

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

**PLANNING BOARD**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday, October 24, 2022**

**6:30 PM**

**Council Chambers,  
City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Pamela Russell-Slack, Chair  
Mayor George S. Hansel  
Roberta Mastrogiovanni  
Armando Rangel  
Harold Farrington  
Randyn Markelon, Alternate  
Kenneth Kost, Alternate

**Staff Present:**

Jesse Rounds, Community Development  
Director  
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

**Members Not Present:**

David Orgaz, Vice Chair  
Councilor Michael Remy  
Emily Lavigne-Bernier  
Gail Somers, Alternate  
Tammy Adams, Alternate

**I) Call to Order – Roll Call**

Chair Russell-Slack called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM and roll call was taken

**II) Minutes of Previous Meeting – September 26, 2022**

Harold Farrington offered the following correction – Line 569 the word *that* should be replaced with the word *than*.

A motion was made by Mayor George Hansel that the Planning Board approve the September 26, 2022 meeting minutes as amended. The motion was seconded by Harold Farrington and was unanimously approved.

**III) Final Vote on Conditional Approvals**

The Chair stated this is a new, standing agenda item in response to the recent “City of Dover” decision issued by the NH Supreme Court. As a matter of practice, the Board will now issue a final vote on all conditionally approved plans after all of the “conditions precedent” have been met. This final vote will be the final approval and will start the 30-day appeal clock. She asked staff whether there were any

applications tonight that are ready for a final vote.

Senior Planner Mari Brunner stated one application is ready for final vote, which is the Mint Carwash site plan application SPR 16-14, Modification 8. There were two conditions precedent: that the owner's signature appears on the plan and that five copies of the plan be submitted. Ms. Brunner stated both those conditions have been met and hence the applicant is looking for a final approval tonight.

A motion was made by Mayor George Hansel that the Planning Board issue final site plan approval for SPR 16-14, Modification 8. The motion was seconded by Harold Farrington and carried on a unanimous vote.

#### IV) Public Hearings

**SPR-11-16, Modification #10 – Site Plan – Covenant Living Site Modifications, 95, 100, & 118 Wyman Rd - Applicant SVE Associates, on behalf of owner Covenant Living of Keene, proposes site modifications including the creation of an on-site pedestrian walkway and sidewalks, two crosswalks, and the relocation of seven street trees and fourteen shrubs on their properties at 95 Wyman Rd (TMP #221-019-000), 100 Wyman Rd (TMP #221-018-000), and 118 Wyman Rd (TMP #210-010-000). These properties are a combined 67 acres in size and are located in the Rural District.**

##### A. Board Determination of Completeness

Ms. Brunner stated the Applicant has requested exemptions from submitting a Lighting Plan, Elevations, and technical reports. Staff recommends the Board grant these exemptions and accept the application as complete.

A motion was made by Mayor George Hansel to recommend the Board accept Application SPR-11-16, Modification #10 as complete. The motion was seconded by Councilor Michael Remy and was unanimously approved.

##### B. Public Hearing

Ms. Liza Sargent from SVE Associates addressed the Board on behalf of Applicant Covenant Living of Keene. On a plan, Ms. Sargent referred to the independent living building, healthcare building and the barn. Ms. Sargent stated the proposal is to construct a crosswalk at the main entrance on top of the speed table, locate two additional sidewalks, as well as a gravel path along the west side of Wyman Road to the barn facility and connecting to the existing path. As part of this project, landscaping will be relocated to improve sight distance; there are existing trees to the south that block the view. The trees will be relocated to the islands that exist on site. This concluded the applicant's presentation.

Staff comments were next. Ms. Brunner stated there were a few departmental comments from engineering staff, mostly regarding the infrastructure that is going to be installed in the public right of way. The first comment is that the property owner should submit written documentation that the improvements do not serve the general public and will not be maintained by the City. The second comment is that the applicant

will obtain a revocable license and maintenance agreement from the Public Works Department for the infrastructure that is going to be installed in the public right of way.

