

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

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

**Thursday, March 23, 2023**

**6:00 PM**

**Council Chambers,  
City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Michael J. Remy, Vice Chair  
Bettina A. Chadbourne  
Andrew M. Madison  
Bryan J. Lake

**Members Not Present:**

Thomas F. Powers, Chair

**Staff Present:**

Elizabeth Dragon, City Manager  
Thomas P. Mullins, City Attorney  
Amanda Palmiera, Assistant City Attorney  
Beth Fox, Asst. City Manager/Human  
Resources Director  
Kurt Blomquist, Asst. City Manager/Public  
Works Director  
Don Lussier, City Engineer

Acting Chair Remy called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

**1. Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grant - ACM/Public Works Director**

Acting Chair Remy recognized Assistant City Manager/Public Works Director Kurt Blomquist. Mr. Blomquist began that he was present in his role as the Emergency Management Director this evening to discuss the City's hazard mitigation plan. He stated this is a plan that identifies the various hazards, natural and man-made, that the city is subject to, along with identifying the risk associated with those particular hazards. It also identifies potential projects that can help mitigate if one of these events were to occur. Mr. Blomquist added that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requires communities to have an approved plan in place to qualify for certain types of Federal funding if a federally declared event occurs in your community. He went on to say there is a list of federal programs through the hazard mitigation site, and he went on to reference a few of them.

Mr. Blomquist continued that hazard mitigation plans are required to be reviewed and updated every 5 years. The City's current plan was reviewed, updated and adopted in 2018. 2023 is our year to review and update the plan again. The Department Homeland Security does provide grants to assist in updating these plans. The City has applied for and received a grant, in the amount of \$16,667 for this purpose. He explained this particular grant requires a 10% match, meaning \$1,667 is the required match from the local community. The reason it is 10% is that underneath our last disaster that was approved by the White House, it was approved at 90% reimbursement, so that carries through for any hazard mitigation grants that are granted underneath that particular disaster declaration.

Mr. Blomquist went on to explain that the local match will primarily come from staff time. These updates involve Community Development, Police, Fire, and Public Works. Staff will conduct a series of meetings where the various components and sections will be reviewed. The goal is to complete this by this summer, prior to the expiration of the current plan in August.

As there were no questions from the Committee members of the public, Acting Chair Remy called for a motion.

The following motion was made by Councilor Lake, and duly seconded by Councilor Madison:

On a vote of 4-0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept, execute, and expend a Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grant in the amount of up to \$16,667 from the New Hampshire Department of Safety Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management for the updating of the City's Hazard Mitigation Plan.

**2. Transportation Heritage Trail, Phase 1 – Project Agreement – City Engineer**

City Engineer Don Lussier addressed the Committee relative to the Transportation Heritage Trail Phase One Project, which has been discussed previously. He continued tonight's action is related to the State agreement that the City is required to sign. As background, Mr. Lussier recalled that the City has already received two separate grant agreements for this first phase. The first was through the Federal Highway Administration. That particular grant is called the *Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Grant*, and it is the same program we have been using for a number of our rail trail projects. Federal money requires a 20% local match. The other federal grant we received was a congressionally directed spending grant, also known as an earmark, through Congresswoman Kuster's office. Last week, the City received the first agreement with the State for those federal project funds, and this agreement is specifically related to the TAP Grant. At present, the amount of that agreement covers just the amount of the TAP Grant. However the DOT staff explained that the congressionally directed funds are still working their way through the State's process through the Governor and Council. They expect once that gets approved, the two projects will be merged together and an updated grant agreement or project agreement will be issued.

Mr. Lussier continued that the motion before the Committee tonight includes the authority for the Manager to sign the project agreement for the first phase, as well as any subsequent amendments, anticipating that we will be receiving an amendment to cover that the additional project funds. The total project funded by the TAP grant is \$680,675 of which \$544,540 are Federal, and \$136,135 come from the local match. Recently, Pathways for Keene and The Monadnock Conservancy came in together with some donations of totaling \$52,000 to help with that local match. He offered to take any questions.

