

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, October 11, 2023

6:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Mitchell H. Greenwald, Chair
Randy L. Filiault, Vice Chair
Robert C. Williams
Catherine I. Workman

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager
Thomas Mullins, City Attorney
Amanda Palmeira, Assistant City Attorney

Members Not Present:

Kris E. Roberts

Chair Greenwald called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and explained the procedures of the meeting.

- 1) **Safety Concerns on the Eastside of Keene**
 - a. **Hilary Seifer/American House - Safety Concerns on the Eastside of Keene**
 - b. **Robert Hamm - Safety Concerns on the Eastside of Keene and the Need for Increased Police Presence**
 - c. **Vicky Morton - Safety Concerns on the Eastside of Keene and the Need for Increased Police Presence**
 - d. **Krishni and Ed Pahl - Safety Concerns East Keene**
 - e. **Councilor Filiault - Homelessness in Keene**

Chair Greenwald stated that the only item on the agenda tonight is the safety concerns on the east side of Keene. He continued that there are four public communications and each person who sent the City Council a letter will be invited to speak. He explained the meeting process and the procedures for public participation.

Chair Greenwald stated that he wants to share some personal observations first. He continued that this evening, they will not end homelessness, drug abuse, or criminal activity. It is not possible to return to the Keene as some think it was in 1960. The Hundred Nights shelter is a reality. It might make some changes, but it is not leaving. The Hundred Nights shelter is not solely responsible for the problems they are discussing tonight. Homeless individuals are not going to go away. No one wants to be homeless. Homeless residents are people and deserve to be treated with respect. Everyone needs to come together and develop plans to assure that all residents feel and are safe in their neighborhoods.

Chair Greenwald continued that this evening, City staff will take notes and create a report back, which he expects will be ready by the November MSFI Committee meeting. They might be able to implement some actions immediately, while others will require planning and funding.

Chair Greenwald asked to hear from Hilary Seifer.

Hilary Seifer of Beech St. stated that she is the Executive Director of American House on Water St. She continued that she submitted a letter after reaching out to the Councilor in her ward to ask how to best bring east Keene safety concerns to the City Council's attention. Over three to four weeks there were several incidents. Her car was broken into, and checks were stolen from her. American House had several disruptions on the property, including a violent incident with someone who was looking for help attempting to gain access to the building. It was scary for the residents. As a homeowner in the neighborhood, she too was noticing a difference and was pleased to see others had submitted letters as well. Since then, east Keene residents have had a lot of conversation. She has not been able to attend the (neighborhood) meetings, but it has all been positive. She thinks everyone is on the same page as Chair Greenwald, knowing they will not solve anything immediately tonight and that they all need to work together to find manageable solutions that make a difference so they can maintain homeowners' and business owners' safety in the neighborhood.

Ms. Seifer continued that the City of Keene and the Keene Police Department (KPD) have been "nothing but wonderful" to work with. She and her neighbors have seen (staff) remove shrubbery along the bike path and clean up the river, and they are now seeing KPD foot patrols on the bike path every morning. She personally spoke with Lt. Nugent, who was supportive. She appreciates that and is happy to see that things are moving in this direction, and hopes it continues. Her biggest ask is how the neighborhood can come together to ensure that safety continues, and for the brand-new Pat T. Russell Park to stay clean and safe. The number of needles already found along the property lines and at the park concerns her. She would like to see a sidewalk with lights and a speed bump on Water St., where there are many speeding cars and traffic is expected to increase due to the new park(s).

Ms. Seifer continued that American House residents have toured Hundred Nights, are in full support of Hundred Nights, and are interested in working different programs with them. Many wise people with a lot of knowledge have been with us a long time, have many ideas, and have seen the city go through various changes. Her door and American House's doors "are wide open." She looks forward to hearing other people's ideas, and hearing how the Council can help. She is open to feedback and hopes they can problem solve together.

Chair Greenwald asked to hear from Robert Hamm.