With respect to the Planning Board development standards Ms. Brunner stated as follows:

Drainage & Stormwater Management: The project narrative states that approximately 2,030 sf of impervious area will be added to the site from the addition of the new sidewalks and paved pathway. The project narrative specifies that the existing impervious areas will continue to drain as they currently do and notes that another catch basin is proposed to be installed. Engineering also had a comment about the proposed infiltration on the lawn of the former Miracles in Motion property and that this infiltration system will become less effective over time and will require maintenance. She added the Board may wish to ask the applicant to clarify how they plan on maintenance of this system.

Sedimentation & Erosion Control: The applicant is proposing inlet protection over existing catch basins and silt fencing. Ms. Brunner indicated this standard appears to be met.

Landscaping: The applicant is proposing new landscaping along the road to improve sight distance based on comments from residents. These trees will be relocated on site and will not be eliminated. Ms. Brunner referred to where the trees and shrubs are currently located and the area they are going to be relocated.

Ms. Brunner went on to say that prior to this proposed change, the parking lot was in compliance with the parking lot landscape standards in zoning. With this change, the applicant is seeking an alternative design and the Board may wish to determine if this meets the intent of the parking lot landscaping design standards.

Traffic & Access Management: The applicant is addressing some concerns raised by residents and are proposing to install two crosswalks with pedestrian-activated beacons. However, because of the topography of the site and somewhat high speeds on the road they are proposing to locate warning beacons 100 feet in advance of the crosswalk. They are also proposing a stone dust walkway which would connect to the barn and would connect via the secondary crosswalk to the walking path.

Ms. Brunner stated there is an outstanding condition of approval from the Board which states as follows: *“Between Twelve and Eighteen months following the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy, the Applicant will hire an independent consultant to complete an assessment of pedestrian traffic and safety along the area of Wyman Road adjacent to the site. If the Public Works Director determines that the pedestrian volumes and assessed safety conditions warrant changes to the site and/or roadway design, the Applicant will work with the Public Works and Planning Departments to implement agreed upon changes at the expense of the Applicant.”*

Ms. Brunner stated the Applicant did approach staff after the certificate of occupancy was issued but that was in the midst of Covid and staff and the applicant agreed to wait until after Covid when traffic patterns would be more normal. Since that time, ownership changed and the new owner is interested in installing pedestrian facilities and staff agreed to skip that step of the pedestrian safety assessment as they are going directly to the solution.

This concluded staff comments.

The Chair asked for public comment next.

Mr. Carl Jacobs, 81 Wyman Road addressed the Board and stated he was one of those who advocated for the crosswalk and noted the situation as it exists now is not safe. He encouraged the Board to approve this request.

With no further comments the Chair closed the public hearing.

C. Board Discussion and Action

A motion was made by Mayor George Hansel that the Planning Board approve SPR-11-16, Modification 10 as shown on the plan set identified as “Covenant Living Cross Walks, 95 Wyman Road, Keene New Hampshire” prepared by SVE Associates at varying scales on August 16, 2022, and last revised October 4, 2022, with the following conditions:

A. Prior to final approval and signature by Planning Board Chair, the following conditions precedent shall be met:

1. Owner’s signature appears on plan.
2. Submittal of five full-size paper copies and one digital copy of the final plan set.
3. The property owner shall submit written acknowledgement, acceptable to the Public Works Director and City Attorney, that the proposed pedestrian improvements do not serve the general public and will not be maintained by the City. A written note to this effect shall be added to sheet C-4 of the plan set.
4. The property owner shall obtain a revocable license and maintenance agreement from the City of Keene for the placement of private signage and pedestrian safety improvements within the public right-of-way. A plan showing the location of the pedestrian safety improvements and signage shall be submitted as part of the required documentation.”

The motion was seconded by Harold Farrington and was unanimously approved.

