

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, April 26, 2023

6:00 PM

**Council Chamber,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Bryan J. Lake
Michael J. Remy
Gladys Johnsen
Randy L. Filiault
Kris E. Roberts
Catherine I. Workman
Mitchell H. Greenwald
Thomas F. Powers

Staff Present:

Elizabeth Dragon, City Manager
Amanda Palmiera, Assistant City Attorney
Terri Hood, Assistant City Clerk
Don Lussier, City Engineer
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works
Director/Emergency Management
Director/Assistant City Manager

Members Not Present:

Michael Giacomo
Robert C. Williams
Philip M. Jones
Andrew M. Madison
Raleigh C. Ormerod
Bettina A. Chadbourne
Kate M. Bosley

George S. Hansel, Mayor

1) Call to Order

Mayor Hansel called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. He noted that any additional meetings on this topic would have public comment as well. He added that it was important for the Council to have a final vote on this matter before the end of this fiscal year (June 30). This deadline would allow the Public Works Department to prepare proposals for various funding opportunities that would be important to offset any burden to the taxpayers as much as possible. The Council Chamber was reserved for possible future meetings on this topic: May 15, May 30, June 6, and June 20. At the end of this meeting, the Council would decide whether to continue with workshops or move the project forward to the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee.

2) **Infrastructure Replacement**
a. **Conditions**

Mayor Hansel welcomed the City Engineer, Don Lussier, and the project consultants from Stantec: Ed Roberge, Dave McNamara, Bob Corning, and Liza Cohen.

Mr. Lussier began the presentation discussing and showing photos of the current conditions of the underground infrastructure downtown. In most infrastructure projects, there is one system in dire need that drives the City to start planning a project. He said the impetus for this project was an undersized drain from Court Street to Roxbury Street. In 2012, the City developed a Drainage Master Plan. He showed 12-inch clay drainpipes under Central Square that date back to 1931 and were also undersized. In reality, these pipes need to be 24 inches to carry the necessary amount of stormwater during street flooding in neighborhoods like Vernon and Court Streets. He showed a pipe under Court Street that was in a typical failure mode for clay pipes, which are inflexible and will crack/collapse when subjected to too much load. Mr. Lussier said that most of the pipes under Main Street are undersized at 8–12 inches. He said there was good news—the size of drainpipes on the downstream ends of Roxbury Street, Railroad Square, and Water Street had all been increased through previous projects. So, those areas of Keene were ready to receive more flow if the pipes downtown could get the water there adequately.

Mr. McNamara showed a map of the utility work limits and proposed storm drain work. He showed the existing drains that would be abandoned in place - or removed - if in an area of excavation. In addition to the underground challenges, he said there are aboveground issues with ponding and puddling. In some areas, the drainage is not even getting close to the catch basins. Mr. McNamara showed a rendering of the reconstruction of the whole drainage system; the exact locations of catch basins would have to be determined based on the street layout and curbing in the final design. He said a larger “trunk line” would run down the middle of Main Street and pick-up the drainage from the catch basins on the edges. Having the catch basins run directly to that trunk line would improve water quality to some extent because sediment would be able to settle out in the catch basins before the water moves to the trunk line. Then, the trunk line would send water to the 3 systems that Mr. Lussier mentioned on Roxbury Street, Railroad Square, and Water Street. Overall, he said the system would include 4,500 feet of pipe (12–36 feet in diameter) and approximately 100 structures (basins and manholes).

Councilor Greenwald asked where all this new infrastructure will discharge. Mr. Lussier replied that this new infrastructure would connect on the downstream end to 3 discharge systems—Roxbury Street (Central Square drains here), Railroad Square (where most of Main Street discharges), and Water Street (where Emerald Street and south drains). Mr. McNamara said any improvements on Gilbo Avenue would remain there, and there would be nothing for Emerald Street. In response to Councilor Greenwald, Mr. Lussier confirmed that all 3 of those discharge systems drained to Beaver Brook and then to the Ashuelot River. He added that Gilbo Avenue drained toward the Ashuelot River and that would remain; the same was true for Lamson Street. In that case, Councilor Powers thought it would be possible to do this project in sections. Mr.

Lussier agreed that there is a sort of logical phasing and break points for this work. Unfortunately, Mr. Lussier said those logical breakpoints are not the same for all the different utility systems. Councilor Powers recalled that stormwater had been the greatest challenge in the past. Mr. Lussier agreed.

Mr. Lussier continued the presentation on the sewage system. He showed images taken with a “crawler” that takes photos and videos up to 800 feet inside of pipes to demonstrate some common defects in older sewer systems. He showed 6-inch diameter clay sewer pipes under Main Street. He showed a pipe with a “sag,” where it had settled over time and was no longer flowing downhill, so the waste collected in place until more came to push it out. When those solids settle in pipes, more maintenance is needed. Mr. Lussier showed another photo of a root ball in an older clay sewer pipe; the roots are attracted to the nutrients in the sewage and can break through the leaky, breakable joints of clay pipes. He said that newer sewer pipes have water-tight joints that roots cannot infiltrate. In addition to soil entering the clay pipes, there could be a lot of inflow and infiltration into the groundwater system. He showed photos to demonstrate why the City sells 2 million gallons of water daily but treats 3 million gallons. He said the City treats approximately 1 million gallons of groundwater per day that infiltrates into the system through broken and offset joints.

