

City of Keene
New Hampshire

FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, May 11, 2023

5:30 PM

**Council Chamber,
City Hall**

Members Present:

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

Members Not Present:

All Present

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager
Thomas P. Mullins, City Attorney
Amanda Palmiera, Assistant City Attorney
Elizabeth Fox, HR Director/ACM
Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks,
Recreation, & Facilities
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works
Director/EMD/ACM
Don Lussier City Engineer
Aaron Costa, Assistant Public Works
Director/Operations Manager
Merri Howe, Finance Director/Treasurer
Rebecca Landry, Communications &
Marketing Director/ACM
Don Farquhar, Fire Chief

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

1) Roger Weinreich/Downtown Merchants Association – Requesting Financial Assistance to Facilitate a Visit from Urban Designer and Author, Jess Speck – Walkable City

Chair Powers welcomed Roger Weinreich of the Downtown Merchants Association and Good Fortune at 110 Main Street. Mr. Weinreich said that he had followed Jeff Speck's career. Mr. Speck is considered the foremost downtown urban designer in the country and perhaps the world. Mr. Weinreich spoke with Mr. Speck some time ago and learned that he was very interested in our area and has property nearby. Mr. Speck was willing to do some consulting in Keene. So, Mr. Weinreich met with the City Manager, Elizabeth Dragon, and Mr. Speck via Zoom to learn more. The Downtown Merchants Association was committed to bringing Mr. Speck to Keene on June 12, which was the only date he was available for the foreseeable year. Mr. Weinreich said he liked that Mr. Speck would bring a clean perspective and has expertise in walkability, marketability, and drawing tourists. Mr. Weinreich continued he is hopeful the City will contribute \$5,000 to this effort. He thought this would be a good public-private partnership.

He mentioned a lunch, a dinner, and a morning question and answer breakfast workshop the next day. The downtown merchants felt that this would be a wise investment to bring potential revenue, good spirit, and livability to the community.

Chair Powers recognized Mark Rebillard, Chair of the Downtown Merchants Association. Mr. Rebillard said that Mr. Speck was an internationally known urban planner who wrote “the book” on walkability. He said the Downtown Group has started fundraising and the group themselves has committed \$1,000 they unanimously voted to contribute to Mr. Speck’s fee. Another fundraising effort was going to be matched up to \$2,000 by the Monadnock Food Co-Op. There was a lot of buy-in already. Mr. Rebillard said everyone was very excited about this possible once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. He said it was an opportunity for the City to consider some things it had not yet, noting that it would not be a political engagement about debating roundabouts versus traffic lights. This would be an opportunity to learn a new perspective from an urban planner at a critical juncture.

Chair Powers recognized Taryn Fischer of the Downtown Merchants Association. Ms. Fischer is a small business owner, and a business advisor with the Small Business Development Center in Keene, and she teaches at Keene State College. She was very supportive of bringing Mr. Speck to Keene, calling it a wonderful opportunity to open the City’s collective mind to different ways of thinking about downtown. She saw the Council essentially debating 2 options: a roundabout and or what she called saving the Square. She said Mr. Speck could help the City realize there are numerous options using his experience with walkable downtowns. Ms. Fischer was eager for this opportunity to consider how to create the most dynamic downtown.

The City Manager recalled that she had a Zoom call with Mr. Weinreich and Mr. Speck, and she had begun reading one of Mr. Speck’s books, which she called interesting. The City Manager agreed that Mr. Speck had designed many diverse downtowns and he would consider how the downtown operates, including the side streets, and how to create the walkable environment the City had been striving for. The City Manager confirmed with the Public Works Director that there was \$5,000 in the downtown project’s budget to contribute to the visit.

Councilor Lake asked whether Mr. Speck would focus primarily on downtown, or on some of the side street corridors like West and Court Streets. He also asked if there would be any summary materials or videos available for those who could not attend. Mr. Weinreich thought the focus would be on downtown and drawing people to the community. The Downtown Merchants Association was committed to working out the logistics, including the use of Heberton Hall, which could hold 150 people. He added that the visit would be recorded, and they hope to have a way to stream it for people after. He said that ultimately, the populous would need to decide whether they want this. He said Mr. Speck indicated to him that there are other design options that could work with how the Central Square intersection is laid out already. He could also advise options for the side street intersections along Main Street.

Councilor Chadbourne said that with this amount of financial investment, she hoped that more than 150 members of the community would be able to participate. She asked if they considered Keene State College or the high school. Mr. Weinreich said he received advice to keep the events downtown, but he did not want to exclude anyone; he even considered the Colonial, but it was not the best option. Mr. Rebillard mentioned that events in Heberton Hall could be broadcast on TV. He added that the merchants were working with a local advertising provider to publish the videos. Councilor Chadbourne noted that watching a video would not be the same as the public being able to attend and interact with the consultant. Mr. Weinreich noted that more of the public could be invited to the follow-up workshop the next morning, which could be somewhere large like the Marriott Hotel.

Councilor Remy was concerned that the City was mid-way through the downtown reconstruction process with a lot of very polarized opinions in the community. He wondered how Mr. Speck would feel being surrounded by people with specific opinions and potential skepticism. Mr. Weinreich said he posed that question to Mr. Speck, who said that was normal and that Keene was at the stage where there are high emotions that he would not be trying to quell. Mr. Speck would just help to make sure the City had considered all options. Mr. Weinreich said this was not about “Save the Square” but more so about getting a second opinion. He thought Mr. Speck would be very diplomatic and unbiased.

Councilor Madison was concerned about the preliminary schedule of events, which mentioned 3 different meal events with “key individuals.” Councilor Madison asked who the key individuals would be because it read to him like VIPs. While he thought the visit would be interesting, he was concerned, ethically, about using taxpayer dollars to fund meals and drinks for this visitor, VIPs, and supporters. Mr. Weinreich said the downtown merchants’ goal was to target the \$12,000 fee. Beyond that would be funding the meals, etc. (he did not say by whom). He said Mr. Speck was vague about what “key individuals” meant, so it was really up to the City to decide. From the downtown merchants’ vantage points, they wanted everyone possible to be involved throughout the events. He thought there could be more participation through Mr. Speck’s small City model of interaction. Mr. Rebillard said Councilor Madison’s concern was well understood and he agreed. Mr. Rebillard said the first goal was raising the fee. Otherwise, he said it would be about bringing as many people as possible to the table at these public events at the largest venues possible. Mr. Weinreich was excited about this public-private partnership that could get more pedestrians and taxpayers involved. The downtown merchants would need the City’s help to make this a success.

Vice Chair Remy thought the timing was interesting because before the full Council votes on this project, there would be a special MSFI meeting to discuss the design alternatives on May 15. He doubted the MSFI Committee would leave that meeting with a recommendation. No matter what the PLD Committee voted at this meeting, this would still require a full Council vote on May 18. Vice Chair Remy said he reserved his right to change his mind at the Council meeting on May 18 after hearing the MSFI Committee’s proceedings.

Chair Powers thought valid points were raised by all the Committee members. He thought this would be a great opportunity for the City to get more information that would be helpful now or in the future.

With no comments from the public, Chair Powers entertained a motion by Councilor Lake that was duly seconded by Councilor Madison.

On a vote of 4–1, the Finance, Organization, and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Council support a contribution of \$5,000 to assist with funding the speaker fee to facilitate a visit from Urban Planner, Jeff Speck, regarding planning for walkable cities. Said funding to come from Project Cost Center (75J0034A) “Downtown Infrastructure Improvement and Reconstruction Project”. Councilor Chadbourne voted in opposition.

Mr. Weinreich cited some other details from Mr. Speck’s book about enlivening the aesthetics of a streetscape. He also mentioned challenges with the intersection of Main Street, Emerald Street, and Eagle Court where there are a lot of pedestrian accidents.

2) Acceptance of 2023 Wellness Grant – Human Resources Director/ACM

Chair Powers asked for comments from the HR Director/Assistant City Manager, Elizabeth Fox. Ms. Fox sought a recommendation from the FOP Committee to authorize the City Manager to accept a wellness grant in the amount of \$2,100 to be used for employee wellness activities. The City’s health insurance vendor provides the opportunity for communities to have wellness coordinators; they train the coordinators, who develop custom programs to meet the needs of their workforce. The City has 4 wellness coordinators—2 in HR, 1 in Parking Services, and 1 in the Finance Department. This past year, activities included blood drives and financial wellness efforts. Monthly, they send out educational pieces to help employees learn how to best use their health plans. Another event in late May would be a financial health fair in the Blastos Room. If for some reason the grant was not expended fully this year, it could carry over to next year’s activities.

With no comments from the Committee or the public, Chair Powers entertained a motion by Councilor Madison that was duly seconded by Councilor Lake.

On a vote of 5–0, the Finance, Organization, and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept and expend the 2023 wellness grant from HealthTrust of \$2,100 to be used for employee wellness activities.