**CLSS-CUP-01-22 – Congregate Living & Social Service Conditional Use Permit – Unity House, 39 Summer St - Applicant The Home for Little Wanderers, on behalf of owner William K. Schofield, proposes to operate a Small Group Home on the property located at 39 Summer St (TMP #568-037-000). A waiver is requested from Sec. 25.14.7.A of the Land Development Code regarding the requirement to submit a complete plan set stamped and signed by a NH licensed engineer or architect. The site is 0.40 acres in size and is located in the Downtown Transition District.**

A. Board Determination of Completeness

Ms. Brunner stated the Applicant has requested exemptions from submitting a plan set that is signed and stamped by a NH licensed engineer or architect. The Community Development Director did determine that this is an exemption request because it is a submittal item and not a waiver request. However, staff made an error and included the waiver request in the legal language and hence the Board does not need to vote on the waiver request. She reiterated that it is just an exemption request. In addition, the application is also requesting an exemption from providing a grading plan, a lighting plan, architectural elevations,

and technical reports. After reviewing the requested exemptions, staff recommend that the Planning Board accept the application as complete.

A motion was made by Mayor George Hansel to recommend the Board accept Application CLSS-CUP-01-22 as complete. The motion was seconded by Harold Farrington and was unanimously approved.

B. Public Hearing

Attorney Tom Hanna addressed the Board on behalf of The Home for Little Wanderers and indicated the application relates to a small group home, initially the applicant was considering a large group home with 12 youth but it has been downsized to eight (small group home) which is a permitted use in the Downtown Transition District. Attorney Hanna introduced Tara Kessler, Planner Paralegal who also works from Attorney Hanna's law firm. The attorney also introduced Vice-President for Community Programs, Matt McCall and Director of Facilities, John Davis.

Mr. McCall began the presentation by saying that this group home is for children who are involved with DCYF and will specialize in treatment of children who identify as LGBTQ. This is the first such group home in New Hampshire and third in the country. Mr. McCall stated this facility will help youth from New Hampshire to remain in New Hampshire and receive services.

Mr. McCall stated this site would be considered a Level 2 Group Home, where community based support will be provided for children under the age of 18 where children will eventually be able to return to the community. There will be staff present at the site 24/7 to provide ongoing support and supervision. There will be mental health services as part of the program and this would be an in house service provided to the residents. The children will also be assisted with day to day needs that any adolescent would have.

Mr. McCall went on to say that they have a \$250,000 budget to renovate this home. For many years this site was a single family home, a very large property (7,000 square feet) in total. For the last several years it has been used as a business.

Mr. McCall continued with respect to how they operate the program. There are services provided to children who have go through trauma in their lives, but the program also keeps in mind that they encourage youth to grow and do better while also making sure the program and site is not detrimental to the neighborhood. At other sites they operate in different areas, there is little impact on the community such as minor usage of emergency services. The site in Massachusetts has probably seen three ambulance calls per year. He added because staff is present 24/7, neighbors always have a way of getting in touch with someone with any concerns they may have. He added there are also administrators on call 24 hours a day.

He stated they also conduct quarterly meetings in the community to discuss any challenges which is also a way for the neighbors to be part of the program. Chair Russell-Slack asked whether neighbors typically attend such meetings. Mr. McCall stated attendance usually depends on weather, time of year, etc. The Chair asked for the ages of children and their gender. Mr. McCall stated they are between the ages of 14-18 and both male and female. Mr. McCall added the State is short 250 beds, and in addition Crotched Mountain Center will also be closing its doors soon which would increase this number. Hence, there is a lot more pressure to open group homes in New Hampshire.

Mayor Hansel clarified the parking in the rear is accessible via the adjoining property and asked if the applicant has an agreement with the neighbor to use that access. Attorney Hanna stated there is a long standing deeded easement. The Mayor asked whether the front driveway will be used to access the rear parking lot. Mr. McCall stated that driveway won't be used often, except to use the handicap parking at the front and to access the lift located on the first floor. The Mayor noted the lighting fixtures are being proposed to be changed but asked if the lighting itself is being changed. Mr. McCall stated the lighting is not being proposed to be changed significantly.

Mr. Farrington asked if any of the youth would have vehicles. Mr. McCall answered in the negative.

Tara Kessler addressed the Board next and went over the Conditional Use Criteria outlined in Article 15 in the Land Development Code for Congregate Living and Social Services.