Mr. McNamara showed a rendering of the proposed sewer line replacements downtown. He said that on the westerly side of Main Street, there was a big gap with no sewer main. He said there was a larger pipe running from Davis Street up to Court Street that was lined in 2004 and did not require any more work at this time. Mr. McNamara said that on the north side of Main Street and a few of the side streets, the smaller 6-inch clay pipes were still in place. Those would all be replaced with 8-inch pipes. In total, Mr. McNamara said the downtown sewer replacements would include 3,000 feet of new sewer pipes, 35 manholes, and 20–25 services.

Mr. Lussier said that unfortunately, there was no equipment that could look inside the water pipes. Instead, he passed around a 6-inch service valve that would have served someone’s house and was taken off the Court Street service. He pointed out the mineral deposits that had collected in the pipe and restricted the flow, which could cause a loss of capacity for fire flows, for example. More importantly, he said that if the service in this pipe needed to be interrupted, the valve could not be relied upon to stop the flow of water.

b. Scope of Improvement

Mr. Lussier recalled questions throughout this project asking, “why not wait until there is a water main break and then fix it.” He said that is what the Public Works Staff does; he called this type of work “run to failure.” It is a much more expensive way to maintain the system in the long run because it requires unplanned work, afterhours Staff, and disrupted businesses. Ultimately in these circumstances, Staff only repair a short amount of pipe (4–6 feet) and not the real problem. Instead of waiting for the system to fail, Mr. Lussier recommended updating the system in a planned and organized way.

Mr. McNamara said there had been some improvements to the water mains down at the south end through the Emerald Street area, so there would not be a lot of work there. He showed the planned water main work down Main Street and through Central Square that would replace all services, including fire services. He said the water mains in the project area are the oldest of the utilities, dating back to the 1880s and early 1900s.

Mr. Lussier recalled that there had been many questions about what evidence existed and the history of problems to prove that this project needed to occur. He shared some statistics. Most of the cast iron water mains on Main Street were installed between 1891 and 1904. The average service life for these pipes is 120 years under the best conditions. In the last 3 years, the City had responded to 4 water main breaks and repairs within the project limits—2 on Lamson Street, 1 at the intersection of Gilbo Avenue and St. James Street, and 1 at the intersection of Cypress and Main Streets. Additionally, Mr. Lussier said there are many valves throughout the project area and when one stops working, the break has to be isolated one valve downstream. An example of this comes from the Roxbury Street project a few years ago; when replacing valves at the Roxbury Street intersection, the correct valve could not be isolated, which resulted in going to the next valve on Church Street and turning off water to the Fairfield Hotel for a day. Mr. Lussier said the goal is to avoid similar unplanned disruptions. He did not have data with him for sewer breaks but recalled that there had been numerous calls and complaints about back-ups on Lamson Street, where one pipe was cleaned 56 times in the last 5 years.

Mr. Lussier said that another question he heard often was: “what would happen if the City did not do this infrastructure work now?” Mr. Lussier said he could not say that the pipes would collapse in the next year. However, he did state that over time, there would be more and more frequent problems and maintenance needs. This would create increasing costs for Staff time to address these issues as well as increasing disruptions for customers. For example, Lindy’s Diner recently had a back-up that shut them down on a Saturday.

Mr. Lussier concluded the infrastructure presentation by discussing some other less discussed items that this project would address. The irrigation system that serves the downtown landscaping is at the end of its usable life. Additionally, there are electrical “pedestals” throughout the downtown that provide utility power for events and the locks on them are in varying conditions and in need of replacements. Next, Mr. Lussier said that most of the sidewalks downtown were in pretty good shape but that some areas needed to be replaced with utility work. He said that all of the sidewalks downtown are expected to be replaced for this project, unfortunately including those that are still in good condition. Mr. Lussier said that the light poles would be replaced downtown because they had been in place since the 1980s and some of them had missing or broken parts. Finally, he said that the small strip drains behind the landscaping beds were in poor condition and some were missing grates.

3) Project Finances

a. Project Cost Estimates

Mr. Lussier provided a summary of the expected project costs for the 3 preliminary design options being considered. Total construction costs presented included all the utility work, the streetscape and ancillary features mentioned, final design costs, and construction administration. The preliminary design (\$570,928) and final design (\$1,140,000) costs would be the same for all 3 options.

- Option 1 – Optimize Existing
 - Features:
 - Largely leave the existing streetscape features in place
 - No added bike lanes
 - New signalized equipment
 - Costs:
 - Construction total: \$12,410,000
 - **Project total: \$14,120,928**

- Option 2 – Five-Leg Signal
 - Features:
 - Crosswalks raised at Gilbo Avenue
 - Bike lanes
 - Northern expansion of Central Square
 - 5-leg signalized intersection at the head of Central Square
 - Costs:
 - Construction total: \$13,260,000
 - **Project total: \$14,970,928**

- Option 4 – Five-Leg Roundabout
 - Features:
 - Crosswalks raised at Gilbo Avenue
 - Bike lanes
 - Northern expansion of Central Square
 - 5-leg roundabout at the head of Central Square
 - Costs:
 - Construction total: \$13,160,000
 - **Project total: \$14,870,928**

Councilor Roberts asked if these were the prices for 2023 or 2025. Mr. Lussier said 2023.

b. Funding Sources

The City Manager, Elizabeth Dragon, discussed the funding sources for this project. She began with the funds that were appropriated already as of February 2023. There was \$908,970

appropriated in the General Fund, \$329,875 in the Sewer Fund, and \$453,246 in the Water Fund for a total of \$1,692,091 expended to date. The City Manager said the downtown infrastructure project had been in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), which is available on the City website and physically in the Finance Department, since 2017. Thus, a capital reserve account had been building in anticipation of this project.

