

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HERITAGE COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 14, 2023

4:30 PM

**2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Cauley Powell, Chair
Molly Ellis, Vice Chair
Susan DeGidio (remote)
Rose Carey
Marilyn Huston
Brian Lee
Louise Zerba

Staff Present:

Evan Clements, Planner
Will Schoefmann, GIS Technician

Members Not Present:

Councilor Gladys Johnsen
Erin Benik

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Powell called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM and took the roll.

2) Approval of March 8, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Ms. Huston made a motion to accept the minutes of the March 8, 2023 meeting as presented. Mr. Lee seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Zerba noted that it she gave the Historical Society of Cheshire County the video discussed during the meeting, and Mr. Clements noted that the Historical Society did not need any paperwork from the City.

3) 2022 CLG – Recovering Black History in Keene Project

Jenna Carroll, director of education at the Historical Society, and Kabria Baumgartner, associate professor of history and Africana studies and co-director of the public history program at Northeastern University, introduced themselves and presented a summary of the history, status, and future of the project to Commission.

Ms. Carroll stated the Historical Society has been working on the county-wide Recovering Black History project on and off for two years. She wants to know how the Historical Society can be a resource for Ms. Baumgartner and the Commission to get this project moving forward.

Ms. Baumgartner expressed excitement about working on the innovative project. Recovering the lived experiences of African Americans in New England is the focus of her work. She enjoyed presentations from Ms. Carroll and community archivists about their research thus far. She sees her role as helping Ms. Carroll and her team examine the impressive amount of information already collected and contextualize it. Her focus is on nineteenth century Keene. Her team includes three students in the public history program, two graduate and one undergraduate.

Mr. Clements distributed with the meeting agenda an overview of the project prepared by Ms. Baumgartner. The overview outlines three project phases. The first phase is data and location familiarization, during which the team will review the Historical Society's research, learn about the relevant history of the region, and identify additional sources and records to explore. In phase two, the team will perform on-site and digital archival research over about four months. The third phase is historical interpretation and contextualization. She would like to complete the project deliverables in March 2024, including a written narrative report, a presentation contextualizing the information about nineteenth-century Keene, and new archival research, all of which will remain available to Ms. Carroll, her team, and the Commission.

After that, next steps might include installing marker signs or giving walking tours as public history initiatives. She is enjoying working with the Historical Society and the Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire, which is currently implementing a historical marker program focused on the coast. There are some great candidates for markers in Keene. The Trail might want to help with the effort.

Ms. Huston asked if the project will include surrounding towns or just Keene itself, noting there are two African-American Revolutionary War patriots in Richmond with markers but not much information. Ms. Carroll responded that 23 towns are included in the Historical Society's project – Wendy O'Brien is researching Richmond – but this project is focused on Keene. It could act as a template for other towns. Chair Powell also noted the CLG grant restricts work to Keene.

Chair Powell expressed excitement about the project kickoff. She asked if the Commission could do anything to support the project, such as getting research training and giving volunteer time. Mr. Clements noted that the City will be donating staff time as part of the grant requirements. There will be a lot of resources for the project between volunteers and staff. Ms. Carroll asked Ms. Baumgartner about the best way to use the Commission. She asked about doing a sweep of resources out there that have not been tapped into yet. She asked about doing legwork to help with the team's in-person visit. She noted her team relied heavily on online resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Baumgartner expressed appreciation for the help.

Ms. Baumgartner notes her team has identified online census and newspaper records, and they are still familiarizing themselves with information the archivists already collected. Students will look at Cheshire County deeds and property records, as well as directories and probate and naturalization records. They may review early church records on-site. She said the team may look at petitions at the county or city level, noting, for example, that in Massachusetts, her team found records of black residents petitioning for something, and they were very informative. The team will look at archival collections in the Boston area, at the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Boston Athenaeum, and the Philips Library. Specifically, there is a diary at the Massachusetts Historical Society about Keene in the early- to mid-nineteenth century. The team has several leads but welcome suggestions. It would also be helpful for the team to know if a resource was already reviewed found not to be fruitful.

Ms. Carroll said that her team did review census records, but it might be worth reviewing them again. She said she would check on early church records, and she isn't sure if they are stored locally or not. Her team has not looked at probate and deed records. Her team looked at early records, including petitions, from other towns, but not from Keene. The other towns' records are scanned to FamilySearch but are not searchable. She has asked the City Clerk's Office about Keene's records. There may also be "warning out" records, documents related to "undesirable" families being given two weeks to leave town. Mr. Schoefmann offered to help schedule access to those records.