Acting Chair Remy opened it up for questions. With no questions from the group, Acting Chair

Remy asked Mr. Lussier asked if the \$90,000 of the match was budgeted to a specific area aligned with timing for this project.

Mr. Lussier responded that match for the remaining match for what we have now is already been appropriated in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, and previously. He added that there would be a request for some additional local match that comes forward with the FY 2024 CIP updates.

With no questions from the public, Acting Chair Remy called for a motion.

The following motion was made by Councilor Madison and duly seconded Councilor Chadbourne:

On a vote of 4-0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the city manager be authorized to do all things necessary to negotiate and execute a project agreement along with future amendments the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) to implement phase one of the transportation heritage trail project.

### **3. MOU with Keene Dog Park, Inc. - Parks, Recreation and Facilities Director**

Acting Chair Remy recognized Mr. Andy Bohannon, Parks and Recreation Facilities Director. Mr. Bohannon introduced himself and thanked the Chairman and members of the committee. He noted that he has two items very similar in nature. The first item is a motion to have the City Manager be authorized to negotiate and execute a memorandum of understanding with the Keene Dog Park, Inc. Previously, the committee had set forth criteria for the group to become a 501C3 in order to go out, fundraise and begin to work on getting a dog park up and running here within the City at Wheelock Park that was designated last year for that purpose. At that same time, it was agreed that the group would come back at a later date to create an MOU for the two groups. This request for the MOU is for the Dog Park Group. In previous efforts of the dog park, the group fundraised slightly over \$10,000, which was held in a reserve account here within the City as the City is the fiscal agent for them.

To move forward helping them with the project, Keene Dog Park, Inc. had Phil's Tree Service, who is under contract with the City to perform tree work, come out to provide a quote. Phil's Tree Service gave them a significant and generous donation from in-kind, but there is still \$10,000 remaining in costs for that purpose. The Keene Dog Park, Inc. has given permission in writing, and Mr. Bohannon wanted to come forward to make the committee aware that they intend to spend that \$10,000 for that purpose. He added that if anyone would like to help out with the Keene Dog Park, they have fundraising efforts right on their webpage. They currently have about \$35,000 pledged to them, and they have several other requests out there.

With no questions from the rest of the committee, Acting Chair Remy asked if the intent of these agreements was to be cost neutral to the City. City Manager Dragon responded that the actual

building of the facilities for both the dog park and the disc golf should be neutral cost to the City. She noted that there is some work that needs to be done in the Park in general and she understands that Mr. Bohannon is timing some of the work planned related to the public with some of these projects. Mr. Bohannon stated that in working with both groups, part of the agreement, is that the groups will perform the ongoing maintenance of trash pickup and general cleanup of the area, similar to agreement previously made with the Mountain Bike Club. The mowing and trimming will fall back on the City, but the group itself will do the general maintenance.

Acting Chair Remy asked if there a thought on what would happen if they fell out of compliance with the agreement. Attorney Mullins that has yet to be determined. Acting Chair Remy responded that his only hesitation with having to negotiate and execute a recommendation coming out of it is that we do not know what that is. City Manager Dragon offered to provide a copy of the executed agreement to the committee member mailboxes. Acting Chair Remy accepted and thanked City Manager Dragon.

Acting Chair Remy called for a motion to approve.

The following motion was made by Councilor Chadbourne and duly seconded by Councilor Lake:

On a vote of 4-0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to negotiate and execute a memorandum of understanding with the Keene Dog Park, Inc. for the purposes of building and maintaining a dog park in Wheelock Park.

**4. MOU with Keene Disc Golf Club - Parks, Recreation and Facilities Director**

Mr. Bohannon explained the second request is similar, related to the Keene Disc Golf Club in the execution of putting together a nine-hole golf course within the campground as well. This group is ready to execute sooner than the Dog Park and Mr. Bohannon plans to meet with them tomorrow to review their status and plans going forward. From his understanding, city staff has gone out and done some GIS components of that particular course, to ensure compliance with the Dubois and King Survey previously presented to the committee last fall. Once they work on the agreement, they will get an executed copy to the committee.

Acting Chair Remy asked if there were any questions from the committee.