The City Manager continued displaying a more detailed funding breakdown for fiscal years 2023–2029 from the CIP that the City Council adopted on July 1, 2022; she showed how different work elements (traffic signals: FY 24–25, stormwater: FY 25, streets: FY 25–27, sewer infrastructure: FY 24–25, water infrastructure: FY 25) would be addressed in different years. As a part of the CIP, Staff tried to anticipate the future costs of the project so those costs could be spread over multiple years. The City Manager said that as of April 2023, there was \$8.195 million allocated for this project in the CIP. She recalled that the updated total project cost was between \$14.1–\$14.9 million. Thus, the gap in funding of \$6,775,437 had not yet been included in the CIP.

The City Manager explained that one way the City had been setting aside money for this project was through the Capital Reserve account, a portion of which is funded by the Downtown Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District. Approximately \$250,000 annually is set aside in that Capital Reserve account through the TIF District. When the City sets a boundary/district in the downtown, any increased value in that district beyond the date of initially setting that value, is used for the purposes of the downtown district. This is just one of multiple purposes of the Downtown TIF District.

The City Manager continued that the City had always anticipated the need for grant funding for this project. She said it made more sense to apply for grants once there was a more concrete design. Still, the City had obtained some grant funding already and Staff has applied for more:

- Grants and other funds *obtained*:
 - Clean Water/Drinking Water SRF
 - Amount: \$1,376,270
 - Work element: sewer/stormwater
 - Obligated to begin work by: February 2027
 - American Rescue Plan
 - Amount: \$285,330
 - Work element: stormwater
 - Obligated to begin work by: May 2024
 - *The City Manager said she did not believe the City would be able to execute by this deadline and there was potential to lose this grant.
- Grants and other funds *applied for* (*could be used to cover additional costs):
 - Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE)

- Amount: \$1,140,000
- Work element: design
- Application date: February 28, 2023
- Notice of award: June 28, 2023
- Northern Borders CATALYST Program
 - Amount: \$2,000,000
 - Work element: stormwater/transportation
 - Application date: April 23, 2023
 - Notice of award: October 31, 2023
- RAISE FY 24
 - Amount: To be determined
 - Work element: construction
 - Application date: February 2024
 - Notice of award: June 2024

The City Manager said that the City had been going after the RAISE grant she listed for many years with no luck. She said the City had not yet submitted a construction application for this project because there were not enough finalized design details. So, she said the City had only been seeking the preliminary and final design dollars. The City Manager said Staff did apply for \$1.1 million in the next step, which is the final design phase. The City Manager noted that this is a very competitive grant. This is the one that Concord was awarded, and it funded a large portion of their downtown. She said this grant commonly requires multiple years of effort and help from the Congressional Delegation.

The City Manager concluded her comments by describing what these high dollar grants require: improve safety, address environmental sustainability, improve quality of life, mobility and multimodal options, community connectivity, economic competitiveness, partnerships, impacts to under-represented communities, adaptivity to changing climate conditions and extreme weather (resiliency), benefit-cost analysis, letters of support, and project readiness. The more items from this list that the City could meet, the more competitive the grant applications would be. The City Manager said the City Council needed to make a decision on the scope of work in order for Staff to apply for these grants. She said that if the Council chose to replace the downtown exactly as it exists today, then Staff would have to do some very creative grant writing to be competitive under some of the categories she listed, especially in terms of safety and climate change adaptation.

4) Traffic Review

a. Project Area/Safety Analysis

Mr. Roberge of Stantec presented the traffic data along with Kürt Blomquist, Public Works Director/EMD/ACM. Mr. Roberge said the traffic study began with understanding the various components of this Main Street/Gilbo/Railroad/Central Square corridor that was defined by where utilities must be replaced. So, the consultants collected data on where traffic comes from

and goes, the pedestrians, the bicycles, parking, crosswalks, safety components, and other factors like delivery trucks that stop and block a lane of traffic. He said all of this data contributed to a traffic model of downtown Keene. Many of the images Mr. Roberge showed the Council dated back to the first public workshop in June 2022.

Mr. Roberge discussed the project area. He said that in their scope of work, the consultants were tasked with looking at 4 intersections and determining their existing conditions, as well as what improvements (large or small scale) could be made to enhance functionality or level of service. The 4 intersections were: Central Square (Roxbury/Court/West/Main/Washington Streets), Gilbo Avenue/Railroad Street, Cypress Street, and Emerald Street/ Eagle Court.

Next, Mr. Roberge described the safety analysis that occurred as a part of the traffic study. With the help of the Public Works and Police Departments, the consultants studied 3 years of crash data. Mr. Roberge was pleased to report that none of those 4 intersections mentioned were of severe concern. He said that there were many crashes. He displayed average crashes per year for the various downtown streets included in this project area. He said those crashes could be related to parking, side street interactions, pedestrians, bicycles, and more. Mr. Roberge reported that between 2019–2022, there were 286 crashes in this corridor. Importantly, there were zero fatal crashes and only 29 non-fatal injuries. On Main Street, for example, there were 177 crashes during those years with 17 injuries; this rate was under 10%, which Mr. Roberge said was decent, reiterating that none of these crashes were severe.