Chair Powell wondered if there are any female aid societies with relevant records. She also suggested Black residents who have lived in the area for a long time might have oral histories to offer. Ms. Carroll wondered if mapping histories out would be worthwhile. Mr. Schoefmann said they could discuss this separately. Ms. Huston asked about doing genealogy research for some Black residents. Chair Powell agreed to doing so, as long as there is no pressure on anyone to participate. This could also result in additional names being identified.

Ms. Baumgartner noted that genealogy is an interest of hers. Her team will look at various databases that researchers use, as well as Ancestry.com and FamilySearch. It would be wonderful to consider descendant communities. Ms. Carroll reported that there are around 1,500 entries total and around 270 entries for Keene resources in her team's spreadsheet for the project. There are also reports on specific people who have been researched. There is community archivist work available. She suggested connecting with current homeowners of homes in which the team identified a Black person had lived. For example, her team identified and located a butler for a family who lived in a particular house in Roxbury and then moved to California, and he donated the letters he wrote during that period to the Historical Society.

Chair Powell asked if they should try to build public awareness now or later. Ms. Carroll responded that it is always helpful to report out the status of a project. There is a lot of interest in this project. She also noted that there is a shell of a website waiting for content, which she hopes to add with the help of New Hampshire News Collaborative journalism students. It is great that Keene is taking a lead on this. Mr. Clements told the Commission that the project caught the City

Manager's attention, and she asked him to submit a story about it for the monthly newsletter. He will also work with Rebecca Landry, Communications Director, on coordinating a social media presence. Asah Cramer, A/V coordinator, can also create media for the project. There is also the Commission's website.

Ms. Huston asked if members could talk to Ms. Carroll and her team at the Historical Society about the project. Ms. Carroll said yes, the team loves talking about its work.

Chair Powell thanked Ms. Baumgartner and Ms. Carroll, noting the Commission would be in touch.

4) **Downtown Infrastructure Project Update**

Mr. Schoefmann reported on the status of the project. There was a discussion in the morning about bike lanes. Major component changes are still under discussion, such as whether there should be a park instead of a rotary, whether there should be more pedestrian-friendly areas or more sidewalks, whether the roundabout should be moved or the intersection re-signalized, and whether there should be bike lanes. He believes the MSFI Committee's recent recommendation did not include bike lanes or a park but did include a signalized intersection. The issue will go to the City Council on July 6, and no one can say what will happen.

In response to a question from Chair Powell, Mr. Clements stated the original timeline called for the City to be in the construction phase by now. He thinks they are about six months to a year behind schedule.

The grants the City applies for will depend on the final design, since various grants have various criteria. Mr. Clements stated the City has about half the money for the project secured and needs to raise the other half. He said the different design proposals cost within about \$700,000 of each other; the budget for the entire project is around \$14 million. In response to Chair Powell's question, Mr. Schoefmann said that most grants prioritize multimodal, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure improvements. For example, the City applied for a \$1.1 million Rebuilding American Infrastructure and Sustainability and Equity Grant in February. Most of the available funds do not focus on preservation.

Ms. Huston asked how much of the budget would go toward consultants. Mr. Clements wasn't sure but thought it was a very modest amount, maybe around \$300,000. About \$8.8 million is going toward utilities. About \$1.2-\$1.7 million is going toward streetscaping, landscaping, and lighting. About \$1.5-\$1.6 million is going toward roads and sidewalks. If included per the MSFI Committee's recommendation, raised pedestrian crossings would cost about \$250,000. About \$300,000 is going toward construction administration. About \$450,000-\$500,000 is allocated for contingencies. All the information about the project, including the costs, is available online. The majority of the costs will be for the underground work that is not seen.

Chair Powell reminded the Commission that its role in the project, if any, is related to cultural and historic preservation. Mr. Clements distributed a revised draft letter to the City Council about the project for review. Ms. Zerba asked where they stand on the north end of the square. Mr. Schoefmann responded that everything is on the table, regardless of the MSFI Committee's recommendation. Ideally, the letter should go out by July 1. Ms. Huston said the letter made its points well.

Chair Powell advised that the next step would be for the Commission to make a motion to approve the letter and send it to the Council. Then she would file the letter with the City Clerk for presentation to the Council. Most likely, the letter would just be advisory, but the Council could invite her to speak at a meeting.

Chair Powell asked about calling out Jeananna [Farrar] by name in the letter. Ms. Huston noted her name is spelled, "Jeananna," not "Jeananne," as spelled in the letter. Chair Powell said she would correct it.

Chair Powell made a motion to send the letter, as corrected for spelling, to the City Council in hopes the Council will take the Commission's thoughts into consideration in its deliberations. Vice Chair Ellis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

5) **2021 CLG – Italian Neighborhood Heritage Project**

Mr. Schoefmann gave the Commission an update on the project.