Councilor Lake, in an effort to be transparent, shared that he has been involved in this project for a while as he is an avid member of the disc golf club. He is not, however, on the board, and did not believe there to be any conflict as he will not be involved in the signing of this agreement.

Councilor Remy asked if there were any challenges or questions from the committee. With no challenges or questions, Councilor Remy welcomed questions.

With no questions, Councilor Remy asked if there was any specialized maintenance for the disc golf club. Mr. Bohannon responded that the maintenance is minimal. The City will perform general maintenance days to clean up some of the T boxes and keep the course in good condition. Mr. Remy thanked Mr. Bohannon. Councilor Lake added that the club has over a decade of experience with maintaining a course located in Otter Brook. They regularly go out, especially after storms, to clear limbs/debris, etc. The group places importance on keeping the courses well maintained in a professional manner and will continue to do the same with this course.

Councilor Remy thanked Councilor Lake for his input. Without any questions from anybody in the audience, he requested a motion.

Councilor Lake offered the following motion that was duly seconded by Councilor Madison:

On a vote of 4-0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to all things necessary to negotiate and execute a memorandum of understanding with the Keene Disc Golf Club for the purposes of building and maintaining a nine-hole disc golf course in Wheelock Park.

#### **5. Opioid Grant Application/ KPD Social Worker - City Manager**

Acting Chair Remy welcomed City Manager Dragon. The City Manager discussed a grant application for a social worker position at the Keene Police Department that she has been working on with Police Chief, Steve Stewart and former Police Chief, Steve Russo. The application would be to the Opioid Abatement Trust Fund. City of Keene was one of the 23 litigating subdivisions. Keene is to receive 15% of the settlement amount as the state continues to settle these accounts. The money that the city receives is deposited into its own account, and it is kept year to year. The money is also restricted and must be used for the purpose of abatement of opioid issues. As of right now, none of the received funding has been spent and there is currently a balance of \$113,123.85. That amount is in the form of multiple payments; three small payments, and then one large payment. Some of these settlements will come in over 18 years and the larger settlement is a larger lump settlement with Johnson and Johnson Company.

The City Manager continued the Opioid Abatement Commission is also working on the RGA and related grant application going out to communities and non-profits. She shared that there has already been one round of grant applications, but the City of Keene did not submit in that round as they were not ready. There is another round happening soon, specifically for Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), which is directed to counties that are required to provide MAT. It will be a partial reimbursement for the costs incurred going back the last couple of years. After the MAT specific funding, there will be another round similar to the first.

The City Manager added that she will likely have to recuse herself once they end up looking at these projects, but as of right now, she is part of the process. Some additional modifications to

the grant are expected before the next round goes out as there have been some lessons learned along the way. She shared that she is honored to be asked to serve by the Governor on this commission, but notes that it has been a very slow moving commission. The State has had quite a bit of money in the bank that has not been dispersed as quickly as she believes it should have. The commission has been working on it and with a process now in place, she hopes it will go faster. The first round of grant applications that was awarded several months ago is scheduled for April disbursement, which provides a sense of how long it took for approval from the April Governor and Council meeting before actually getting the check cut back to the organization. Many non-profits were part of that first round, along with a few municipal applications and a couple of counties. The State right now about 37 million dollars in the bank, or almost 38 million dollars from settlement. They had 44, but 6.86 of that went to municipalities, and they are expecting another 15 million dollar settlement to come in from Walmart by June. In the end, all told, there should be over 300 million dollars received by the State of New Hampshire, resulting in numerous future grant rounds. Right now, the way that the statute is written, every time the State has a half million dollars in the bank they are supposed to go out for an RGA. It is her understanding they are working to change some of that through modifying the language. They took the first round of applications, and the RGA and that was used by the commission to structure a grant application to meet those to meet that application from the first round. It will likely need to be tweaked once the commission finalizes the next RGA.