Mr. Roberge discussed traffic flow issues in this project area. He displayed images of Central Square, noting that the roadway operated with excessively wide pavement that essentially created one lane. He said that this configuration led to risks, mistakes, and confusion. He cited the various things occurring within Central Square—from parking to crosswalks—that the consultants included in their traffic model. This model allowed them to predict what improvements could enhance conditions around the Square. Mr. Roberge showed an image of the Central Square roadway and parking. He noted that there was a utility vehicle overhanging a parking space and blocking part of the outer traffic lane. He noted that the utility truck was also adjacent to the Central Square crosswalk in front of The United Church of Christ. There are many public complaints about this crosswalk. He called this a “double threat” of a mid-block crosswalk that spans multiple lanes of traffic. Mr. Roberge said there were a lot of near misses at this site. So, he said the consultants considered a single lane southbound and northbound to eliminate that threat, slow speeding, and balance the corridor. He said that when modeling the Main/West/Roxbury Streets intersection, the existing condition of long queues (up to 900 feet) backed-up Main Street were due to confusion about what lane to be in when entering the intersection going north. Mr. Roberge thought that improving what is north of the intersection—where the signal is—with clearer signage and pavement markings would improve that queue length and delay. He showed another photo of pedestrians jogging through the crosswalk at Central Square/Washington Street; he said that the long crosswalks with short crossing times around Central Square were a common complaint.

b. Traffic Data Collection/Analysis

Mr. Roberge discussed the traffic counts. For several days during the morning, midday, and evening peak hours, the consultants physically counted pedestrians, bicycles, trucks, interference of parking, traffic signal timing, and number of vehicles. Further, they recorded turning movements from Water Street in the south and Central Square to the north. He said a key part of this traffic analysis was to determine the “levels of service” for each intersection based on how well they operate. He said that level of service is a balance of queueing length and time delay (in seconds). He displayed the 50th and 95th percentile queues, which are the queueing lengths expected in the existing condition and predicted for the future. He said the 50th percentile is essentially the average—or typical—length of queue during normal operation. Whereas the 95th percentile is the most severe condition; it indicates that 5% of the time there would be the most traffic.

c. Existing Traffic Operations

Mr. Roberge showed multiple photos and graphics depicting the traffic data. As expected, the predominance of traffic is along Main Street, where there are approximately 10,000 vehicles northbound and 9,600 southbound daily. At Central Square, there are approximately 7,000 vehicles going northbound to and from Washington Street and approximately 8,000 for Court Street. Mr. Roberge said that this data helped the consultants to predict where traffic would be going and how that traffic would respond to any design alternatives. He showed images with the pedestrian movement data and explained that the traffic model took all of these crosswalk delays into account. He briefly showed a very detailed table of the traffic model data.

Next, Mr. Roberge showed an image and data (including levels of service and queue lengths) of the existing Central Square traffic conditions, with the traffic signals and 4-leg approach. Coming to and from Central Square on Main Street, there are 3 lanes northbound entering Central Square and 2 lanes exiting Central Square going southbound. The current (2022) traffic at peak hours was highest in the evening.

Councilor Remy pointed out that this model did not show the fact that there were zero cars in the left lane and the right lane had a 900-foot queue (entering Central Square from Main Street). While it looked like that queue was only a little longer in the images, the Councilor said that (according to his math) the right lane was taking 73% of the outbound traffic. Mr. Roberge said that the model works well, but the consultants wanted to ensure that they understood the field conditions, which he said were very interesting. He said Councilor Remy was correct that the Main Street northbound evening model showed that if the two lanes were functioning fully and well, the queue would be approximately 250 feet in the 95th percentile. Mr. Roberge said that the queue is really more like 900 feet due to the “extended condition” because of the unique geometry of Central Square. He said the Councilor’s point was a good one. Mr. Roberge added this is why the model is theoretical; he said the consultants used the real existing (2022) data to ensure that they understood how the traffic patterns really worked.

d. Alternatives Review
i. Central Square Alternatives

Mr. Roberge said that improving pedestrian cycles was one way to optimize the existing Central Square. He described the existing condition as an “exclusive pedestrian cycle,” with the pedestrian push button that stops traffic in all directions, which takes a lot of time from the system. In order to optimize that condition, the consultants suggested a “concurrent pedestrian cycle,” with pedestrians walking parallel to the vehicles that have a green light. He said one way to strategize this option is with an operation called “leading pedestrian interval,” which begins the pedestrian cycle before the traffic light turns green (while the vehicles are stopped) so that drivers could see that pedestrians have the right-of-way. Mr. Roberge added that the current crossing standards are a challenge, particularly east to west on Main Street, where the crosswalk is 142 feet long. He said pedestrians could not cross that whole length during a single walk cycle. As such, pedestrians must wait in the center median to finish crossing. He said the consultants looked at ways to reduce that width and improve that timing. Mr. Roberge said another way to optimize the existing Central Square conditions would be to modernize the traffic signals. He said the existing signal cycles had outdated red and yellow times.

Councilor Johnsen said that when coming from Court Street into Central Square, she had challenges making the left turn to come to City Hall. She said it was confusing and dangerous contending with traffic coming from Roxbury Street. Mr. Roberge agreed that there was some confusion about how to drive around Central Square, which he said could be improved by updating the signals and better marking the lane operations.

Next, Mr. Roberge showed images and tables of data to describe the 3 design alternatives (Options 1, 2, & 4) for Central Square.

Option 1 – Existing 4-Lane Approach With Optimized Lanes & Traffic Signals: Mr. Roberge said that this option would impact Roxbury and West Streets with slightly longer queue times. He said it is a balancing act with giving more needed time to the legs with the most traffic (Main and Court Streets).

Option 2 – New 5-Leg Approach With a Full Movement Traffic Signal, 2-Lane Main Street, & Northern Central Square Expansion: Mr. Roberge showed images to demonstrate that this option would allow two directions that did not exist today: from Main Street onto Court Street and Main Street onto West Street. He said the consultants modeled the possibility of single lanes in both directions on Main Street but found longer delays on the side streets that the consultants thought would put the system in failure (details available in final report). Mr. Roberge noted that this option would allow for shorter crosswalks.