3) Donation – Community Garden Tool Shed – Parks, Recreation, & Facilities Director

Chair Powers asked for comments from Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks, Recreation, and Facilities. Mr. Bohannon explained that the Cheshire County Conservation District was donating

a toolshed to be located at the Monadnock View Cemetery. He said this had been a collaboration over the past few years, through which the Council had accepted donations from various organizations. Mr. Bohannon said that the Monadnock Gardening Club of Antioch University New England initiated this City-wide effort to improve food access. The Club worked with the City's gardens at the Monadnock View Cemetery, where there are a total of 52 plots. When the City started working with the gardening club, the City was only selling 19–20 of the plots, but over the past few years, they sold out (including this year). Two years ago, the City accepted a donation to install an irrigation system and another grant program was in the works to install a third water spicket. An Eagle Scouts project added a pergola to the garden for shade. The present grant request was to work with Bensonwood to build the shed. Mr. Bohannon also mentioned that over the past few years, Rowland Russell of Antioch University had been an instrumental advocate of these gardens and the City's food security; over 1 year, Mr. Russell produced over 500 pounds of produce for the Community Kitchen and his goal was to increase this year.

With no comments from the Committee or the public, Chair Powers entertained a motion by Vice Chair Remy that was duly seconded by Councilor Chadbourne.

On a vote of 5–0, the Finance, Organization, and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept a donation of a tool shed from Cheshire County Conservation District for the community gardens located behind the Monadnock View Cemetery.

4) Contract for Design Services – Concept Plan for Robin Hood Park – Parks, Recreation, and Facilities Director

Chair Powers asked for comments from Andy Bohannon, Director of Parks, Recreation, and Facilities. Mr. Bohannon explained that this was for a contract to be signed for \$34,962.00 for the Robin Hood Park improvement project. He recalled a few years ago when he presented to the Council relative to a Weston and Samson report in 2019 related to the condition of City pools. Through that process, a project was added to the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) as a placeholder for the replacement of the Robin Hood Pool. Three years after that report, the City was doing everything possible to sustain that pool. With this project, the City would engage the public in relation to Robin Hood Park and the need for a pool or whether there is another alternative. This was programmed in the CIP for FY 27, so these funds would help guide the project for the coming CIP development. The City received 4 bids and after interviews, chose Dubois & King as the contractor; he recalled that this company worked on the dog park/disc golf plan last year that included successful community engagement.

With no comments from the Committee or the public, Chair Powers entertained a motion by Councilor Chadbourne that was duly seconded by Councilor Lake.

On a vote of 5–0, the Finance, Organization, and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to negotiate and execute a professional

service contract with Dubois & King for design services required for the Conceptual Design of Robin Hood Park, for an amount not to exceed \$34,962.00 and with funding to come from Project Cost Center (65J0018A) “Robin Hood Park Improvement Project.”

5) Winchester Street Reconstruction Project – Request to Reallocate Funds – City Engineer

Chair Powers asked for a project update from the City Engineer, Don Lussier, before he discussed this reallocation. Mr. Lussier reported that the Winchester Street project was well underway. He said the construction season was off to a good start and a lot of progress had been made. The remaining truck apron on Key Road was poured and cured. Two weeks after this meeting, the sidewalks and curbing along the outside of the Key Road intersection would be completed. Mr. Lussier had heard from many people that the new configuration and traffic pattern was working well even though it was only 1 lane in each direction at the time. The week after this meeting, the contractor would begin disassembling the Island Street Bridge, which had been closed to traffic for a few weeks already for utility work. He recalled that the Bailey Bridge would be salvaged to hopefully reuse on a railroad project. He also mentioned that at this point, the money was not actually needed. There was a situation where the project had a certain amount of funding, the contract was awarded in the last year, and the City had provided several change orders to account for unexpected circumstances like an asbestos pipe that did not have records or conflicts between the elevations of utilities that had to be rerouted. Now, Mr. Lussier said that the available funds the Council approved for the project in the Water Fund were getting thin. Both the General and Sewer Funds had good balances remaining for the City Manager to use her authority to issue small change orders. He said the Sewer Fund was down to about \$5,000 of the remaining balance, which was the difference between the contractual obligation to the contractor and what the City Council approved for funding. Mr. Lussier said this was not a problem, per se, but if there were another unanticipated issue above the \$5,000 sewer fund limit, that work would have to be halted until the City Council could grant authority for more funds. So, City Staff were trying to be proactive. Mr. Lussier recalled a few years ago during the Wetmore Street project, when the Wetmore water main branch failed and there were emergency repairs. At that time, the City Council approved \$65,000 for that project and \$14,430 remained unspoken for from that work. Those funds were unspent because the City’s water and sewer crew did a lot of the work themselves. He recommended reallocating those remaining funds toward the Winchester Street reconstruction project in case needed. If unused, the funds would remain available for other purposes.

With no comments from the Committee or the public, Chair Powers entertained a motion by Councilor Lake that was duly seconded by Councilor Madison.

On a vote of 5–0, the Finance, Organization, and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to reallocate the remaining unspent project balance of approximately \$14,429.55 from the Wetmore / Winchester Street Main Repair Project

(Water Fund Project No. 34JI024A) to the State Bypass Utilities Project, also known as the Winchester Street Reconstruction Project (Water Fund Project No. 34JI016A).

6) Reallocation of Funds – 1.5 MG Tank Repair Project – Assistant Public Works Director/Operations Manager

Chair Powers asked for comments from Aaron Costa, Assistant Public Works Director and Operations Manager of the Treatment Facilities. Mr. Costa requested the reallocation of funds to the 1.5MG storage tank repair project. He explained that the City owned a 1.5MG tank in the general area of the 3MG tank at Robin Hood Park. The 1.5MG tank was completely buried and nearing 100 years old. The tank was due for improvements specifically to the roof and capping system. In 2013, Tighe and Bond Engineers performed a facilities evaluation for the City that became the blueprint for CIP projects like this one. In November 2021, the City contracted with Weston and Sampson for engineering services for this project. The City put the project out to bid and received 1 bid in August 2022 that was over budget. There was also “bid alternate” work that came to another \$200,000. The City decided to modify the specifications to try to get a better price, so all the bid alternate work was removed. He said that the concrete repair work—which would not be noticed until all the earth was removed from the cover—was also removed from the revised scope to be completed on a time and materials basis through a change order versus the contractor having to carry that in their base bid. He said the project was also re-bid in the early spring instead of mid-to-late summer because some construction and earthwork would be required, which would result in loaming and seeding on top of the new cap. In this new round, there were 2 more bids received in April 2023, one of which was similar to the bid last year. One bid was 33% higher than the other. The City’s consultant estimated \$350,000 for this project and the City had allocated \$340,000. Mr. Costa said the consultant advised that it was difficult to predict how construction bids would come in, given labor shortages and the increased cost of labor. It was difficult for the consultants to estimate the costs based on their experience. He said Staff recommended reallocating funds from the following 2 projects: the Drummer Hill Tanks and Pump Station project (was complete with a project balance of \$139,109.12 remaining) and the Elm Steet Cleaning and Lining Project from FY 19–20 (ultimately determined that it would be a better candidate for a larger water main instead of cleaning and lining).

Chair Powers assumed that Staff was comfortable with the changes made to the project scope that allowed the bid to be lower but asked if the issues conceded would arise again a year from now. Mr. Costa said maybe. Some of the bid alternate work included the outfall where the tank drains down a hill with a steep embankment, so the plan was to install stairs. There was also an underground vault, and the goal was to move that to an aboveground building so Staff would have easier entry. These were things that would need to be evaluated down the line, but the most essential part of this project was replacing the cap that currently allowed water and snow to pool on top, posing structural concerns. The new cap would be sloped to move water off the structure.

With no comments from the public, Chair Powers entertained a motion by Councilor Madison that was duly seconded by Vice Chair Remy.

Councilor Remy was reminded that it had been some time since the Council saw a list of project balances remaining. He wondered what other funds were out there and he asked to see that report from Staff soon.

On a vote of 5–0, the Finance, Organization, and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to reallocate \$139,109.12 in remaining project balance from the Drummer Hill Tank and Pump Station Replacement Project (Water Fund Project 34JI014A) and \$89,701.88 in funds from the Water Main Cleaning and Lining Project (Water Fund Project 34MI0400) and move these funds to the 1.5MG Storage Tank Repair Project (Water Fund Project 34JI002A).

7) **Councilor Madison – Recommending an Amendment to the City Code – Meeting Times for Public Bodies**

Chair Powers asked for comments from Councilor Madison. Councilor Madison said this matter had been on his mind for a while following some conversations with constituents about City meetings becoming more accessible to members of the public who are working age. He used the example of the Housing Report presentation from a few weeks prior that was at 3:00 PM, which is challenging for most who are impacted by the housing crisis to attend during the day. Even as a Councilor, it was difficult to attend meetings during the workday. He also provided the example of the Energy and Climate Committee which meets at 9:00 AM and has a constant turnover of members; he wondered if those two issues were related. Councilor Madison was clear that the City was not doing anything wrong, noting how City Staff go above and beyond to hold these public meetings, citing how well the Conservation Commission meetings run as a result, for example. The Councilor was content if the Committee wanted to put this on more time so they could move on to the budget.