The Manager added that the commission is also looking at staffing as the Division of Health and Human Services will be the division handling these grants, and they are not currently staffed to be able to support the additional work. The commission had hired a staff person, but once the grants start rolling out there will be monitoring, acceptance and review of reports and support that will need to be provided to grantees that cannot be fulfilled by one singular position. The Manager stated she originally thought the city would be ready for the next round in April, but now believes that to be optimistic. Given the last meeting she went to on Monday, she believes it might be May or June. There is also a question right now as to whether they can have multiple RGA's at the same time and it has not been clarified as to whether that is a legal question or capacity in terms of time and staff. She hopes for clarification at the next meeting. She would like to see both rounds going at the same time; the reimbursement to the counties and then the next round of applications.

In summary, the Manager explained they are talking about bringing on a social worker for the police department to provide follow-up assistance, referral services and coordinate across the continuum of care for people involved with certain law enforcement calls for services such as substance use disorders, mental health issues, or co-occurring issues, as well as serving those seeking assistance on their own. In a nut shell, any drug-related calls that come in would have someone that is following up with these individuals, ensuring successful referrals to treatment, as well as making that connection in the community. The social worker would also serve to liaise and connect the police department with our human services office to ensure collaboration. If successful at getting this grant, this would be a brand new job description that would need to be added to the salary scale as part of the budget process. The draft job description has not been

finalized, nor priced out.

The City Manager stated the request is for the maximum of two years with the position 100% grant-funded. There will be no match, so they will want to know what is being done with the city money. Keene's \$100,000 will partially sustain this into the future, but will not cover it all. The two years will provide a good opportunity to evaluate the success and opportunity of this role in terms of connecting people with resources in our community, and she believes that is in line with what this money is meant for, along with being something that is desperately needed. She added that the police officers time and capacity is limited. They currently hand out an informational card, but their ability to follow-up is extremely limited, so this is exciting. The Police Chief has been great about brainstorming this opportunity and investigating how it might fit into the department. Ms. Dragon continued it is anticipated that there will be some initial training for police officers and dispatchers, which will be included as part of the application as well highlighting the mental health trainings already done in the department. All of these things are tied together, and while this grant money is specific for substance use disorder, often there are co-occurring mental health disorders and this role will allow for more coordinated care across the spectrum.

The City Manager will tentatively put the role in the salary schedule. Once she knows whether or not she has been successful in getting the grant, she will return to the committee. She sees this as an important role and the reserved Opioid Abatement Funds can be utilized to help get this off the ground. Rather than one hit infusions of money, she has been intentional about developing a systematic approach. She is hopeful that this is something the committee would support and she did invite the Chief of Police, Steve Stewart along in case the committee had any questions.

Councilor Chadbourne asked if there were other cities within the state that are already doing it, if there have been communications with them about how they do it, their parameters and their successes. City Manager Dragon shared that when she was the city manager of Franklin, NH, she worked with Laconia on an outreach program to do exactly this. Laconia was leading the way with their program so she met with them via zoom to discuss and investigate potential. Their model utilizes a police officer as their outreach person. Dover, NH has a slightly different program in that they have a separate social worker embedded in the police department, which seems to work better for a variety of reasons. She believes it reduces much of the intimidation factor. Both of these programs have been successful, so much so that they have expanded the programs to include more social workers.

City Manager Dragon shared that she had asked about metrics as when working on a grant, metrics are a large component. Metrics can be tough to report particularly with this topic as there are so many aspects to it such as the number of successful connections made, how many times did people come back, what was the recidivism rate, etc. Laconia eventually became a model program and the state worked with them to get a federal congressionally directed grant to work with a handful of communities to set up similar types of program.

Councilor Chadbourne shared that she initially had two reactions to hearing City Manager Dragon speak with the first being that while this is much needed, one social worker does not sound like enough. The second is, with all the incidents that occur, she wondered whether that social worker would also be working with the fire department and the EMT's and acting as a liaison to the local community organizations. City Manager Dragon responded yes, they absolutely would be and that making those personal connections and hand-offs are not only crucial but have been found to get individuals in quicker for services and assistance.

Acting Chair Remy asked if there were any other questions.