Option 4 – New 5-Leg Approach With a Roundabout & Northern Central Square Expansion: Because of the deflections required in a roundabout for speed control and processing vehicles, Mr. Roberge explained that this option would include a single lane southbound on Main Street

exiting the roundabout (that would return to 2 lanes further down Main Street) and 2 lanes northbound (versus 3 today) entering the roundabout. He explained that this option had the highest levels of service because roundabouts are designed to process a lot of traffic effectively.

Mr. Roberge showed an image (slide 37) of the existing conditions side-by-side with the 3 options he just described, including all the relevant data (level of service, delay, queue length at 50th and 95th percentiles) to demonstrate how the existing conditions could be improved. He said the 5-leg signalized option created some additional delays but had the value of full access mobility on each of the legs. He used Roxbury Street as an example, noting that the delay was slightly longer but drivers would not have to navigate around Central Square to get to West Street or Court Street, thus improving overall travel time. He said the conditions would be improved despite adding one signal cycle.

Councilor Johnsen said she still did not see an option that clarified how a driver could make a left turn from Court Street onto Washington Street to arrive at City Hall, without competing with traffic from Roxbury Street. Mr. Roberge said it was hard to describe what would be best for Councilor Johnsen specifically. Councilor Johnsen clarified that she was asking for the sake of anyone in that situation. Mr. Roberge thought that from a mobility standpoint someone turning right from Roxbury Street would have full mobility in any alternative. Councilor Johnsen reiterated that she was asking about when coming from Court Street. Mr. Roberge displayed Option 2 (5-leg signalized) again and stated that coming from Court Street, you could make a left turn at the traffic signal, and another left up Washington Street as an operation of the traffic signal; a 2-stage left turn. In the case of a roundabout, when coming from Court Street you would go around the roundabout to reverse direction up Washington Street. Councilor Johnsen noted how confusing the existing Central Square could be for new drivers especially.

ii. *Main/Gilbo/Railroad Alternatives*

The consultants did not comment.

iii. *Main/Emerald/Eagle Alternatives*

The consultants did not comment.

e. *Central Square – Further Review*

Mr. Roberge wanted to briefly discuss the proposal to expand Central Square northward and close the current roadway at the top of the Square. He displayed some illustrative renderings of how this would look/work with the 5-leg signalized and roundabout options. The closed roadway could be converted to a multi-use path and plaza space. He said the loss of parking at the top of the Square would be mitigated with new parking on the sides of the expanded Square. At the top of the Square, a 24-foot-wide sidewalk was proposed along the building edge to fix multiple existing conditions. While he did not review the design alternative for Gilbo Avenue and

Railroad Square, he said that this new plaza area in the expanded Central Square could be raised above street level, much like what was proposed for Gilbo/Railroad. Mr. Roberge said that during events, the plaza area could be closed for additional space. This expanded Square would add approximately 8,500 square feet of green area for a total of approximately 26,000–31,000 square feet for Central Square. If expanding Central Square was the Council’s will, then Mr. Roberge said the consultants would have some questions about the direction and impact of traffic entering this slip lane of vehicles on Washington and Court Streets.

Mayor Hansel wondered if this expanded Central Square would add in the 16 parking spaces on the sides of Central Square that would be lost due to the roundabout. Mr. Roberge said those spaces would be replicated as essentially the same spaces that exist today. Mayor Hansel asked if there would be no net change to downtown parking with this option. Mr. Blomquist pointed out that the parking spaces lost at the top of the Square would be compensated for on the sides of the new expanded Central Square, so there would be no net loss in parking there. He showed another image with the parking at the top of the expanded Central Square so there would be no net loss in parking.

Councilor Remy thought he was one of the Councilors in favor of [this] as a means of reversing direction of travel on the north side to avoid impacting traffic on Court and Washington Streets, and even further down to Mechanic Street. Mr. Blomquist said one thing to consider was the possibility of several cars waiting on a parking spot [there] and whether that would back-up traffic into the signalized intersection or roundabout.

Councilor Greenwald asked if the consultants considered “smart signals” that collect data. Mr. Roberge said yes. Because there is only one signalized intersection in this corridor there would be no need to time the cycles to work with other intersections. Still, “smart” options would be utilized, like video detection and programming with adaptive controls. Mr. Roberge said the goal would be to modernize as much as possible. Councilor Greenwald referred back to the image of a 900-foot queue in the right lane on Main Street entering Central Square; he said he had never seen that and did not understand it. Other Councilors said they had seen that condition. Mr. Blomquist said that around 3:30–5:30 PM there is a lot of traffic, and many drivers fill that right lane because that is where they think they should be to get to Court Street. He called it an interesting phenomenon that he had observed for a long time.