Robert Hamm of 89 Valley St. stated that he and his family have enjoyed living on the east side of Keene for over 22 years. He continued that he has enjoyed, continues to enjoy, and expects to

be able to continue to enjoy the neighborhood. His letter was prompted by conversation and incidents he and others were seeing in the neighborhood, which raised concern in ways he thought were useful. It is useful to join together to begin addressing the issues causing concern. He appreciates Chair Greenwald's introductory remarks, which speak to the need to be in conversation as a neighborhood and as a city, to address the issues. Some are infrastructure issues, and some are staffing issues. He fully supports the shrubbery-clearing work the Parks, Recreation, and Facilities (PRF) Department did, which increased the sightlines. He is concerned about the many sidewalks in east Keene that are unsafe for people who are elderly or have mobility issues. An example is the undulating, cracked, and broken sidewalks on the south side of Roxbury St. He is concerned about what is happening to properties on the west end of Church St. He is not sure what Code Enforcement is doing. Homeowners and landlords in that part of Keene need to be good citizens. We need to be diligent about keeping each other working toward a better, safer community.

Mr. Hamm continued that he has "nothing but praise" for the response of City services (such as the) Fire Department, and he particularly appreciates the nuanced approaches that the Fire Chief takes to help the community, and the way in which he addresses response to drug overdoses. It seems to him that homelessness is a state issue. (Keene) bears the brunt of it in many ways. Homeless people are people who have mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and children. Some of those children are in (Keene) schools, and people should be careful not to vilify people who do not have adequate housing, in a state where housing has become so expensive. He thanks the City and Council for all that they do and looks forward to being a part of a conversation that looks for communitarian answers. He looks forward to folks talking with and listening to each other, in ways that are kind and civil, working to find solutions that help everyone.

Chair Greenwald asked to hear from Vicky Morton.

Vicky Morton of 275 Water St. stated that she will read part of her letter:

"We have an increase in automobile break-ins, automobile thefts, assaults, stabbings, and overdoses. Other residents have complained about finding human feces on the bike path, used needles on the sidewalk and streets, and aggressive individuals on the bike path. Floral displays have been stolen from our front porch, along with garden statues and a rock display. I found one of our granite posts partially out of the garden as if someone was coming back later to steal that one as well. Residents on Victoria St. have a go-cart, golf cart, and dirt bike, none of which display registration plates, that they ride around the neighborhood and for trips back and forth to Cumberland Farms. Earlier this week, two cars aligned at the stop sign at Valley St. and drag raced across Water St. and down Victoria St. A cable installation company parks their bucket trucks towing cable spool dollies in the north bound lane, effectively hindering the flow of traffic."

Ms. Morton continued that she understands the City has nine open, unfilled police officer positions. She was informed tonight that now it is ten. She has spoken with a couple Councilors

about utilizing those payroll funds to create a supplementary auxiliary force to support the existing force. This auxiliary force could answer the calls that are less of a priority to leave officers available for more serious, high priority calls. She is thankful that there are only ten unfilled positions, and not the complete force. She hopes they can find ways to support the Fire and Police personnel. She has had many positive interactions with them and she appreciates how difficult their daily shifts can be.

Ms. Morton continued that since she wrote her letter, she has been attending neighborhood meetings and talking with personnel from the PRF, Public Works, Fire, and Police Departments, and has gotten a different perspective on some pieces. One person asked her, "Why do you feel unsafe in your neighborhood?" (Her answer is that) at about 5:30 AM, a man in stocking feet was trying to get into her house. He was on the porch banging on the door, attempting to push it open. Her son came over and enticed the man to walk away. He walked down Water St. where the police officers were able to secure him. A police officer came to her house and asked to look around, and in her driveway, found the man's shoes and a pile of vomit. Later when the sun came up, she and her family found the man's backpack and hat across the street on a neighbor's doorstep. It is scary and unnerving when someone is banging on your door and trying to get in, and there are not many resources (other than) calling the police, who will come when they can. The police came and the officers were helpful and respectful. However, when the man was banging on her door and she told him, "The police are coming, go away," he did not go away, which contributes to her and her family's sense of lack of safety in the neighborhood.

