soon as well to ensure the collection does not place undue demand on Public Works Department crews. He said that although Staff inventoried sidewalk conditions, he encouraged residents to use the See, Click, Fix app to report damaged sidewalks to the Public Works Department. The City Manager shared a story of using the app anonymously recently, how user-friendly it was, and how quickly crews resolved the concern. Councilor Williams also shared experience using the app and how quickly crews addressed his concern too.

Vice Chair Giacomo asked what the costs would be to bring all City sidewalks up to American Disability Association standards, which the \$3.2 million would be for this work. Discussion ensued about the overall City score of 67 being an average. Vice Chair Giacomo asked what it would take to bring the overall City average to a 70 or 75. The Director of Public Works said that bringing a sidewalk up to a score 70 is less a linear cost and more so exponential because various levels are not evenly distributed; if the City wanted a level of service of 90, that would then include all the sidewalks ranked good today. The City Engineer agreed that would add many more sidewalks that are today in the 60—80 range and so to reach an average of 80, approximately 20% of the sidewalk inventory would need repair and replacement and the other 80% would not need immediate attention. Unfortunately the City Engineer said the 80/20 rule does not always work in reverse, and if only addressing 10% there would not be the same results, for example.

There were no further public questions.

Vice Chair Giacomo moved to accept the sidewalk asset management plan presentation as informational, which Councilor Filiault seconded, and the motion passed on a roll call vote of 4-0.



Chair Manwaring thanked the City Engineer and Director of Public Works for the report. The Director of Public Works said that he looked forward to the CIP discussion, when the Council will get into this issue more.

**2) Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Manwaring adjourned the meeting at 6:31 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Katrnya Kibler, Minute Taker

Additional edits by,  
Terri Hood, Assistant City Clerk