Councilor Workman noted that she lives off West Street. So, if she is going home from Main Street, she uses the left lane. She said she often sees drivers use that right lane entering Central Square from Main Street just up to the light. Then, she said they merge coming around the Square because people in the left lane want to take the “shortcut” by the flagpole, where she said drivers often sit through numerous light cycles. Her understanding of the roadway was that if someone wanted to get to Washington or Court Streets, they should be in the right lane on Main Street; if they wanted to get to West Street, they should be in the left lane on Main Street entering Central Square. Councilor Workman thought people ignored that rule of traffic because they do not want to sit through a green light to get to a red light.

f. Parking Summary

Mr. Roberge showed a detailed table that summarized the net parking changes throughout the project area block-by-block for each design option, including whether the parking gains/losses were in high/low demand locations. He said this data table was first presented several meetings ago. He showed a rendering of Main Street as a multi-lane, multimodal corridor with a traffic signal at Central Square and the Square expanded north. The angled parking on the inside of Court and Washington Streets was shown. Of the 167 parking spaces in this project area, Mr. Roberge said there was a net loss of 1 parking space with the 5-leg signalized alternative (Option 2). He said there had been conversations about expanding parking on West Street. For example, in a roundabout alternative with a single lane approaching the intersection from West Street, he said there was an opportunity to add several parking spaces where there was no space in the existing configuration. Mr. Roberge added that there is a block just south of Cumberland Farms where parking could be added as well. He did note that a parking space on northern Main Street was valued higher than a space on southern Main Street, but that could change in the future with southern developments. Next, Mr. Roberge showed the rendering of Main Street with the roundabout at Central Square (Option 4). This showed where 15 parking spaces would be impacted on the deflection into the roundabout on north Main Street and in the first block southbound on Main Street exiting the roundabout.

5) Council Comments & Questions

Councilor Remy said he appreciated this summary presentation, noting that the Council had seen different iterations of these options throughout this public engagement process. He especially appreciated the side-by-side comparison of the various options, which showed him that the roundabout option could provide a more dramatic improvement than he previously thought. He said he also appreciated the parking slide that showed how parking could be incorporated at the top of an expanded Central Square.

Councilor Johnsen noted that when trying to go around the current Central Square, from Main Street to West Street, it is not clear what lane you should be in. She added that it then becomes very complicated at the top of the Square as the traffic enters from Court Street that is often trying to cross multiple lanes of traffic. Mr. Roberge agreed that the lanes were unclear and therefore the progression around the current Central Square could be confusing. He noted how drivers do not want to get stuck in the inner lane when they are trying to exit onto one of the side streets.

Councilor Workman disagreed, stating that the existing lanes and Central Square were very clearly laid out. She noted that there is a sign right by Prime Roast showing the lane progression around Central Square. She recalled that many times throughout the presentations for this project, it was mentioned that people would just do the right thing if there was a roundabout and,

for example, fire trucks were trying to pass through. The Councilor said her point was that people do not always do the right thing, and that includes not following the rules/laws of traffic. She reiterated that the signs indicating the flow of traffic around Central Square are there already, and people ignore them. She did not see how more signs would help.

Councilor Remy said he agreed with Councilor Workman's point. Councilor Remy thought the same percentage of people would break the rules no matter what design is chosen. He said there were a lot of points of conflict in the existing 4-leg signalized design (Option 1) as well as the proposed 5-leg signalized design (Option 2). He said he liked the roundabout (Option 4) because it solves most of those points of conflict. Still, he said there appeared to be a problematic point of conflict in the roundabout design when trying to go from Washington/Court/West Streets onto Roxbury Street with 2 lanes coming through the intersection. Mr. Blomquist referred to the roundabout at Winchester Street/Key Road, which is considered modified, with 2 lanes entering and 1 lane across the top; he said in many ways that roundabout could have looked like it had points of conflict, but even during construction, was working well. He said that in areas with heavy north-south traffic and lighter east-west, roundabouts work well, like at Winchester Street/Key Road. The Main/Marlboro/Winchester Streets roundabout is also modified, and Mr. Blomquist said the 10,000 cars using Main Street daily are also successfully using this roundabout.

Mayor Hansel said it seemed like the roundabout would move traffic most effectively. He asked if that was always true; is there an upper limit on the efficiency of roundabouts with a high level of traffic? Mr. Roberge replied that a roundabout could reach such an upper limit. He said that in this instance, the roundabout would have predominantly through movements, meaning that there would be limited east-west interference that would create points of conflict in the flow of traffic. He thought that there were enough gaps in the traffic lines that would allow the sidelines to move. Mr. Roberge said he thought this roundabout would work well given the daily traffic counts on Main/Court/Washington Streets. He noted that the consultants used a "growth factor" to determine whether there could be an upper limit to plan for, and not much traffic growth was predicted. He called this a high-capacity roundabout that would be configured slightly differently, and he was unaware of any upper limitations unless there was a considerable growth factor. Mr. Blomquist said that in 2028, it would be 20 years since the construction of the Main/Marlboro/Winchester Streets roundabout and it would be interesting to see how traffic and capacity had changed in that time.

Councilor Powers asked if there was any consideration of pushing some of the traffic that wants to loop looking for parking onto Vernon Street; he said it was a bad idea, stating that there was too much traffic already. He added that turning from Vernon Street onto Court Street does not work because parallel parked cars block the view of traffic. Councilor Powers added that these design alternatives showed no improvements to the short stretch of Court Street between Central Square and Vernon Street. He said that area needed serious work in terms of illumination, sidewalk conditions, and parking space layout.

Councilor Filiault said one of his biggest concerns with the proposed roundabout had always been regarding the Fire Department, noting his 6 years' experience going through Central Square on the fire truck. He said one lesson learned in those situations is that sometimes people in roundabouts hear a horn and loud siren and freeze in the middle of roundabouts, blocking traffic. He said that by the time the truck pulled out of Vernon Street, onto Washington Street, and into Central Square backward the emergency lights in the Square would have cleared most of the traffic. Councilor Filiault did not think it would be possible to clear the traffic as well with a roundabout. He thought signalized lighting (Options 1 & 2) was needed, without which he thought traffic would not begin moving out of the way until they heard sirens and he thought that would be too late. In his opinion and experience, he thought the roundabout (Option 4) would be a failure.