***A. The nature of the proposed application is consistent with the spirit and intent of the Zoning Regulations, and the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, and complies with all the applicable standards for the particular use in Section 8.3.4.***

This property is located in the Downtown Transition (DT-T) district, which acts as a transition between the more intense Downtown Core District and neighboring residential areas and allow for mixture of uses including residential, multi family, office, funeral home, bed and breakfast, institutional uses, and cultural centers (with special exception). The proposed use would be less intense than the ones allowed by special exception, as it takes an office building and converts it to a residential building.

Ms. Kessler noted surrounding uses on Summer Street are consistent with this proposed use; on the same side of Summer Street are two, three-unit apartment buildings, a single family home, two offices and one mixed use building. Ms. Kessler stated the use standards for Small Group Home state that the use must be licensed through the City's Congregate Living Social Service License. Pending tonight's outcome, the applicant will be back before the Licensing Board tomorrow.

She went on to say the applicant wants to preserve the exterior of the building as a single family home.

Ms. Kessler stated the primary goal of this facility is to provide a safe haven for LGBTQ youth to live and grow and be part of the community. She noted this is consistent with the Master Plan goals of embracing diversity.

***B. The proposed use will be established, maintained, and operated so as not to endanger the public health, safety, or welfare.***

Ms. Kessler stated the Home has a long history of operating similar programs both in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. The home will be managed by 14.5 equivalent professional staff and at a minimum of two professional staff will be present during "awake hours" and two staff present during "asleep hours" to ensure continual supervision in the event of an emergency. An administrator is also on-call 24/7 for any issues that need additional support or guidance. All points of ingress/egress for the building will be secured with key-pad locks and security cameras. With this level of security, the Applicant feels there will be no unreasonable hazards to the neighborhood.

- C. The proposed use will be established, maintained, and operated so as to be harmonious with the surrounding area and will not impede the development, use, and enjoyment of adjacent property. In addition, any parking lots, outdoor activity area, or waiting areas associated with the use shall be adequately screened from adjacent properties and from public rights-of-way.***

Ms. Kessler noted as indicated previously, this use will be compatible with surrounding uses in the neighborhood. With respect to screening, there is an existing parking lot at the rear and right now the abutter to the east has a stockade fence for screening. There is a heavy vegetative screening for the abutter to the north. With respect to outdoor activities, it is anticipated the residents would use the extensive front porch of the building. There is also some lawn area at the rear of the building and to the west side of the building and there is thick vegetation that screens the neighboring property to the west. If the residents were to be congregating outside on the lawn, west of the building, the applicant did suggest to the abutter at 45 Summer Street, that the applicant will be willing to install landscaping to screen this area but this abutter has stated he does not want any screening in this area; he has concerns about added vegetation crowding his property. However, if the Board requires screening, he would prefer a stockade fence. At the request of staff, the site plan shows ten arborvitae in the area. The portion of the existing structure that would be most impacted by the outdoor activity area is the barn. Ms. Kessler circulated to the Board an email from this abutter indicated his opposition to vegetation along his shared property boundary with the site.

- D. The proposed use will be of a character that does not produce noise, odors, glare, and/or vibration that adversely affects the surrounding area.***

Ms. Kessler stated the proposed use is going to be residential in nature. With respect to impact of noise, odor etc. the noise level from the residents who use the outdoor area will be similar to that of a residential uses in the neighborhood. Staff will always be present during outdoor activity to monitor noise and address neighborhood concerns. Ms. Kessler added the residents in this group home are not residing in this facility due to behavior issues which prohibit them from being in a community setting.

With respect to air quality, there will be no smoking permitted anywhere on the site. With respect to the lighting, there will be four wall mounted, fully shielded lights.

- E. The proposed use will not place an excessive burden on public infrastructure, facilities, services, or utilities.***

Ms. Kessler noted that this site has had similar uses and hence the applicant feels there will not be any added burden on public services. The applicant will also be providing their own mental health services and will not be relying on community programs for this. However, like any other Keene residents, they might need the City's emergency room or medical facility. There is existing water and sewer available and will be sufficient for the proposed use and the applicant would have to go before the City for a building permit and would have to adhere to building life safety codes before occupying the space.