Councilor Lake shared enthusiasm about the pursuit of this. He would be interested to know what other projects are planned for the \$113,000. City Manager Dragon responded that there are no other programs in wait as they have been saving the funds to support this program. If they are not successful in getting the grant, she would like to use the money at least partially to offset the position. If they do get the funding, she would like to have more discussion of how to make that money spread out to sustain the position beyond the two year grant contract. She agreed with Councilor Chadbourne in that they will probably want more help as the need is too great for one individual or one singular role.

Councilor Madison thanked both City Manager Dragon and the Police Chief for their initiative. He was pleased to see the city thinking outside the box and joining other towns to realize that we are not going to arrest or jail the way out of the current opioid crisis or the mental health crisis and believed this to be a big step in the right direction.

Acting Chair Remy opened it to public comment.

Jody Newell, 32 Leverett Street, spoke on how this money was to compensate for the harm that was done to people like her. She implored the committee to not put this position through the police department and not due to any bias on behalf of her against the police department. She explained many individuals with substance use disorder deal with the police on a regular basis in a negative way. She suggested the committee separate it from the people who are tasked with enforcing the criminalization of substance use if the desire really is to save lives. She stated she would like to see it separated and thanked the committee.

Acting Chair Remy thanked Ms. Newell for her comments and stated that while this is informational tonight, where this position should live is something the committee should consider moving forward with, whether that be within police or health services.

Acting Chair Remy asked for any other questions, comments.

Council Williams spoke and reiterated the concern with the position being housed with the police department. He had no disrespect to the police department, but explained some substance users have a great deal of fear of police, and housing this position within the department will create a barrier. He preferred to see the position associated with the fire department or EMS as it would



take it out of the criminal responsibility and make it a health matter, which he believes to be an important philosophical aspect.

Acting Chair Remy thanked him for his comments. He asked if there was anything else, from the committee or from the public. With no further comment he requested a motion.

Councilor Madison offered the following motion that was duly seconded by Councilor Chadbourne:

On a vote of 4-0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the update on the Opioid Grant application be accepted as informational.

**6. Fire Department Staffing Recommendations - City Manager**

Acting Chair Remy recognized the City Manager. Ms. Dragon shared that she had two large topics for the committee. She asked for them to direct her to draft a resolution to transfer \$492,528 from fund balance to allow the hiring of four firefighters. The process would be to draft a resolution, which would then go to Council. She mentioned how this has been a topic of discussion for years and Chief Howard, for several years before he retired, has brought forward a request to hire additional firefighters. As a result of his request, the city created a staffing committee, and before he retired they finished a staffing report. Councilor Remy and Councilor Powers participated in that staffing committee, in which they analyzed what is happening with the community, region, and the department. They were able to see the continued growth of calls, the types of calls, and length of response time as some of the calls are very complicated. The last staffing adjustment was completed in 2008 and at the time a position was given up to get some additional assistance. By running ten firefighters per shift, it allowed the city to have a third ambulance. This has continued since then and has resulted in a significant uptick in cost as the tenth person is always an overtime person.

City Manager Dragon has been working with the Human Resources Department and Chief Farquhar to create a revised sheet provided to the committee. By increasing minimum staffing to ten and having eleven firefighters per shift, they hope to not only reduce the strain, stress and demand the increased hours place on staff and their families, but also reduce injuries, resulting leave requests and in turn workers compensation claims thereby reducing the financial cost. She went on to explain salary costs, but also some of the additional costs included into the calculations such as required training for every firefighter as well as needing to outfit each member with proper gear and equipment. Using the most conservative numbers, she compared 85% versus the 80% available.

In the provided budget sheet, The Manager reviewed with the committee the comparison of the 85% versus 80% available and reviewed information provided by the fire department on how many hours per shift as well as how many hours in a year are filled then calculated at overtime rates versus regular firefighter. At the 85% available calculation, it's a \$128,374 savings in the first year. The Fire Department budget has been overrun for several years. She noted that the

Police Department, while active is the recruiting process, averages six officers short resulting in unused money from the police budget. With agreement from the Police Department, that unused money is able to be moved to the Fire Department budget to cover overtime expenses. While this arrangement works when they are understaffed, if they were to reach full staffing, that money would not be available to cover the overage of the Fire Department. She is requesting this adjustment now because the hiring and training process is a lengthy one and costs are only going to continue to accrue during that time. City Manager Dragon then introduced Chief Farquhar explaining that he gathered the provided numbers and was there to walk the committee through them.