Councilor Lake said he agreed with Councilor Remy's point about the mini roundabout and that adding extra parking on the sides of Central Square seemed to help solve a problem. Councilor Lake was unsure that the mini roundabout option would be better than making the current configuration around Central Square work as a roundabout, keeping the lights for emergency vehicles and pedestrian crossings. He asked the feasibility of that option. Mr. Blomquist replied that a roundabout is about its deflections. Looking at the current Central Square configuration, he said the challenge had always been in having deflections that slow the traffic. He said Staff had considered this possibility several times but always ran into challenges with sufficient deflections due to the egg shape of Central Square created over time. Mr. Blomquist added that there could be a light system with the roundabout option for pedestrians and emergency vehicles, as long as queuing lengths would not also then block those vehicles.

Councilor Remy disagreed with the mention of fire trucks being unable to maneuver through the proposed roundabout or the notion that drivers would freeze and block emergency vehicles. He stated that Keene had many roundabouts already that emergency vehicles could successfully and safely traverse and that drivers did not regularly freeze in, blocking whole roundabouts. Thus, he did not agree with comments to the contrary.

Mayor Hansel called a short break.

6) Public Comment

Mayor Hansel called on Lisa Peterson of Service Credit Union on Winchester Street. Ms. Peterson noted that her comments were about Winchester Street and not relevant to this hearing.

Connie Joyce of 81 Grant Street was grateful for the tremendous amount of work and time that went into this project so far. She recalled seeing the traffic counts for vehicles but not for bicycles. Mayor Hansel said there was a bicycle survey but thought it might have been glossed over on one of the presentation slides. Ms. Joyce said that both bikes and vehicles would be at risk if the proposal for bike paths through downtown moved forward. She noted a recent story of a world-famous cyclist killed in San Francisco because a driver did not see them. She said that

cities are eliminating bike lanes because they realize they are a liability with preoccupied drivers. She noted that Keene's population is aging. Ms. Joyce stated that cars kill and are considered by some law enforcement to be dangerous weapons. She cited a recent incident when she was parallel parked on Washington Street and her car door nearly collided with a passing cyclist. She cited another incident when a cyclist was in traffic going from West Street to Roxbury Street and realized that Roxbury was too narrow, so they got off and walked their bike. Ms. Joyce thought there was supposed to be a 3-foot berth between bikes and cars. She said that cyclists used to follow the rules of the road but do not anymore. Ms. Joyce asked the Council to create safe bike lanes that avoid downtown and keep everyone safer.

Roger Weinreich of 110 Main Street discussed someone named Jeff Speck, who has worked to assess cities and help them increase walkability to improve their towns. Mr. Weinreich showed a copy of Speck's book called *Walkable City: How Downtown can Save America, One Step at a Time*. Mr. Weinreich said that when a City is developed to be walkable, tourism grows, which he said business owners would welcome. He and some other downtown business owners were working to bring Mr. Speck (who is not a fan of roundabouts) to Keene for a workshop that Mr. Weinreich hoped everyone would attend. Mr. Weinreich—a former firefighter—also spoke to Councilor Filiault's points, agreeing that moving emergency vehicles through roundabouts could be challenging.

Jim Sterling of 197 Jordan Road said that 6 generations of his family had lived in Keene as well as 2 generations of his wife's family. Mr. Sterling advocated for bike lanes for the future of Keene, which he said would be much better with protected bike lanes downtown. He noted how much money the City had spent on the Rail Trail and that another one was being added in the coming years. He said that those trails funnel more people into Keene. Mr. Sterling felt like a lot of businesses do not appreciate cyclists or consider them as customers. He said that instead, business owners are concerned with having more and more vehicle parking. Over the last 50 years, he said it had become harder and harder to bike downtown, to the point where he no longer would. He said that with protected bike lanes, all of the people coming from the Rail Trail could shop downtown. Mr. Sterling expressed further frustration, stating that cyclists are treated as second-class citizens downtown. He recalled City Councilors calling Keene a bikeable City. Mr. Sterling said that was untrue and businesses are missing an opportunity. Regarding the desire for more parking, he stated that if a business cannot attract customers from more than 2 blocks of parking, they might have a failed business, and he would not support that model. He said that half of the 28,000 people in Keene probably have bikes, and that all those cyclists were asking for was 10 feet out of one of the widest Main Streets in the United States. Mr. Sterling said that Keene does not have a parking problem, it has a walking problem. He suggested that businesses provide bike racks; every biker downtown creates one more free parking space.

Nancy Ancharski of 60 School Street discussed multimodal transportation, which she said she knew was important to focus on from her time writing grants. She said that multimodal transportation includes busses, not just bikes. She suggested small electric buses. Ms. Ancharski agreed with Ms. Joyce about bikes. She also agreed with Mr. Sterling. Ms. Ancharski said that

she rides her bike downtown, parks it somewhere, and then walks. She said it would be helpful to have some bike racks downtown. She said it was good that the Council had these workshops, which answered most of her questions.

David Kamm of 21 Red Oak Drive was opposed to changing the configuration of Central Square but said there were many opportunities to make it better. He did not support the expansion of Central Square. He said the alternatives presented by Stantec jumped from how the Square exists to new options the close the northern leg of the Square; Mr. Kamm said he had a proposal that was in between these 2 options. He said that with the proposed solution, there would be single lanes and parking on both sides, which he said would back-up traffic when people park and impact the whole circle. He questioned where delivery and emergency vehicles would go if the northern leg of the Square was closed. Mr. Kamm said a positive opportunity with this project was smart traffic signals. He also suggested moving the turnaround at the top of Main Street to Gilbo Avenue. He said that [we] also conducted a 7-day traffic study there and found that everyone who turned around at the top of Main Street went south beyond Gilbo Avenue; he said that a left turn onto Gilbo Avenue and the turnaround at the same location would get rid of a high volume of traffic stopped at north Main Street. Mr. Kamm referred to his website www.keenesquare.org, for the rest of his recommendations.