- F. The proposed use will not result in the destruction, loss, or damage of any feature determined to be of significant natural, scenic, or historic importance.***

Ms. Kessler stated there are no new structures or additions being proposed. There is interior work being proposed. However, for the exterior of the site it will be limited to painting the building in a similar color as it is today. There is some damage to the front porch which would also be repaired as well as some roofing repair. The applicant has a budget of \$250,000 for this work and will also have an annual capital budget for maintenance and they also have a full time facilities maintenance person on staff.

***G. The proposed use will not create a traffic safety hazard or a substantial increase in the level of traffic congestion in the vicinity of the use.***

Ms. Kessler stated that the residents will not be driving and staff will work in three shifts, hence traffic impact would be at a minimum. Average daily weekday trip generation is estimated to be 20 vehicle trips. Weekend trips will amount to 16 vehicle trips. According to ITE calculation, the prior office use estimated about 90 trips a day. Hence, this use has a much lesser impact. There is ample parking at the site. There are 15 spaces on site for use by employees and visitors. The Home will have its own transportation for its residents and parking will be at the rear of the building.

***H. The proposed use will be located in proximity to pedestrian facilities (e.g. multiuse trails and sidewalks), public transportation, or offer transportation options to its client population.***

Ms. Kessler noted this is an ideal site for a youth group home as it is at walking distance to downtown and community resources. There will be a bike rack added to the rear of the building, and the site will have access to the City Express. This concluded Ms. Kessler's presentation.

Attorney Hanna referred to the email from the abutter which requests that there be no plant screening and, if there should be any screening, is requesting a fence.

Staff comments were next. Ms. Brunner referred to Conditional Use Permit Criteria 15.3.c which calls for any parking lots and activity areas associated with the use to be adequately screened from adjacent properties and public rights of way. Ms. Brunner stated in this instance the key word is "adequately" which is not defined anywhere in the code. In this instance, the abutter does not want screening, most of the area is screened and there is only one area that is not fully screened. In this instance, staff did not feel they could make the determination that no screening is required; however, the Board could determine whether or not that is adequate. Ms. Brunner stated that the applicant is looking for final approval tonight if possible, and so the applicant has brought different versions of the plan to the meeting with options for arborvitae (as shown in the packet), fencing, or no screening. She suggested the Board should decide which option they would prefer and make it clear which version of the plan they are approving. There is only one condition of approval staff is requesting and that is, that the Applicant has to obtain a Congregate Living and Social Services License, which shall be renewed annually in accordance with Chapter 46 of the City Code of Ordinances. This concluded staff comments.

The Chair asked for public comment next.

The Chair began by reading into the record an email from Sally Rhinehart of 24 School Street which states as follows:

*The last public hearing I attended had only a few minutes for the public to speak.... My concern remains the same as it was when this organization was going for a variance – there is no green space for these teens to enjoy the outdoors... I urge all members to walk the site before a decision is made.*

Mr. John Arruda of 31 Summer Street addressed the Board next. Mr. Arruda stated their property is 17 feet from this Home and is concerned as there are many youth who would be using this site and he has young children of his own. He stated he has only heard good things about this use but has heard many concerns raised by the neighbors. He questioned the need for the waiver. Ms. Brunner stated the waiver was to exempt the applicant from having to submit a site plan prepared by a NH licensed engineer or architect; this is a requirement of the Planning Board for full site plan approval. Ms. Brunner stated this item does not meet the threshold for site plan approval because the site changes are so minor. If the applicant did not require a conditional use permit, all they would have required is administrative approval without the need of a stamped plan. She added this is not a waiver request, but an exemption request for submittal.

Mr. Arruda stated he is requesting a fence on the east side of the property. Mr. McCall stated they had met with the real estate agent during the neighborhood meeting and have agreed to locate any amount of screening to the east as the neighbors would like. Mr. Arruda asked for a timeline for the installation. Mr. McCall stated it would be installed prior to occupancy as part of their renovation efforts.