The City Manager said that Staff reviewed the boards and commissions that meet before 5:00 PM. She noted how difficult it was to schedule the various committee meetings at times when both Staff and meeting rooms are available. There are 8 committees that meet during the workday: Energy and Climate Committee, Bicycle/Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee, Conservation Commission, Historic District Commission, Minor Project Review Committee, Heritage Commission, Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board, and Airport Development and Marketing Committee. The City Manager explained that annually, City Staff poll these committees to ensure that the meeting times work for them. She noted that some volunteers are paid by their employees to attend these meetings, so in those cases, daytime attendance is best. While for others, after work is the only time they can participate. The City Manager assured the Committee that Staff works really hard to accomplish the maximum attendance. The City Manager reiterated that the availability of meeting spaces was also a challenge, noting the need for minute takers and to broadcast certain meetings for the public. The City Manager said she heard Councilor Madison’s point about increasing attendance options for some of these important ad hoc committees—like for the downtown project or community power. The City

Manager said that in those instances, they usually try to have one session during the day and one at night (and sometimes a virtual option) to accommodate as many as possible. She noted that the Library has a variety of their own meetings and they set their own schedule. The City Manager said Staff suggested that the Committee recommend that she continue working with public bodies annually to determine the best meeting times. She noted that sometimes membership turns over for various reasons such as someone moving out of town. She said Staff could work to better track why there are vacancies.

Councilor Lake said he counted and there were 22–23 committees that meet during the week. He agreed that scheduling all of those is complicated, especially if there were many more after 5:00 PM. With an average of 21 business days in a month, he reiterated the scheduling challenges. Councilor Lake had heard similar feedback about the public being able to attend these ad hoc meetings; he was unable to attend the downtown infrastructure meetings.

Councilor Madison agreed that he missed most of the downtown infrastructure meetings because they were during the day. Councilor Madison was comfortable with the proposed motion for Staff to work on ways to generate better attendance for some of these more consequential topics. He appreciated City Staff's efforts.

Councilor Remy suggested modifying the proposed motion to add, "to ask Staff to come back with a proposal on how to handle ad hoc committees specifically." The City Manager explained that those are the Mayor's meetings and that might be beyond the Staff's control. Councilor Remy still proposed having some guidelines on how those could be scheduled.

Councilor Chadbourne noted that many committees, like the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board, had met at the same time for many years. She noted that companies like C&S Grocers promote their employees to be active in the community and support them in attending meetings during working hours. Councilor Chadbourne said the committees she had served over time usually discussed whether the meeting time worked at the beginning of each year, sometimes compromising on a new time. She agreed with how complicated it is to coordinate and schedule all these monthly meetings. Still, she agreed that contentious topics like the downtown project should be at times of the day that are easier for more stakeholders to attend.

Vice Chair Remy agreed that these more critical committees and projects should be at times that more constituents could attend. For example, most stakeholders in the lower Winchester Street project are businesses that might find it easier to meet during the day.

The City Manager said she could have a conversation with the Mayor about adjusting some ad hoc meeting times to have the most participation. However, the City Manager was nervous about amending the proposed motion to direct her to do anything with the meetings created by the Mayor because coordinating schedules could be difficult. Councilor Madison understood and agreed that there are scheduling challenges. The last thing he wanted to do was interfere with the

various committees' work. He just hoped that the conversation about meeting times would occur regularly, as the City Manager suggested.

With no further comments from the Committee or the public, Chair Powers entertained a motion by Vice Chair Remy that was duly seconded by Councilor Chadbourne.

On a vote of 5–0, the Finance, Organization, and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager work with public body staff liaisons to annually survey their membership to ensure meeting times are fostering the greatest level of participation possible for membership and the public for bodies established by City Code.

8) Relating to an Appropriation of Funds and Use of Unassigned Fund Balance for the FY 2023 Fire Department Personnel Budget Resolution – Resolution R-2023-27

Chair Powers requested comments from the Fire Chief, Don Farquhar, who said this was a Resolution regarding the City's Fiscal Policy. This Resolution was to transfer \$380,672.84 from the Police Department's budget to the Fire Department's for this fiscal year. This amount would be offset by projected budgetary savings and the Police Personnel Department's \$405,341 budget. For context, he explained that the funds broke down as follows:

- In personnel overages (overtime training) – \$42,893.44 – for overtime training in the third fiscal quarter, this line item was used to track overtime to fund a 10th person. This was captured as a specific number to recover Federal grant funding for Covid expenditures. While labeled “overtime training,” it was for hiring the 10th person in that fiscal quarter.
- Ambulance and Fire Budgets “overtime sick replacement” – \$181, 833.43 – this is mostly overtime but a portion is Family Medical Leave and Worker's Compensation. Family Medical Leave was very high this year, mostly attributed to paternity leave.
- Overtime for multi-alarm (this was split with next year's budget for better clarity and part went to funding that 10th Firefighter) – this included callbacks for fires and shift coverage – \$105,000.68. These costs would be tracked in next year's budget to understand what was driving those costs more accurately.
- The 3 line items in the operating overages section directly correlated with the supplementary requests for the upcoming budget. Under EMS disposables – \$15,718.08 directly attributed to a high call volume and some specialty equipment.
- Vehicle maintenance was also related to call volume – \$27,156.18.
- Protective clothing – \$8,071.03 – the Department worked with vendors this year to recover some costs and the Department received a grant for some equipment. He thought that the supplemental request this year would correct that program to be a smooth line item funded over a period of time.

Councilor Chadbourne thought this was really minimal when considering how great the need is, noting that the Department had been short-staffed for some time, causing employees to work

longer hours and overtime. She thought this was the first step to correcting that and she supported this.

With no comments from the public, Chair Powers entertained a motion by Councilor Chadbourne that was duly seconded by Councilor Lake.

On a vote of 5–0, the Finance, Organization, and Personnel Committee recommends the adoption of Resolution R-2023-27.

9) Relating to the FY 2023–2024 Budget – Resolution R-2023-13

9) Relating to the FY 2023–2024 Budget – Resolution R-2023-13

A motion by Vice Chair Remy was duly seconded by Councilor Chadbourne.

On a vote of 5–0, the Finance, Organization, and Personnel Committee recommended that this agenda item be placed on more time to allow further review and discussion of the budget.

The City Manager, Elizabeth Dragon, introduced the budget, noting that the Committee would not hear from all departments at this meeting. She expanded on the budget comments she made at the May 4 Council meeting. She recalled that in the last 2 years, the City’s overall tax rate had dropped, and the year before that the City’s portion of the tax rate remained level. She noted that between increasing costs of projects and operational supplies, the aftereffects of Covid, the strain on supply chains, inflationary cost impacts, and the increasing need for staffing to keep up with departmental service demands, the City’s portion of the tax rate was proposed to increase 3.4% this year. The City Manager said this budget was in compliance with City policy limitations when excluding the expenses associated with the 4 firefighters approved by the Council in April 2023. When those firefighters were added, that was just under \$1 million, and given the cost-of-living index used by the City, the figure was much higher at 6.4%. The 3-year average used for the Fiscal Policy calculation was also higher at 4.4%. So, the City Manager said that with the City’s overall municipal 3.4% increase in the context of current economic challenges—including inflationary cost impacts—the municipal team worked hard to structure this budget.

The City Manager continued explaining that within the City’s Fiscal Policy guidelines, the proposed budget included an estimated \$0.43 change in the municipal rate, of which \$0.23 was the impact of the expense of the 4 firefighters needed to maintain the minimum staffing level of 10. The City Manager said that in preparing this budget, some of the major challenges included a reduction in overall utility values and residential properties consistently selling for prices considerably higher than their average assessments, with no sign of change. Low inventory and high demand continued to be factors as houses on the market saw multiple offers ending above asking prices. Construction costs also remained high for any new housing. The City Manager recalled multiple conversations with the Council about these costs for City projects. So, the City Manager said this was about more than housing costs. She noted that the NH Department of

Revenue sets the assessment equalization ratio, which was 80.9% for the City last year, meaning that the medium sale price in the City was 19.1% more than assessed values; people were selling their houses at approximately 19% higher than what they were assessed for by NH State law. Annually, the City's utility values must be equalized by that ratio. While utility values are reviewed every year to account for changes and the value could increase from the previous year, the equalization ratio of 80.9% would still need to be applied. Doing so could result in an overall loss in taxable values for utility properties. So, the City Manager said it was essential to consider not only what was happening to utility values, but also what was happening to general assessments throughout the City, and whether the City could offset that loss when equalizing those utility values. Unfortunately, the City Assessor told the City Manager that offsetting that loss was not possible. So, the City Manager included a reduction in the City's overall assessments in the utility category of \$6 million; a \$6 million drop in overall values. The City Manager noted that utility costs were up across the organization. Electricity and heating expenses were almost \$100,000 more than they were last year. This increase was despite efforts the City undertook on third party contracts for bidding out electricity, work on increasing solar power, moving the Wastewater Treatment Plant (the largest energy user in Cheshire County) to a new solar farm at the Dillant Hopkins Airport, and a solar project to power the Marlboro Street facilities.

The City Manager explained that in the budget, there were necessary personnel changes in multiple departments across the organization, including changes made in anticipation of retirements; many employees across the organization were eligible for retirement. Unfortunately, many of those retirements would be at the upper level of management, so the City would be losing a great deal of experience. She said that departments were working on plans to ensure smooth transitions. She said the costliest personnel change was the addition of 4 firefighters recently approved by the Council. This expense was broken down on page 13 of the budget.

In addition, the City Manager said that operating expenses required to run various functions across all departments and capital costs increased dramatically. She said this required many changes to funding sources of projects to reduce the impact of the costs. She recalled that the Assistant Public Works Director/Treatment Plant Operations Manager, Aaron Costa, recently reported to the Council about the cost of supplies and how much those costs had increased to run the Plants 24 hours daily. The City Manager also explained that there would be an election in 2024, which always requires many more expenses for the Clerk's office due to the great deal of effort involved in hosting a successful election.