The next step for the consultant is to create the framework for the StoryMap. The StoryMap website will integrate video clips, historical scans, and photos, tying them to specific locations on a map.

The challenge is matching the stories they've heard to specific locations. Mr. Schoefmann needs to listen to the narratives again, log any names identified, and determine whether each name relates to a specific location, and if not, where the narrative should go on the map. Chair Powell asked whether a subcommittee should be formed. He responded that he could use help from whoever knows Keene geography best. He said Jim Sterling might be a good resource, too. Chair Powell responded that the more community involvement in the project, the better. She noted Mr. Sterling is from the same generation as Tim Carbone.

Ms. Zerba relayed that she heard that people at a recent Historical Society event said they have a story that is not included in the project, and she believes there may be more stories out there. Chair Powell mentioned a lot of people have oral traditions, so having to submit stories via a website might be a barrier for them. Some people might have stories to tell in person.

The Commission has two-and-a-half months, or until September, to wrap up the project. She asked Mr. Lee if he could cut some more videos. Members could be assigned to review and locate on a map the new material. Mr. Schoefmann suggested starting with the most interesting

stories first. What he needs to know is where they should go on a map. Chair Powell has all the transcripts and videos; they are long. Brian cut more clips than they actually used at the event; she believes they used around seven of the 14 he cut. The clips used were chosen for the particular event, not for the StoryMap. She does not want to disappoint anyone who shared their stories, but some don't fit with the project. While it should be the community's project, there are limits. Chair Powell said she will identify clips for Mr. Lee to cut by the end of the month. Mr. Schoefmann said it would be ideal to get a family name and location on a modern map, but he has some older maps to reference. He also has a USB drive with information from Vice Chair Ellis and Ms. Carey.

They scanned photos of homes, many in the neighborhood, from the library event, which will require visual matching to determine their location. Vice Chair Ellis and Ms. Carey started putting together a map with names and homes based on directories at the Historical Society. It was tedious. Having names would be helpful. Maybe the names and places from the transcripts could be used. The Commission could also return to the Italian Society for clarification or other help.

Mr. Schoefmann asked who would be geolocating what. He suggested having another session to sort of "storyboard" it out, and then he could piece everything together. He would appreciate any guidance. Chair Powell suggesting the Commission decide what content to include with the StoryMap, so Mr. Schoefmann doesn't do unnecessary work. She asked if Ms. Ellis and Ms. Carey would pick through the scans. Maybe they could work with the Italian Society to determine who lived where on a map. Mr. Schoefmann can print out a large map for the Italian Society folks to write in people's names and the years they lived at a particular address. All the photos already have addresses.

6) New Business

Ms. DeGidio reported that Bob sent her a demolition request in April, which she approved. It was a nondescript 1950s era house on the corner of Water Street and Carpenter Street. The City will demolish it. A skate park with some plantings will be built there. It sounds nice.

Ms. Carey announced the Preservation Alliance is hosting several workshops this summer that may be worthwhile to attend, but most are not in the area.

Mr. Clements reminded the Commission that the City is transitioning from Zoom to Teams for meetings, which may affect Ms. DeGidio most. He suggested she check out Teams and ask for any help she might need. Teams is free and does not require a download. It can be accessed via a web browser.

Mr. Schoefmann alerted the Commission that at some point in the future, input from the Commission may be needed for the Transportation Heritage Trail going from Easter Avenue to the old stone arch bridge and beyond, where the new bridge is going in. He is monitoring the situation. Early on, Engineering asked the State if the coping stones over the bridge needed to be replaced, which would be very expensive, or if safety railings could be installed instead. The State approved the installation of safety railings. That is phase 3. Phase 1 is developing the trail

at Eastern Avenue to the abutment. Phase 2 is repurposing the NHDOT bridge to fill the gap over 101. Phase 4 is looking at the state of the Island Street bridge over the Swanzey factory. Portions of the Londonderry bridge may be repurposed. There are some renderings on a StoryMap site. He will send out a link. He will have more information at the Commission's next meeting.

7) **Next Meeting – August 9, 2023**

Chair Powell noted she could not make the July 12, 2023 meeting. She asked if others wanted to meet anyway. Ms. Carey cannot make the meeting, either. Mr. Schoefmann indicated he doesn't need the Commission to meet then. The Commission agreed to cancel the July 12, 2023 meeting and hold the next meeting on August 9, 2023.

8) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Powell adjourned the meeting at 5:42 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Wendy Chen, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Evan J. Clements, AICP - Planner