Laura Tobin of Center Street stated she would love to have teenagers in the neighborhood. However, she stated her concern is the drug dealers who inhabit that area; they cut through yards on Summer Street to get to Center Street. She stated she has called the police many times over the past few weeks and has been told they are too busy to respond. She stated when she looked up this application, one of the names was related to an embezzling incident at that property and wanted to make sure that relationship was severed. The Chair stated this is not something the Board can address.

Mr. Michael Zoll of 18 Summer Street was the next to address the Board. Mr. Zoll stated that, at the neighborhood meeting, he had asked Mr. McCall about the variance for 12 residents versus eight and Mr. McCall had indicated they would not have the financial resources to continue with eight residents. Mr. Zoll asked for Mr. McCall to address this issue. The Chair stated unfortunately this is not the Board's purview and asked Mr. Zoll to address this with Mr. McCall at the end of the meeting. She explained the Board's responsibility is to make sure the Board's 19 Standards are adhered to and the item raised by Mr. Zoll is not part of those Standards.

Mr. Tom Savastano of 25 Winter Street referred to the traffic impact statement outlined on Pages 59 and 60 of the packet. He indicated this statement refers to staff travel but does not mention visitors to the site. He stated the final sentence indicates ... *The estimated weekly number of visitors and guests will be between 1 and 2* and felt this number does not address visitors to the site. Ms. Brunner in response stated the traffic numbers outlined come from the ITE trip generation manual and they use an average based on the use and this is the number the City goes by.

Ms. Susan Doyle of 69 Island addressed the Board and referred to the Congregate Living and Social Services Licenses and asked for clarification. Ms. Brunner stated all uses that fall under the category of Congregate Living and Social Services, which include "group home," need a license every year from the City. The Licensing Board will meet a day after the Planning Board to review this license. Ms. Doyle also

raised the issue of the number of residents as 12 versus eight – the Chair reiterated this is not an issue that is the purview of the Planning Board.

Ms. Jeananne Farrar of 59 School Street stated she has lived in the Summer Street neighborhood most of her life until she moved into her current home on School Street. She stated her concern is where the City is going with these types of uses; Winter Street now is mostly business uses. She indicated Winter Street, Center Street, Summer Street and Middle Street were laid out in the 1800's and they are not wide enough for traffic and Summer Street has already been diminished by speed bumps. This is one of the second oldest neighborhoods in the City. She felt there are some rules that need to be followed with respect to certain areas which have been protected up to this point. Ms. Farrar stated she loves kids and these young people need a place to live, but expressed concern about the location and the close proximity to drug dealers. She indicated the problems on Main Street are getting worse. She felt this use should be in a location where they are not next to things that are not healthy for the residents.

Attorney Hanna addressed the Board and stated they have a Purchase and Sales Agreement on this property and it was important to receive approval from the Board. He stated as Mr. McCall has indicated they are willing to locate a fence to the east of this site.

With no further comment, the Chair closed the public hearing.

Mayor Hansel stated that the various processes that applicants have to go through can be confusing at times. The one tonight focuses mainly on the site, accessibility, and the development standards the Board has to adhere to. Concerns with respect to use is a conversation for a different night. He said the Board's responsibility is to look at their standards, resolve potential conflicts, which it looks like they might be able to do tonight. He said with respect to screening, he agrees with the applicant that the screening on the west side is adequate without the arborvitae or the fence. Additionally, it looks like the abutter on the west side would like some screening, so it makes sense to add a fence there and the motion he makes will reflect that.

#### C. Board Discussion and Action

A motion was made by Mayor George Hansel that the Planning Board approve Conditional Use Permit CLSS-CUP-01-22 for a small group home, as shown on the plan identified as "Proposed Conditions, 39 Summer Street, Keene, NH" prepared at a scale of 1 inch = 45 feet, dated August 23, 2022 and last revised October 7, 2022, with the following conditions subsequent to final approval:

1. The Applicant shall obtain a Congregate Living and Social Services License, which shall be renewed annually in accordance with Chapter 46 of the City Code of Ordinances.
2. The Applicant shall submit a revised plan showing a fence on the eastern side of the property and the removal of 10 arborvitae on the western side of the property.