The City Manager said that this summer (2023), the capital planning process would begin at the administrative level and would work its way to the Council in January 2024. She said it would require a great deal of effort this year to update project costs in keeping with the City's strategic governance principles. The City Manager had instructed Department heads to not only include updated estimates for projects, but also to include anticipated impacts on operational expenses, including personnel impacts. She thought that was something that had not been called out well in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) in the past because when the Council decided to add a park

or facility, for example, increased labor would be needed. She said this would be clear this coming year with the addition of the Pat Russell Park.

The City Manager said she consulted with Chair Powers, and they decided that the Committee would follow the same process as in the past for the departmental budget review process, reviewing changes in each budget and some of the upcoming challenges and opportunities.

Chair Powers welcomed the Finance Director/Treasurer, Merri Howe, to provide introductory comments on this budget. She mentioned that the budget was available to the public online at www.keeenh.gov/budget. She also noted that this was the first budget that Staff prepared with the new finance software, Munis, which Staff was still in the early stages of exploring. Over the course of the next few years, she said the Council would see some changes to how the budget is presented as Staff adapts to the new software. For reference, Ms. Howe explained that the City used to call subdivisions within departments “cost centers,” which were now called “organizations” or “org codes.” Additionally, “accounts” would now be called “object codes.” She said that some things were moved around in the budget; for example, the Mayor’s budget used to include City-wide benefits for employees, which seemed like more of an overall function of Human Resources, so they were moved to that budget. She said this was a matter of trying to align expenses with the real org that they go to.

Ms. Howe wanted to extend a special thank you to Karen Gray, Accounting & Fund Manager, for her hard work to execute this budget that would not have been formatted well without her. Ms. Howe also recognized the Assistant Finance Director, Rob Constable, for his incredible Excel skills. She also thanked the rest of the Finance Department and Human Resources teams, who would present parts of the budget to the Council.

Ms. Howe began walking the Committee through pages 10–30 of the budget. She directed the Committee to page 10, which was an informative breakdown of the City’s portion of the tax rate by department; this would give a taxpayer an understanding of where their dollars were going and that those dollars are really well spent. While different information was available to the Council than in the past because of the new software, Ms. Howe thought the department heads would present their portions of the budget clearly. Pages 11–15 were the budget recap that broke down the tax rate. The calculation of the budget and tax rate were in orange on page 11, demonstrating that the City was in compliance prior to the 4 additional firefighters. Page 13 was a recap of the change to the overall budget and tax rate. Pages 14–15 summarized the budget and tax rate. Pages 16–19 recapped the General Fund revenue, which was broken down by object codes on pages 17–19. Ms. Howe explained that as a part of the budget process each year, every department prepares a list of their supplemental requests for changes or additions to their budgets. On pages 20–22, there was a list of software requests by department included in the City Manager’s budget. Not all requests were in the City Manager’s budget; they are reviewed, discussed, and assessed to determine whether they are added to the City Manager’s budget. On pages 23–30, the General Fund expenditure budget reports, one by department on page 23 and one by object codes on pages 24–28. Then there was a breakdown by department between

personnel and operating costs. Ms. Howe continued introducing the budget. On pages 31–33 there was a list of the General Fund long-term debt with issue date, maturity rate, original amount, principal interest, and end balance as of June 30, 2024. The new anticipated debt for FY 24 based on the CIP projects was \$2,951,000 which would hopefully be issued in fall 2024. Ms. Howe also mentioned that the Mayor’s budget started on page 38 and was essentially status quo, despite a slight increase due to an additional \$1,000 for the Human Rights Committee.

Next, the Human Resources Manager, Natalie Darcy, reviewed the outside agencies’ budget on pages 39–42. Historically, Human Services was tasked with outside agency funding. This year, the Committee consisted of individuals from Human Services, Purchasing, and 2 City Councilors. Ms. Darcy said the Committee worked diligently to ensure that any interested organization had the opportunity to apply for funding. A public notice was placed in the Keene Sentinel in mid-December 2022 and the deadline for submittal was January 27, 2023.

Recommendations for funding were based on each agency’s responses to the following established criteria:

1. The impact on the City if the agency was not in operation.
2. The agency provides a service with a direct financial impact on expenditure of City departments.
3. The number and percentage of Keene residents served by the agency.
4. Other local service agencies providing similar services.
5. Financial impact in terms of prevention and intervention services that potentially save future City spending.
6. Demonstrated efforts to cooperate and avoid duplication with other agencies.

Ms. Darcy said that this year, Human Services received 15 requests for agency funding. One agency, The Samaritans NH, rescinded their request. Another agency, Monadnock Family Services’ Substance Abuse Services, did not appear before the Committee. The Committee met with the agencies in February 2023 via Zoom to discuss their requests. The Committee then made recommendations, which were forwarded to the City Manager for budget review. Chair Powers recognized representatives of the requesting agencies to summarize their services and requests.

Monadnock Center for Violence Prevention (MCVP): Megan Fulton, Director, and Robin Christopherson, Executive Director, were present. Ms. Fulton said they make this same request of all towns in Cheshire County and the 14 westernmost towns in Hillsborough County that they serve. MCVP serves survivors of domestic and sexual violence, stalking, and human sex trafficking. They offer both crisis prevention services and prevention education programs. MCVP works in upward of 30 schools, including some in the Keene area, and they would like to work in more. The agency’s request was based on the cost of their services, which are free to anyone seeking help. She said the request is different from town-to-town based on the number of survivors they serve, with Keene being the largest town and therefore the largest need. The requested funds would go toward crisis prevention services and prevention education.

Southwest Community Services (SCS): Keith Thibault, Chief Development Officer, explained that SCS serves the 2 counties in southwestern NH. SCS is a community action program. Annually, SCS asks each community in those 2 counties to provide funding. He explained what SCS calls their “town funding effort,” which raises a little over \$100,000 annually. He was pleased to report that every community in Cheshire and Sullivan Counties had provided funding every year. For every community served, SCS calculates how much direct assistance goes to that community. With Keene being the largest community served, last year SCS provided over \$7.3 million in services just to Keene residents. SCS typically asks towns to contribute 1% of that total, which would be \$73,000 for Keene last year; however, they cap that figure at \$10,000. Other towns like Claremont, Newport, Winchester, and Swanzey, reach that \$10,000 level, while smaller towns like Gilsum, Roxbury, and Nelson contribute \$200–\$300. Mr. Thibault was grateful that every community recognized the value that SCS brings to their community. He explained that specific funding could only go toward specific activities, like Head Start and fuel assistance. So, it was helpful for SCS to receive some funds that could be used in multiple ways to address unique problems without those restrictions. Last year alone, the fuel assistance program provided \$852,000 to Keene residents. The housing stabilization program provided over \$4 million, which was augmented in the last year in response to a very robust NH rental assistance program that provided \$3.5 million to Keene residents. Mr. Thibault said SCS was making its annual \$10,000 request. He expressed gratitude for the various partnerships and collaborations in Keene.

Keene Senior Center: Mary Jensen thanked the Council for their past support. Last year, the Center saw a 48% increase, which translated to 18,000 visits from seniors who were feeling more comfortable coming out after Covid. Sixty-seven percent of the Senior Center membership are residents of Keene, many of whom had moved here from other areas to be near family and were surprised by the lack of State support for seniors in NH. The City of Keene’s support for the Senior Center was critical in being able to continue providing inexpensive services to seniors. Approximately 60% of the seniors have an income of \$50,000 or less, so the Senior Center tries to keep costs low so all members of the community can be served. Ms. Jensen said that the Senior Center does a great deal of grant writing and fundraising to make up the difference between memberships, what the City supplies, and other special Senior Center events. She said they try hard to collaborate with other organizations in the area, many of whom she saw representatives of in the audience of this meeting, such as the Community Kitchen and Home Healthcare, Hospice, and Community Services. Ms. Jensen appreciated the Council’s support to maintain a safe and attractive place, and wellness services for Keene’s seniors.

NH Community Volunteer Transport Company (CVTC): Ellen Avery, Executive Director, spoke on behalf of CVTC, which is based in Peterborough. Ms. Avery said this request was similar to last year’s. CVTC opened in 2008, serving 34 towns that make up the region, including all 23 towns in Cheshire County and 11 in Hillsborough County. She said the demand for this service remained high, especially with people venturing out more after Covid. Ms. Avery recalled that CVTC’s request for \$1,500 (which she said some people winced at) last year was unsuccessful, so she met with the City Manager to better understand the concerns about duplication of services.