Bonnie Chamberlin of Fox Avenue said she drives down Main Street daily and she never had a problem with traffic, no matter what time of day. She thought that it would be horrible to change the 2 current lanes on Main Street or change the configuration downtown. She said these changes would create more traffic and difficulties. Ms. Chamberlin did not believe that bike lanes on Main Street were right for this City, given that they would only be usable 6 months of the year. She thought bike lanes would create more issues and accidents. She suggested upgrading the traffic signals but not changing the rest of the downtown, because she said it was not broken.

Pam Slack of 260 Beaver Street said that this was a City Council workshop that was advertised to the public as: *“To provide Councilors the opportunity to learn about and discuss project details as they prepare to vote on the design scope.”* Ms. Slack said it was great that more information was provided. However, she expressed extreme disappointment that 7 (of 15) City Councilors were not present—one from Ward 1, one from Ward 2, one from Ward 3, one from Ward 5, and three Councilors at large. She said that 4 of those Councilors represented her as a voter. Mayor Hansel suggested that Ms. Slack reach out to those Councilors to express her concern. Ms. Slack replied that it was the Mayor’s and City Manager’s decision to have this type of meeting; Ms. Slack suggested that if they wanted the public to believe that they were concerned about the Council voting on this project, that it was not Ms. Slack’s job to get the Councilors to attend. From what she observed as a former Councilor, Ms. Slack was extremely disappointed. Additionally, Ms. Slack was concerned that based on the figures presented during this workshop, the project cost had doubled since last reported and if this project did not begin for 2 more years, the costs would increase further. She asked if those costs would impact the water and sewer prices. Ms. Slack additionally said that while there might be no net loss in parking from this project, she was concerned about the overall impact on downtown businesses.

She said her father always rode his bike downtown. She added that there are a lot of trails in Keene for cyclists that were funded through grants. While Ms. Slack said she had no issue with bike riding, she did have an issue with bikes downtown.

7) Council Discussion

Mayor Hansel thought these two workshops had been productive and he asked whether the Council wanted to have more workshops or send this project on to the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee.

Councilor Filiault said that at this point, the project was ready to go to MSFI. He thought these workshops went well but noted that the first one had 100% Council participation and this one only had 50%. He agreed with Ms. Slack that if the Council expects the public to participate in this process, then the City Council should be seriously engaged, which was not the case at this meeting. When this matter goes to MSFI, Councilor Filiault recalled that Councilors would be able to speak along with the public; he said that Councilor Greenwald (MSFI Chair) would ensure that. Councilor Filiault also recalled that no matter the result at MSFI, the full Council would still be voting on their recommendation. He advocated sending this to Committee.

Councilor Remy agreed that it was time to send this to Committee. He was curious about the best way for Councilors to provide their input to the MSFI Committee if they could not attend those meetings. He did not like the idea of the MSFI Committee making a recommendation that is not in the interest of the full Council that would be overridden and amended at the Council meeting. He hoped that whatever came from MSFI would be close to the final design.

Mayor Hansel cautioned the Council from getting ahead of the MSFI Committee. He said the Committee had listened to their fellow Councilors at these workshops. He presumed the MSFI Committee would do a great job, and he said the rest of the Council should let them do that job.

Councilor Roberts was grateful that a lot of important information was provided to the Council at these workshops. He said that the most important part for him was not listening to the engineers and architects, who he said were working in their own best interests to make money. Instead, Councilor Roberts had been listening to what these design alternatives could do for the City, their costs, and what would happen if the City did not act in this way. He thought that was all presented during these workshops. Councilor Roberts thought it was best to follow protocol and send this to the MSFI Committee and any Councilor with important input could speak to or write to the Committee. He said that 95% of the time, the Council endorses what comes from the Standing Committees. However, he knew there were some contentious items not everyone would agree with. He suggested moving forward toward a decision, noting that City Staff would be available to walk through things further with the MSFI Committee.

Councilor Greenwald (MSFI Chair) said that it would take magic for the MSFI Committee to make recommendations on this project after 1 meeting. While the process would take more than

1 meeting, he said it was time to start making some decisions and narrowing these options. Councilor Greenwald said the MSFI Committee would gather all the necessary information to make a recommendation and he wanted to hear from all Councilors and as many members of the public who want to speak. He did not believe it would be a unanimous decision, but amendments could always be made on the Council floor. The Councilor asked for more details on when the Council needed to make a decision; was it the end of Fiscal Year 2023 on June 30? The City Manager said that the original timeline included a decision before the end of the fiscal year, but in reality, it was most important to have a decision before the Council vacation in August. Councilor Greenwald thought that timeline would be no problem. Mayor Hansel said that was the MSFI Committee's challenge.

Councilor Filiault made the following motion, which was duly seconded by Councilor Johnsen.

On a vote of 8–0, the City Council sent the workshop information to the Municipal Services, Facilities, & Infrastructure Committee for a discussion, vote, and recommendation to the full City Council. Councilors Giacomo, Williams, Jones, Madison, Ormerod, Chadbourne, and Bosley were absent.

Councilor Johnsen expressed gratitude for the important information provided at this workshop.

8) Adjournment

There being no further business, Mayor Hansel adjourned the meeting at 7:56 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katrnya Kibler, Minute Taker

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