The motion was seconded by Harold Farrington and was unanimously approved.

#### V. Staff Updates

##### a. **Downtown Infrastructure Improvement and Reconstruction Project**

Mr. Rounds addressed the Board and noted that the Department of Public Works is working on the design for this project with their consultant, Stantec. There have been two public sessions for the public to weigh in and there will be more. Mr. Rounds indicated that Kurt Blomquist, Public Works Director, is present tonight.

Mr. Blomquist stated that a Steering Committee has been created for the project, with the Mayor serving as the Chair. The Committee represents various interests in the community including business, arts, bicycle/pedestrian, etc. The Committee meets on the third Tuesday of the month and will be extending their meeting schedule through January. This Committee is charged with overseeing the design phase and acting as a group that collects comments.

The project is estimated at around \$7.4 million and 75% of the project is underground. Mr. Blomquist noted that some utilities downtown were installed between 1800–1930 and most of this infrastructure cannot support the downtown activities. When the underground work is completed, there will be an opportunity to make adjustments to the layout and design of the downtown. The last time downtown was renovated was in 1988. At that time, retail was the main aspect in the downtown. This has changed, as people now come downtown for entertainment, gathering etc.; however, the downtown is not user-friendly for these types of activities. What the Steering Committee is hearing is the need for gathering spaces, outdoor activity, and dining (Water Street to Central Square as well as Railroad Square and Gilbo Avenue).

One of the alternatives is to create a focus area on Railroad Square and Gilbo Avenue, creating a much wider pedestrian crossing and more gathering areas. In addition to this, a goal would also be to create bicycle and pedestrian facilities on Main Street.

With respect to the schedule, the Steering Committee will make a recommendation to the City Council in early 2023. The goal is by March/April 2023 to decide what major elements are going to be considered. Phase 1 is planned to start in calendar year 2024. This will be a three year project. The issue is to determine how businesses are going to be operated and also allow people to conduct activities, which could slow down the work. Mr. Blomquist stated that there is a project website that also has alternatives and encouraged the public to visit this site and provide comments.

Chair Russell-Slack stated that there is a Downtown Merchants Association, but noted that not all downtown businesses are part of this group. She added that not all merchants have been contacted and felt it is imperative that they are made aware of what is going to happen. She stated that she also has not heard about transportation (not just bicycle and pedestrian). Mr. Blomquist stated that the City has contacted every property owner in the downtown. In addition to this, he noted that Public Works has had a number of discussions with Mark Remillard, who represents the Downtown Merchants Association on the Steering Committee, and has an email distribution list for this group. Mr. Blomquist encouraged people to reach out to him with any questions. He agreed that public transit in the Monadnock region is an issue. This concluded staff's presentation.

## **VI) New Business**

Chair Russell-Slack stated that there is a need to update the City's Master Plan (focusing on housing needs) to address decisions that will be coming before the Board. Ms. Brunner explained that the City will be starting a housing needs assessment this week. The work will include the Planning, Licenses, &

Development Committee and the Planning Board. Mr. Kost stated that he is hearing about a Master Plan, the Housing Needs Analysis, and the downtown project and did not feel these were separate and said that he felt that all of these projects should be connected. He asked if this could be looked at as a whole. In response, Mr. Rounds agreed that these are all connected and focus on change in the community. He felt that the grants being applied for are going to provide many opportunities and stated that his focus is to look at which portions of the Master Plan need to be updated first.

The Chair stated that she would like the site visit for the November Planning Board meeting to be earlier than the day before Thanksgiving.

**VII) Upcoming Dates of Interest – August 2022**

- Joint Committee of the Planning Board and PLD – November 14, 6:30 PM
- Planning Board Steering Committee – November 15, 11:00 AM
- Planning Board Site Visit – November 23, 8:00 AM – To Be Confirmed
- Planning Board Meeting – November 28, 6:30 PM

There being no further business, Chair Russell-Slack adjourned the meeting at 8:19 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,  
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner  
Megan Fortson, Planning Technician