She explained that CVTC was a part of the regional transportation network. Volunteers donate their time and CVTC reimburses them for mileage. Ms. Avery called it a very nimble organization. At the end of this fiscal year in June, volunteers would have donated over 120,000 miles. At this time, there were 67 volunteers, which Ms. Avery hoped to increase to 75. Next, Ms. Avery discussed the possibility of duplicating efforts. She said Keene was blessed to have the City Express as a transportation option in addition to the Friendly Bus, which serves residents over age 60; she said both of those options had astounding numbers of users for rides within the City limits. What makes CVTC different is that it takes users to locations that are primarily outside of Keene. She said her application reflected that last year, CVTC had 92 ride requests from 36 residents, and 41 of those requests were for trips to White River Junction or to Lebanon; there was a 44% increase in requests to go north. For comparison, Ms. Avery said that Tony's Taxi would charge \$300 roundtrip to Lebanon, as well as \$50 per hour of wait time. Thus, CVTC's free service (they do accept donations) was a significant savings. She added that if volunteer time was valued at \$18/hour in addition to mileage, instead of \$14,000 for the 41 rides to Lebanon, it would be \$6,068 using CVTC, which she said was a big difference. She said this service also keeps people out of the Welfare system that are looking for money to take a taxi north. Ms. Avery thought that CVTC supplemented and enhanced what Home Healthcare, Hospice, and Community Services does already. She added that the Senior Center also has a volunteer driver program that is only for its members, whereas CVTC serves 34 towns.

Dave Whaley, a resident of Keene, volunteer driver for CVTC, and member of the CVTC Board also spoke in support. Mr. Whaley said he began volunteering with CVTC 18 months ago and said it was a unique experience. He had provided approximately 35 rides during that time. He encouraged others to volunteer as well. He was able to learn a lot about the primarily senior demographic using this service. Mr. Whaley had driven users to Lebanon, Concord, Manchester, Nashua, Brattleboro, and Peterborough. He said it is a valuable service and it struck him as something this demographic really needed, many of whom did not have cars and were facing health/financial challenges. He said volunteering was a great opportunity to learn from the users. Mr. Whaley said they were recruiting more drivers and advertising in media sources to attract more riders. He said there was a powerful need for this great service, and he appreciated any support the City could provide. Ms. Avery added that CVTC was being supported by 28 of the 34 towns they serve, and she hoped more would provide funding this year, including Keene. She explained that \$750 was 0.002% of their budget, and all of the municipalities contributing came out to 9% of their budget. She requested the City's support.

Vice Chair Remy asked if the volunteer driver also volunteered their mileage. Mr. Whaley said no, the mileage is reimbursed. Vice Chair Remy said he did not understand where the funds went if the driving was volunteered. Ms. Avery replied that drivers select their rides based on their availability, they do not dispatch, which she thought was a part of the winning formula. The volunteers were in control of how much time they devoted, but there was a voluntary threshold of 4 rides per month, and approximately 68% of the drivers fulfilled that monthly. The volunteers were reimbursed for mileage monthly at \$0.65/mile. Vice Chair Remy referred to the \$750 being 0.002% and asked how those funds were used. Ms. Avery said that was a part of their

readiness to serve, noting that municipal contributions were not dedicated to any specific aspect, but toward operational costs and services (e.g., staff, software, office equipment). For example, their budget was budget tight at \$250–\$258 [did she mean thousands? 2:00:20 on video file] and the mileage reimbursement comes from the NH Department of Transportation (DOT).

Councilor Madison said he did some quick math and a roundtrip from Keene to Lebanon would cost approximately \$84.50 in mileage reimbursement, but he did not realize those funds came from NH DOT. Ms. Avery said that the math was correct.

Keene Community Kitchen: Sarah Harpster, Executive Director, and Jocelyn Desmarais, Director of Development and Advocacy, thanked the City for its continued partnership. Ms. Harpster recognized that the Community Kitchen was a large portion of the “outside agencies” proposed budget. The Community Kitchen was celebrating its 40th year in 2023 and the need continued to be strong. She recalled that 2022 was a year of great transitions for the Community Kitchen leadership and their physical building, the latter of which included a solar array installation. In 2022, they reopened one pantry day that remains open this year; people could have food delivered to their vehicles. In 2023, the goal was to reopen dinners in the dining room, which was a challenge that would require increased staffing and volunteers. More than double the number of individuals were coming to dinners compared to pre-Covid. Ms. Harpster was collaborating with the Hundred Nights shelter; when the new shelter opens, the Community Kitchen would prepare dinners to be served there. In 2022, there was a 22% increase in the hot meal service, and she said those numbers continue rising. The Community Kitchen recently saw 165–190 participants, averaging 140 nightly; those numbers used to be 60–70 nightly, so there had been a big increase in the pantry service. Ms. Harpster noted that the sunseting of the Covid emergency declaration impacted a lot of social services. In one case, there was a boost in SNAP benefits during the pandemic, and with this sunseting, participating NH families lost approximately \$206 in monthly benefits; over 283 families who used the Community Kitchen lost those benefits, equaling \$58,000 of lost buying power. Families used SNAP to supplement their nutritional needs, reducing their need to go to the Community Kitchen. In March and April 2023 alone, there was a 32% increase in pantry use, which had the staff and volunteers scrambling to meet the need. Ms. Harpster said that inflation had impacted all Community Kitchen operations since 2019, but the recent food inflation was even higher at over 30%, which had families struggling. Still, she said the Community Kitchen was doing well thanks to support from citizens in the region. Ms. Harpster understood that the amount requested from the City was high, stating that it was an attempt to level the increase to their budget compared to 2022. She appreciated the City’s ongoing support and consideration of this request during this challenging time.

Ms. Desmarais talked about the Community Kitchen’s effort to reduce the need for its services; their former Executive Director, Phoebe Gray, described the Community Kitchen’s efforts as “taking a band-aid off of people facing food security each week and putting a fresh one on.” She said the City’s support this year would help the Community Kitchen to maintain its baseline so they could begin looking at medium and long-term goals that address the root causes of this

need. She was working toward an advocacy program that would engage people with the experience of food insecurity to develop their advocacy skills and be trained in building an equitable and sustainable local food system and economy. Those people would become assets to the local economy in the long-term and the City's support this year would help initiate this program.

Councilor Chadbourne asked how many towns the Community Kitchen served and how many guests were Keene residents. Ms. Harpster replied that 99% of the hot meal participants were estimated to come from Keene. She said it was rare for a person to come on a nightly basis for one meal, but she said they did not collect data on guests' origin communities for the pantry program. Ms. Harpster said that broadly, the Community Kitchen served Cheshire County and was collaborating with other pantries throughout the region. They were also piloting a mobile food pantry program that was meant to fill any gaps. She said that over 50% of pantry participants were Keene residents. Councilor Chadbourne asked Ms. Harpster to confirm that she believed 99% of hot meal guests were from Keene but there was no way to track that; was it just an open door? Ms. Harpster said yes. Councilor Chadbourne asked about the cost of services to Keene residents. Ms. Harpster said there was an exercise of recalculating what it costs the Community Kitchen per meal. For the pantry, they calculate how many meals they serve to each resident based on guests checking into the pantry. Based on that calculation, they determine how much to request of the municipalities. However, she said Keene's figure was too high, so they were asking for a much smaller contribution.

The City Manager asked what contribution was requested from the other towns served. Ms. Harpster said they asked for \$1.50 per meal, and the total the Community Kitchen requested from all other towns was \$434,286.

Councilor Chadbourne recalled volunteering at the Community Kitchen in the past and noted that there were often families from out-of-town. The Councilor said the Community Kitchen was basing the City's request on how many Keene residents they believed they were serving but had no way to track that. Ms. Harpster said she essentially took the traditional request her predecessor used and modified it. She emphasized that only 7% of the food the Community Kitchen provided was through the hot meals program. Councilor Chadbourne said that made a huge difference. Ms. Harpster added that residency was recorded for 93% of the hot meals.

Keene Housing Kids Collaborative: Sally Malay, Executive Director, thanked the City for their support. She reflected on the Collaborative's work over the past year. She said they continued expanding their services and the number of families served, as well as engaging more children in youth activities. She said the Kids Collaborative's mission was to build a foundation for successful adulthood. Ms. Malay said their approach was based on proven research, which showed that 60–70% of children born into low-income households stay there through adulthood. She added that early research was based on the social genome model, which showed that early intervention to provide opportunities and experiences for children, the better chance they would have at upward social mobility. The Collaborative partnered with 40 other community

organizations, the majority of whom were based in Keene. Ms. Malay said the Collaborative had a diverse range that provided varied opportunities for the different needs (arts, athletics, and academics) of families and children. Access to these services was provided at no cost to participants. She said it was estimated that for children from more affluent households, those families would spend \$9,000 yearly for these services. The Collaborative served families who could not pay for these services. Ms. Malay called this “closing the opportunity gap.” Last year, the Collaborative served 155 children in Keene, and in the first 4 months of 2023, they had served over 200. Thus, expenses continued rising. Ms. Malay said that the City’s contribution would be an investment into the community and its future workforce. The hope was that the children served would choose to stay in Keene and this program would help build their skillsets to be engaged contributors to the community.