Chief Farquhar addressed the committee and reiterated the City Manager's point stressing that overtime is a large issue for their department. Overtime at its core rate is best used to answer temporary work fluctuations, not as a permanent staffing model. They have been stuck in the protracted bad area for a number of years where overtime is the primary staffing model and that has significant drawbacks. It is not only financial capital, but it is human capital. He expressed being truly worried about his staff. The department's call volume is excessive. Out of two fire stations, they do 5,500 calls a year, which averages to 15 calls a day and those calls are increasing in both complexity and duration. Staffing has not increased since 2009 but in that same time frame, the call line increased by over 2,000 calls. They have also been carrying some long term vacancies for overtime as well, which compounds the issue.

Chief Farquhar continued the key question when looking at the continual staffing model is where is that break up point between whether it is cheaper to hire full-time employees, or to pay overtime. There are two basic mathematical models that can be used, and they used both to run through the current numbers. They have determined it was dramatically cheaper to hire more full-time employees and it also protects the department. They currently have five or six people coming up on retirement and if they lose more staff or have people become injured, there is about a six to nine month window to get new staff up and running resulting in needing to fill the overtime spot. He explained they are in a very tenuous and really unsustainable position that could potentially get worse. They currently have a number of injuries in the department, which has its own financial aspect with needing to backfill and the associated workman's compensation. He stressed the emotional toll this staffing model is having on his staff, how they have some members that are truly suffering right now with PTSD and other issues directly related to hours worked and how difficult it is to manage that. The current model is not sustainable and the department is in need of reinforcements. The numbers reinforce and support hiring more full-time staff and show that it will actually be at a cost savings.

Acting Chair Remy thanked Chief Farquhar. He asked for clarification on the 85% and 80% as to what they are actually experiencing. Chief Farquhar explained they are short full-time employees. As a result, some of their over time is filling for that full time slot. Assuming they are at ten per shift, which is at that forty or actual consumption rate, if they average out over the past two years and average out injury leave, FML, it is right about that 80% mark. The actual usage is much higher because on top of the normal consumption rate for overtime, they are also filling full-time positions at the same time. Even considering benefit load, there is a 40%

difference hour for hour between paying someone straight time and paying someone over time. So for every hour that is paid over time, it is 4% more than paying someone straight time.

Acting Chair Remy stated he appreciated the work that went into this. He was part of the original group and that he was already a bit familiar with this. The hard part is that it is obviously an impact over budget. So yes, it will be viewed as a net savings versus experience, but when it comes time for budgeting, the department will be asking for a different increase.

Acting Chair Remy asked if there were any other questions from the committee.

Councilor Lake thanked the Chair and asked, looking ahead with the budgets coming up, whether they expected those four positions and a similar dollar amount to be in next year's budget. City Manager Dragon explained she is asking for it to be moved right now, so that it will be part of the budget and it will need to be carried forward meaning it will remain part of the budget.

Human Resources Director Elizabeth Fox stated that she would expect they might well need to analyze whether they need to include a portion of it for the tail end of this upcoming fiscal year depending on when implementation or start time is. It will all depend on how many people they get in and how fast they are onboarded. The City Manager added that in that following year that number goes up because they will have used the fund balance to go over the next twelve, thirteen or fourteen months.

Councilor Lake responded the reason he was asking was whether they needed to provide the full annualized amount right now, if they are going to be budgeting for that for the next fiscal year. The City Manager explained that they had talked about this. It can be partially funded, and then fund the remaining part in in the upcoming budget year. She is trying to figure out the balance of fiscal policy portion versus fire portion and it is going to take up the available dollars for the overall operating budget. She is trying to work it so that this change does not hurt them going into the upcoming budget process.

Acting Chair Remy responded that he could see where that goes, the hard part is that it will hit in a later year.

City Manager Dragon said another option is to appropriate what we need right now. She suggested they get it into the salary schedule and then she can separate the fire in her calculation. It would not be a tax cap, as it is a fiscal policy. She can calculate the difference and show it in the calculations separately from the rest of the budget.