Home Healthcare, Hospice, & Community Services (HCS): Susan Ashworth thanked the Council and community for their support of HCS’s 2 programs. One program was the City Express, which is public transportation that provides 2 routes and para-express services within the City of Keene. HCS also provides the Friendly Bus, which is a door-to-door service for the elderly or those with disabilities. The Friendly Bus provides once-weekly service to White River Junction and Lebanon as well. Because the City Express serves only the City of Keene, HCS was only requesting funding for that service. Ms. Ashworth said that City Express ridership was increasing and this year, they anticipated providing 28,000 trips to Keene residents. She said the City Express served diverse users getting to essential services (e.g., grocery stores, medical appointments, recreation, and employment). Twenty percent of trips last year were to medical appointments and 50% were to get groceries. HCS worked with many other agencies including the City’s Human Services Department, Hundred Nights, Monadnock Family Services, the Department of Employment Security, and Southwest Community Services; HCS provided either free or discounted tickets to allow their clientele to access those services. This year, Ms. Malay also planned to continue working with the Southwest Regional Planning Commission. She said the City Express routes were evaluated and it was determined that they were reaching more riders. She added that she would continue coordinating with the Monadnock Region Coordinating Council for Community Transportation to reduce duplicate services. Ms. Malay said the funds sought from the City would be the 50% match funds needed to operate the system. The balance of the funding came from fares and from the NH Department of Transportation. The City’s contribution would help HCS to offset the fluctuations in fuel costs, which had been rising. Those funds would also help to address increased maintenance costs due to traveling on bumpy roads. This City Express funding would be crucial to ensure mobility for all residents. She was grateful for the City’s investment in public transportation.

Councilor Chadbourne asked how much overlap there was between HCS’s services and the other agencies that were requesting funding; did they work together to coordinate? Ms. Malay said the agencies did work together through the formal Monadnock Region Coordinating Council for Community Transportation (MRCC). She cited HCS’s dispatchers coordinating with other agencies if there is a need to travel north so they do not duplicate efforts; she said the resources were too scarce to have the luxury of duplication.

Ms. Malay explained HCS's second program, Meals on Wheels, which provides daily nutrition to the City's homebound and elderly citizens. Last year in Keene alone, 48,578 meals (200 per day) were provided. Nearly half of those meals were provided to residents over age 80 and 10% were provided to those over age 90. Also last year, the program served a 100-year-old resident who was able to stay in their home thanks to HCS services. During Covid, the program expanded, but that would be limited again with the end of the Covid Emergency Declaration. Thus, HSC had to be very strict in limiting services to only those who are homebound. However, Ms. Malay was working on some other resources to ensure people get the nutrition they need. She said that the population served was growing, with 28% of Keene residents over age 65 diagnosed with Alzheimer's or dementia, and 57% of those over age 65 had 4 or more chronic health conditions. This was the population HCS was trying to support with daily meals and safety checks. Ms. Malay said HCS was requesting \$0.36 per meal to help offset the 9% increase in food costs experienced in the last year.

The City Manager introduced the Community-Funded Events budget, beginning on page 143 where there was a helpful chart that broke down the cost of City services for these community events and what was provided in this budget versus what the organizations pay. She said there was a \$10,000 cap and a few events exceeded that. This budget demonstrated a slight increase in the overall cost of community-funded events of \$1,639. The City Manager mentioned that the DeMar Marathon put a self-cap of \$5,000 on their request and that was maintained this year.

Ice and Snow Festival: Mark Rebillard, Chair, said the next Festival was being planned for February 6, 2024. Last year was the 20th anniversary and it included 12 ice carvers for what Mr. Rebillard thought was the first ice carving competition in the State of NH. Each participant was provided with a 600-pound block of ice. Some sculptures reached 7 feet tall, and they were all illuminated underneath during the evening. He said this event was a fun, free way for families to spend the day. Two fire pits would be placed downtown during the event and last year, children consumed 800 smores. Also, 5 gallons of maple syrup were used for the "sugar on snow" activity. Mr. Rebillard said the event would include many activities, with over 60 local businesses participating, from donations to contribute to the downtown-wide scavenger hunt. He recalled that the bitter cold this past year resulted in the City rallying to reschedule from a Saturday to a Sunday; unfortunately, some businesses were not open on Sunday. However, the participating businesses saw triple their normal weekend business. Mr. Rebillard said this event occurs in the darkest hours of winter after the holidays when the local retailers could use a boost. The event activities would be free, like the train ride and circus acts. He thanked the Council for their continued support.

Tree Lighting Event: Elizabeth Sayre represented the Keene Kiwanis Club, which was grateful for the City's continued support for this event. She said that for the last 3 years, the fire trucks delivering Santa became a large draw and the most successful part of the event. Ms. Sayre expressed further thanks to the City's Public Works Department, Fire Department, Police, and

other City Staff for helping to make this a successful event. She said 2022 was the largest event ever. They hoped for good weather again this year.

Keene Music Festival: Pablo Fleischman, Chair, said the event began in 2001 thanks to the City's help. Mr. Fleischman said it is an entirely volunteer-run event. He said they try to pay the people who really work. They also pay for Porta Potties and tents, etc. Most of those funds are raised locally from businesses and cash donations. He thanked the City for their support. He said they try to host a great event and hope for good weather.

Clarence DeMar Marathon: Alan Stroshine, a member of the Keene Rotary Club, was also the DeMar Marathon Director. He said he had made this request annually since 2012, when the Rotary Club took over the race, which began in 1978. He said he had not previously heard of a self-cap on the funding request. He stated that he approached that chart in the budget book. It helped him to recall that when he first applied for community event status in 2012, there was a line item provided but the City costs were more than that amount, marginally. Mr. Stroshine said he looked at what the Marathon cost last year and stated that their line item remained essentially flat at \$5,000 since 2012. However, he said the City services for the event cost \$14,000, every nickel of which he said was needed and earned; he said the Rotary Club was happy to pay for it. Mr. Stroshine said his relationship with the City was one he was most proud of, in addition to Keene State College and the Hospital, all of which helped to make this event a success. He did not know there was a self-cap and thought that could be considered for future budgets; the City Manager agreed that it was something to keep in mind for next year. He said the event was on track for 2023. They were making considerable efforts to bring the race back to pre-Covid levels (800–900 kids versus the 100 in 2022). He had started reaching out to school boards throughout Cheshire County to engage possible participants. He encouraged supporters to gather at the starting and finishing lines to experience the positive and uplifting energy. He said the City's investment in this event showed how much it meant to the community.

Chair Powers said it was certainly a worthwhile event and opportunity for so many people to get involved. Councilor Chadbourne agreed, noting that the Rotary Club gives back to a non-profit each year. Mr. Stroshine agreed, stating that 100% of the funds are for many things the Rotary Club does locally, from scholarships to kids' wellness programs. For example, they recently had a 3-week project delivering new sneakers to every 2nd grader in Cheshire County. The Rotary Club also has grant applications to fund non-profits throughout the area. They only pay vendors for food, tents, and City services. He added that this event drew participants from 40–45 states and a few international participants.

Pumpkin Festival: Vice Chair Remy represented Let it Shine. He said the Pumpkin Festival would be back in a larger form this fall, assuming all approvals. He noted that Let it Shine recently hosted the Gathering of the Gourds. He said the idea for the Pumpkin Festival this year was to return to closing the streets for a larger event. Last year, the limit on how many people could fit on the sidewalks became clear, so closing the roads would be important for safety reasons.

Keene Food Festival: Vice Chair Remy also represented this event planned for June 3, 2023. He said the organizers would be applying for the same event next year.

4 on the 4th Road Race: Chair Powers noted that the event's representative, Jan Manwaring, was not present. He said that Ms. Manwaring sent a note stating that the organizers would appreciate the support again this year. Chair Powers noted how that organization [Pathways for Keene] also raised a lot of money that helps to do good in the community.

The City Manager introduced the Capital Expenditure budget, noting that pages 48–49 were the easiest to follow. She mentioned that this would not be an easy part of the budget to explain. She said there were typically a handful of changes in the past, but she recalled that the costs of nearly everything had increased. As a result, projects had to be adjusted with more updated numbers. She said Staff had to move things around to make the bottom-line work, and she had to change some funding sources, including additional uses of fund balances, to get the bottom line to where it needed to be. She added that there was also the perimeter fence project for the Airport, which was not expected in this fiscal year, but it was moved up in the grants cycle and the grant would offset the expenditure.

Chair Powers referred to pages 46–47. He noted that under Capital Reserve Appropriations, there was the Emergency Communications Capital Reserve of \$60,000. He also referred to the Police Department budget, which listed mobile radio replacement of \$58,700. He asked what the City's differences were and the City Manager replied, "Not a lot." The City Manager continued explaining that in some cases, the City was putting in and then taking back out, and was unable to build much of a balance. Still, she said this account was established so Staff could do some advanced planning and hopefully get ahead at some point to not always need to pull from the capital reserves. She said [that] would be using the same account despite these changes. Chair Powers said he understood. The City Manager added that another large change in the CIP would be the Thompson Road project, which was reflected on page 49 under, "Debt for Thompson Road Stabilization" for just over \$1 million.

City Manager's Budget: Beginning on page 51, but with the information the Council would be most interested in on pages 55–56. She said that in her budget, some items changed where they were showing. The City Manager recalled a few years ago when Med Kopczynski transitioned to Economic Development Director and the emergency operations function had always been under this org (i.e., cost center). The City Manager explained that last year the org was moved when Rebecca Landry became Communications and Marketing Director. In this FY 24 budget, Staff was able to align this correctly in the budget document. The City Manager said that one of the great things about the new software was that Staff were also able to transfer expenses. In the past, a zero would be displayed in the previous year, but now Staff could track expenses and more easily compare "apples to apples." So, the City Manager said this year's budget reflected Ms. Landry's position being moved. The City Manager said there were no other supplemental requests in her budget. She mentioned that she had struggled with finding a way to engage the

public more in the prioritization of City projects, like the design of Robin Hood Park, for example. She noted that a large portion of the public does not usually come to meetings to provide feedback on projects. So, she said sometimes it could appear that there is a majority, whether positive or negative. The City Manager said this was a challenge to overcome to ensure the Council hears from a good representation of the public. She explored one community engagement tool called Zen City and another called Qualtrics. These are tools the City could use in a variety of ways to engage the public on projects and with experience surveys. For example, if someone interacted with the Police Department or Community Development Department, this would be a way to survey their satisfaction. Some of these tools were more expensive than others, so they would have to be prioritized. The City Manager hoped to have more information about these tools before the Council updates their goals in the next year. She also hoped to pilot test one/some of these tools over the next year.

Communications & Marketing: Rebecca Landry, Communications and Marketing Director/Assistant City Manager, was excited about her work for the upcoming year. She noted that this was her 26th year with the City. She recalled that last year, a team of one dozen City Staff worked on communications from the Public Works Department, HR, Police, Fire, and more. Over the last year, 73,000 emails were sent to residents and 33,972 of those emails were opened by the recipients. Almost half of the people were opening those emails compared to the 15% industry average, so this was a good success rate. While some people respond better to emails, others engage more with social media, and Ms. Landry said Staff were learning more about how social media behaviors could help people to better consume information. She added that other people engage more with the newspaper or advertisements in magazines. She said the City had the ability to understand all of that intelligence.

Ms. Landry continued, referring to the software tools the City Manager mentioned, noting how those tools could significantly increase the City's ability to understand the pulse of the community. She recalled the discussion of City meeting times earlier in this meeting and noted that no matter what time of day meetings are held, there would always be a portion of the community that could not come at that time. So, these tools could help the City to reach those people so they can contribute and advocate for how their tax dollars are spent. For example, the City was getting closer to understating the community's perspectives on the downtown and Winchester Street projects. While the downtown project got a lot of attention on social media, the top 2 posts with the most reach were the Rescue Inc transition from DiLuzio (51,000 people reached in a short period) and the post with information to get people inside and safe from the cold. Ms. Landry was encouraged that this community really cared about the services that matter to everyone. She was excited to learn more from year-to-year.

Ms. Landry continued reporting that the Communications Plan would be completed by the end of FY 23. Staff were still working with Guide Studio, which helped with the City's brand development. She said Guide Studio was rolling this project out slowly, which Ms. Landry said helped given that it was the City's first brand, and the Marketing Strategy would be officially documented soon. Ms. Landry recalled that there were numerous major events in the City during

the past year, both good and bad, from a plane crash at the Airport, to a death at a City facility, to the excellent Community Power program. There were also significant road construction projects. The City also experienced extremely cold and hot weather, with the City partnering with other agencies to help bring people inside and away from the elements; Ms. Landry said a lot of this would have been difficult to accomplish without relief funding.

Ms. Landry concluded by sharing that in the 30 days before this meeting, the City's social media reached 52,000 people. However, only approximately half of Keene's population uses social media, so the City still needed to find a way to reach the other 40–50% of the population. She mentioned that the City's email list had been very effective at reaching those 2,100 (and growing) people. She added that there was a very good open rate for those emails. Ms. Landry said that page 52 of the budget described her goals for the upcoming year. She thanked all the employees responsible for communications. One thing Ms. Landry hoped to improve over the coming year was recruitment. She said there had been a significant response to social media posts that the City "boosted" for \$25, which helped the posts to reach 5,000 more people. So, she thought those posts were a great way to advertise open City jobs and other information. Ms. Landry also mentioned what an asset the new AV Tech had been to communications and marketing.

City Attorney: The City Attorney, Tom Mullins, noted that his was one of the smallest budgets in the City. He said that things change a lot and there often is no control over the top of the line when dealing with personnel matters. The biggest change in his budget was that a full year had passed since the Assistant City Attorney, Amanda Palmiera, started. The City Attorney expressed his gratitude for her. The City Attorney said that his budget did include the Westlaw legal research platform for Ms. Palmiera to use; he appreciated that she was tech-savvy. For example, during an important meeting, Ms. Palmiera was able to quickly pull up an obscure case they wanted to reference.

City Clerk: Patty Little, the City Clerk, said that her budget (beginning on page 61) was level funded, but as the City Manager mentioned, it included a substantial supplemental request. She was grateful the City Manager supported that request for items needed to host the 2024 presidential primary; the date was yet unknown and would likely have short notice. The City Clerk was also appreciative that the City Manager approved funds to upgrade equipment in the records center and to acquire a right-to-know cloud application software, which appeared in the budget. The Clerk stated that she had 6 goals for the upcoming year and only 1 had a financial impact, which was due to the election. The rest of her goals were to focus Staff on several records series as she approached her retirement; this would include all of the permanent records series to ensure there are no gaps, which would take a lot of focus and scrutiny. The City Clerk said her Staff realized there were unexplainable gaps in the City Charter amendments—probably the Clerk's most important document—from before her tenure. She was working with the State archives to research their physical records and backfill some Charter amendments. At a time in the near future, after the budget meetings and downtown project, the City Clerk said she would bring those Charter amendments to the Ad Hoc Committee, which was this FOP Committee. She

added that the Civic Plus platform had a module dealing with board memberships and her Staff had been dealing with that process. She said there was another technology in place several years ago that was no longer usable, and her office had been struggling to find the next solution. Civic Plus had that solution. She said the intent is to populate the Civic application with 6 years of data for all the boards and commissions. The City Clerk said this would be helpful in targeting demographics, which was something Mayor Hansel was interested in when he became Mayor; identifying the demographics of board membership and targeting potential new classes of citizens to participate. She added that some of the Record Center's technology was dated and would be replaced as one of those supplemental items. The City Clerk was excited to start utilizing the right-to-know technology.

Assessing: Dan Langille, City Assessor, said that the Assessing functions essentially stayed the same year-to-year. For the third year, the budget decreased, largely because a couple of years ago the Department was reduced from 4 Staff to 3. He said that this change seemed to be working well. He added that the Department had 2 retirements over the past few years. Thus, 2 new Staff members had started at the lower scale and were doing excellently. Mr. Langille was optimistic about the future of the Department. He said the overall budget was \$12,000 less than last year.

Finance Department: The Finance Director invited members of her team to introduce the different parts of the Finance Department's budget, including Accounting, Revenue Collection, and Human Services. Rob Constable, Assistant Finance Director, began by reviewing the overall Finance Department budget. Mr. Constable said that as mentioned earlier, the Department's major objective had been implementing the new computer system—Munis—for the organization; there had been some challenges and Staff would continue learning more. He said the primary objective was to implement payroll. Mr. Constable explained that Staff was also working on using Munis and the current software (UB) for water and sewer [this didn't make sense to me...]; utility billing was expected to go live July 1. He said the Department had updated the data within Munis and they were doing some testing on the rates and meter sizes. They partnered with Neptune Technology Group to do live readings and import that data into Munis, so they were doing some parallel testing. Last year, the department also went live with tax and the general ledger.

Mr. Constable continued reviewing the Finance Department's budget. He began with changes to the Revenue Collection Division's budget, noting that they were getting some interest income projected for next year and he said it had been relatively flat. However, market rates had been increasing, so the Finance Staff did anticipate an increase in interest income. Mr. Constable touched on Finance Administration, noting that some items had changed due to personnel changes; those items were regrouped the with department head, supervisory, and a full-time/part-time grouping. For example, on page 84, wages for full-time administration had decreased but accounting had increased because of how some of the positions were categorized into different orgs. Overall, Mr. Constable said that the Finance Department's budget was relatively flat on the operating side, but there was a major change to payroll and associated expenditures.

Maria Castellano, the Finance Department's Revenue Collector, said her budget had changed minimally and the actual bottom line had decreased. Overall, there had been cost increases for paper, shipping, and mailing. Last year, her division mailed 55,000 items, so a postage increase of even \$0.01 would make a significant difference; she expected the postage rate to increase again in the coming year. She added that the cost of envelopes had increased dramatically, and the weight of envelopes was another costly matter. Ms. Castellano pointed out the supplemental item in her budget for required training this year. As a new Collector (there was a retirement), she was required to be certified in that position along with the new Deputy. Ms. Castellano pointed out another budget item for acquiring a new folding machine for billing notices that go out regularly. She said there was also a maintenance agreement. Everything else was similar in salary because retirement meant the replacement would start lower on the scale. She said they also requested an increase from the one part-time (22 hours/week) Staff to add another position at 28 hours/week (the latter position was vacant at this time). Adding the second position would allow the Staff to serve customers in a timelier manner with, for example, coverage during lunch hours.

Councilor Chadbourne asked how the option to pay taxes online impacted the Department. Ms. Castellano said that was a fabulous tool. She added that she was getting acquainted with this position and would be working to see if anything could be improved. Ms. Castellano also wanted to utilize the Communications Department for outreach to let customers know how easy that option was. However, she said that change could be challenging for the older population. She might create a document for the website to demonstrate how to use that tool. She offers to walk customers through the process over the phone. Ms. Castellano said the online payments reduce office tracking but there was still work to do on the back end as the payments are processed. She said there was usually no delay, but if customers register on the last day, it would take one day for that to reach Staff and then another day to go out in the mail; this was especially challenging if the payment was made on the weekend. She thought communication would solve a lot of those issues and increase the level of service the City could offer. Councilor Chadbourne thought this was a great, modern tool that aligned with how so many people pay their bills online today. Ms. Castellano added that the Munis software would be used to move the water system over in July when an automatic service option would be built into the program. She said this aligned with how so many customers have checks sent automatically from their accounts. She noted that customers had been inhibited from the online service a lot of times because there was a fee for using credit cards, whereas there was a flat \$1.50 fee for a check.