Acting Chair Remy believed that to be the fairest way for the Council to review.

City Manager Dragon explained the benefit to splitting it up is that it is not just kicked down the road. As long as there is that understanding going in, she believes it will work.

Acting Chair Remy said there are a few months left in the fiscal year, but sees how that would help split it up a little bit.

Councilor Chadbourne added that she agreed with that. She wanted to add that she believes Keene is really fortunate to have the people they do serving and consistently willing to step up to the plate and compensate for the lack of employees and thanked them.

Councilor Madison echoed Councilor Chadbourne's statement and that he understands that half a million dollars is strong medicine, but he knows the members of the Fire Department have been taking strong medicine with short staffing for a long time. He believed this was desperately needed. He shared that he lives on Elm Street and has seen the fires first hand as the department responded to a fire directly across from his home. He comes from a firefighting family and has seen firsthand the physical and mental toll that firefighting takes on a person and what a toll constant overtime can take on an individual. He was glad to see that there are efforts being made to finally get the firefighters the help and backup support they need.

Councilor Lake asked Chief Farquhar if there had been any progress on programs to rebuild the call company. Chief Farquhar said yes, they had re-advertised for that and had some exceptional candidates. He believes in theory the program will be a little different. They may capture a few that will be in the old model of the call company, which would be someone in a call status would be able to respond to calls on an episodic basis. He thought they had a really good vision and the plan is to use the call company as a training and vetting ground for potential full time employment. There is a dramatic dearth of available suitable employees for full-time fire positions, which actually makes it even harder on the volunteer basis. They have some young well trained and talented individuals who are missing some crucial certifications. So if they bring them on board, they can take advantage of some current grant funding opportunities for medical training, advancement of the training and fire training. They would then become city employees, so any startup costs would be absorbed through the call company side of the budget. This would allow them to take advantage of those grants, pay a salary through the grant, and the city will get a small reimbursement of a couple \$1,000 per student. They can then get them the core certifications so if and when they do have a full time opening, they can transition if they are suitable to the full time company. This would greatly shorten the window of filling a full-time position through overtime. He believes this will be a really smart play for the future. He mentioned that they posted the advertisement last Wednesday and in a twenty-four hour period they had seven applicants.

The City Manager suggested adjusting the motion to transfer a draft resolution to hire four firefighters for the remaining fiscal year.

Councilor Chadbourne offered the following motion that was duly seconded by Councilor Madison:

On a vote of 4-0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends to that the City Manager be directed to draft a Resolution to allow the hiring of four firefighters for the remainder of the fiscal year.

Chief Farquhar thanked the committee for their time and support.

7. **Relating to the Acceptance and Appropriation of Unanticipated Highway Revenue – Resolution R-2023-10**

Acting Chair Remy introduced City Engineer, Don Lussier. Mr. Lussier thanked the Chair and introduced a Resolution related to some unanticipated revenue they had received from the State specifically for bridge work. This is the other half of the same SB 401, state statute that included provisions for two allocations to municipalities. One was for bridges, and there was a formula based on the amount of bridges the municipality is responsible for in their population, and the other one was for highways, so like the bridge money previously discussed a couple weeks ago. This is restricted for use strictly on highway work. It is also the language in that the bill is specifies that it has to be used to supplement, not supplant local funding for highway purposes. So it has to be used on something that otherwise is not already funded. That is the reason why the resolution is recommending that we accept this money and then appropriate it for the Thompson Road Reconstruction project. He did want to be clear that this is partial funding for the Thompson Road project. It is not the full cost of the project outlined in the 2024 CIP updates that the committee will be reviewing here in a few. There is additional funding that is requested to sort of make that project whole, but it does provide a nice little dent in it in the tune of \$414,000 in change of funds that was received and were not expecting.

With no questions, Councilor Lake offered the following motion that was duly seconded by Councilor Madison:

On a vote 4-0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the adoption of resolution R-2023-10.

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 7:04pm.

Respectfully Submitted by  
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Additional Edits by,  
Terri M. Hood, Assistant City Clerk