Vice Chair Remy asked whether the new program would allow for a change to paperless billing. Ms. Castellano said she would love that. She noted that paperless billing was available for motor vehicle bills. When customers come into the office, her goal was to have Staff capture phone numbers and email addresses. The Revenue Division had been mailing 9,000 motor vehicle letters per year, and approximately 2,000 of those came back to the office through the mail, but that did not mean customers were not bringing their letters into the office for renewal. Vice Chair Remy said he was speaking of water, sewer, and tax bills that he gets in the mail. With the new Munis program, Ms. Castellano thought that once Staff were comfortable with it and had worked

out any issues, she would be seriously exploring more paperless billing options because it would certainly relieve some mailing expenses and be more convenient for customers. Vice Chair Remy suggested exploring some other fee providers, noting that some do not charge for debit transactions and more people could be interested in using that. Ms. Castellano agreed that sometimes there is a minimal charge fee based on the amount of money processed, so once there is a single processor there could be better options in the future.

Yves Gakunde, Purchasing and Contract Services Manager, referred to the bottom of page 84, which reflected a \$2,500 request due to increased paper costs, not just for the Finance Department, but throughout City Hall. The cost had increased from \$40 per case to \$60.

Natalie Darcy, Human Services Manager, explained that the Human Services Division provides short-term emergency and financial assistance with housing, electricity, cremation, home heating fuel, and prescription life-threatening medications. The Human Services Staff instills an empathetic and empowering approach to providing assistance to those in need, who are met in the most beneficial and cost-effective manner possible. The confidentiality of all applicants is respected through fair and uniform application of the law and City Council-approved guidelines while providing support and direction in the necessary life skills. With the Covid emergency declaration ending, the NH Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) funding ended for most of their programs. Many clients were referred back to Human Services to assist clients—mainly families—who were in hotels with ERAP funding through the end of June. At that point, any Keene resident would become the City's responsibility. Ms. Darcy hoped there would be some other funding once ERAP concludes.

Ms. Darcy continued explaining that at this point, Human Services had additional homeless individuals and families requesting assistance who were placed in hotels. At one point during the past year, there were 10 individual family rooms for hotel assistance because there was no space at the local shelters. Homeless assistance was at an all-time high, with individuals and families coming to Human Services almost daily for assistance with rent or utilities; assistance had increased sharply. Ms. Darcy noted that Human Services had been successful in preventing numerous evictions, but the high cost of rent had forced those who could not afford the increase to request assistance. She said that without the City to supplement the cost, there was a very real danger that families who did not receive rental subsidies could find themselves homeless due to the higher rents. For example, one client reported that their friend's rent increased by \$400, and then 4 months later, the landlord sold the building, and the new owner increased the rent by another \$600. Most clients in this situation were on fixed incomes and could not afford those sharp increases.

Ms. Darcy noted that Human Services was seeing many clients, exceeding pre-Covid numbers. Electricity disconnections had increased sharply as well with the sunsetting of ERAP. Many clients did not know that the Community Action Partnership (CAP) agencies had stopped paying their electric bills, which were staggering at anywhere between \$500–\$7,500. Human Services helps to pay a fraction of those costs to get service restored, but the clients were still left with

very high bills. Ms. Darcy said there had also been an increase in the amount of heating fuel needed throughout the season. During the past year, clients tended to get less fuel assistance, and Human Services had to supplement at the beginning and end of the season before fuel assistance took effect.

Human Services continued to provide case management, participate in the homeless coalition, and engage with other groups to support the homeless in a “wraparound” fashion. Ms. Darcy added that she had been working with the Hospital and the Cheshire County House of Corrections to find solutions for those being placed on the streets of Keene following discharge from those facilities. Human Services continued to collaborate with local community partners to provide services. This year, Southwest Community Services requested an increase in their funding for the homeless shelter from \$50,000 to \$75,000 for the housing stabilization shelter programs; they had not requested an increase in 10 years. Ms. Darcy also mentioned that Human Services was adding a contract outreach worker to collaborate with the homeless shelter in the field and meet people where they are. Human Services also continued to coordinate the holiday sponsorship program that assisted approximately 280 individuals annually. Human Services was using the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to track those individuals in hotels, which allowed them to go to the top of the area housing waitlist. Ms. Darcy concluded by noting that she worked on the Ethics Resolution with the NH Local Welfare Administrators Association. She also worked with the City Manager on Senate Bill 110, relative to the administration of emergency shelter programs by cities and towns.

Vice Chair Remy asked if Monadnock Family Services (MFS) no longer had the role of Homeless Outreach Coordinator. Ms. Darcy said MFS lost partial funding for that role.

Human Resources (HR): Beth Fox, HR Director/Assistant City Manager, said that Human Resources had been working hard with its partners this past year on the payroll implementation project. She thought they had a strong role on the front end in designing the job classes and things that build the backbone of payroll. HR Staff engaged with the Finance Department for the accounting components. Ms. Fox was optimistic about moving forward toward implementing the new system on July 1. She was also looking forward to the next steps for HR and the new software program, which would build out the Human Capital Management Database. The focus had really been on building out the components needed at the front end to ensure that payroll would function effectively and accurately. So, Staff would be moving on to the recruitment, performance management, and other tools that this application should give the Department. Ms. Fox said this transaction allowed the Department to change some work from the organization and create a structure where the data was set up to verify transactions related to employee actions. This actually shifted some new responsibilities to HR. She thought this would be a primary component of maintaining systems integrity.

Ms. Fox continued explaining that the largest change to the HR budget this year was a personnel adjustment to shift a part-time role to full-time. This position would focus on the financial aspects of HR, including bill reconciliations for health insurance, which she called a \$4.5 million

adventure for the Department and a constantly moving target; the role would also focus on some aspects of secession planning. This position adjustment was the most substantial change to the HR budget this year. Ms. Fox was fairly certain that over the next 2 years, HR would be primarily staffed with employees with less than 5 years of experience with the City. For example, a 20-year employee was leaving but Ms. Fox was working to manage the change to mitigate any impact on the organization. The biggest increase in the HR budget was to those personnel lines. There was also a small adjustment to the HR operating budget that was focused on training to integrate 2 expected personnel additions in the coming year on the government aspects of their duties.

Ms. Fox also explained that the new budget reorganized some activities and there was no longer a large allocation in City-wide benefits related to COLA adjustments, which were redistributed to the department level. So, instead of having a pool of money sitting in the City-wide benefits, those were distributed. Some other costs related to part-time health insurance were very easy to distribute to the department level with the new software, more accurately reflecting those activities. Ms. Fox said the second part of City-wide benefits was non-personnel, for which there were a few supplemental requests: 1) an addition to professional services to hire someone to work with a City Staff Committee and City departments on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), as well as workplace culture; 2) training across City-wide departments focused on leadership and continuing to use e-learning platforms, which had been successful across the organization; 3) additional funding for tuition assistance. Ms. Fox explained that during the last post-pandemic year, tuition assistance requests from City employees were very low; 9 employees submitted requests for various certifications and degree programs. Those requests were not fully funded. She said the City had assisted with tuition for employees at a 5-course level for the upcoming year.

Information Technology (IT): Andrew Mueller, IT Director, said it had been a busy year for the Department. He mentioned a replacement project for 270 phones. There was networking infrastructure related to the phones that were replaced. With the help of the Public Works Department, Martel Court was brought back online, meaning fiber and networking equipment were brought to that facility for easier accessibility and flexibility. IT was also involved with the transition to Munis. He said security upgrades and the security software the City uses were a daily struggle. Another big change for IT was the transition to Microsoft 365; all Councilors should have learned about this change and the new way to log in. This change was a part of the first year of a multi-year project. Mr. Mueller said those were just a few of the 32 projects IT worked on during the past year.

Mr. Mueller continued by referring to page 94 of the budget on personnel, noting that the Assistant IT Director position was moved to the City's Manager's budget, which helped the IT bottom line. The IT operations budget reflected software licensing that increases in price yearly. Cybersecurity remained the IT Departments' highest priority, including detection, prevention, and education; this includes environment user testing. This year, the IT Department was in year 2 of some of those multi-year contracts for a lot of software, so that cost was lower in the budget.

Still, those licenses would have to be renewed eventually. Mr. Mueller noted that the sunsetting of the old financial software (Pentamation) cut that cost in half, helping the operating budget. He pointed out that under the cloud applications section of the budget, the new financial software (Munis) was listed in addition to the budget for Microsoft 365.

Mr. Mueller continued referring to the PC replacement section on page 174. In the coming year, IT would be replacing 63 PC systems, which would keep the Department busy. It was fortunate that those hardware costs had stabilized, and procurement was easier. Network devices were still difficult access points and switches still had a 6-month lead time, making them hard to plan for. The replacement of PCs and laptops was taking 4–6 weeks, making it easier to buy them and get the best deals for the right technology. Finally, Mr. Mueller explained that IT would maintain the 4-year replacement schedule for laptops and tablets, helping with the replacement account balance.

10) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 8:58 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katrnya Kibler, Minute Taker

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