Ms. Morton continued that Jim Craiglow, former president of Antioch University of New England and chancellor of Antioch University, had an open-door policy, allowing people to come vent to him as much as they wanted to. However, before you walked out his door, you had to have some possible solutions to whatever you were venting about. Thus, in honor of Mr. Craiglow, she wants to offer some possible action steps. She will leave written copies here. She thinks City staff, particularly in the Parks, Recreation and Facilities Department and Public Works Departments, do a very good job with what they have and what they face on a daily basis. These people with the boots on the ground, she believes, have solutions to many of the problems or can at least provide feedback about them. She believes there is a need for a safe, anonymous, confidential mechanism where these personnel can provide suggestions, feedback, and proposed solutions. If Keene does not want human waste on the sidewalks, the City needs to provide public bathrooms. An ideal time to do that would be when they are digging up the downtown. The park has bathrooms but they are locked, which does not help. If people have pride in their homes, they act outside their homes in that way.

Chair Greenwald asked to hear from Krishni and/or Ed Pahl.

Krishni Pahl of 84 Valley St. stated that her main concern is safety. She continued that her 86-year-old mother-in-law lives with her and her family, and when she (Ms. Pahl) goes to work, she is afraid of any issues like what (Ms. Morton and Ms. Seifer) were talking about happening to her mother-in-law. Her second concern is the image of east Keene. She has firsthand knowledge

of realtors not wanting outsiders to move to Keene, and her friends, property owners in east Keene, want to live there. It is where they live, and they take a lot of pride in it, and want the City to help them be safe and project a better image of east Keene. She does not think this is happening. She flagged down a State representative who was driving down Valley St., here visiting the day Hundred Nights opened. She went over some of the issues with him, and his response was, "*Why are you surprised? The City has always treated east Keene like a second class citizen.*" That must change. The east Keene residents want to be there and take pride in their homes. They want to be safe, and they need the City's help with that. They are property owners and pay property taxes, and pay for water and sewer, and most of them volunteer at Hundred Nights or the Community Kitchen. They want the same respect that the rest of Keene gets.

Ms. Pahl continued that she is glad to see the Pat Russell Park, and is glad the skate park is coming. There are nice things coming into the neighborhood, and now, the east Keene residents want the City to help maintain that. Some tenants on Church St. have landlords who need to be held accountable. The sidewalks are in bad shape. Mr. Hamm is right about the Roxbury St. sidewalk; she tried to run on it, was unable to, and wound up running in the street. It is unsafe. Landlords need to be held accountable, because tenants are afraid to speak up, given the high rent prices and fear of eviction. It is up to the City to hold these landlords, who may live out of state, accountable. That will change the image of east Keene.

Ms. Pahl continued that in conclusion, she and her neighbors want east Keene to be safe, look respectable, and be respected. She thanks the Councilors, Fire Chief, and Mayor for coming to east Keene's community forums and for listening to the residents.

Chair Greenwald asked Councilor Filiault to address his letter to the Council.

Councilor Filiault stated that he called a homeless advocate in Keene and asked if he wanted to get coffee together to talk about the reports Councilor Filiault was hearing about the vast amount of homelessness and tent cities in various parts of Keene. He continued that the homeless advocate said no, he would not have coffee with him, but if he (Councilor Filiault) had some hiking boots, he would take him for a walk. As a lifelong resident of Keene, he is not naïve and knows what is going on, but when he walked in the area behind Hannaford, he was flabbergasted by the number of homeless camps. It was "like a subdivision," one after the other, some abandoned, some active.

Councilor Filiault continued that two other things caught his attention – the amount of used needles spread everywhere, too many to photograph, and the amount of trash. He does not mean the type of trash that could go in a trash barrel, and it is not enough to bring out some trash bags. Trash bags that advocates had brought out were still in their boxes on top of the trash. He is talking about acres of trash. He will repost his photos for people to see. A couple photos had trash as far as the eye could see, and it felt like being at the landfill. With the sun shining, you can see the glistening of the needles among the trash. Wearing the hiking boots was necessary in

case he stepped on a needle, which he did. This trash is not something that well-meaning neighbors could scoop up after they have put on some gloves. This is a “hazmat” site requiring not barrels, not dumpsters, but probably four or five of the trucks that dumpsters are emptied into. This trash is hazardous, due to the needles and human waste, and is not for volunteers to clean up. This is on private property; the City cannot just go there without being asked. The City was asked to go on this property before and took some heat, because (some people said) it was as if the City was “moving people off for no reason.” Anyone who saw these sites would understand why the City and the property owners acted. Anyone who is out there camping is out there illegally, but there is only so much the City can do. There are multiple other sites like this in the city. The one behind Kohl’s has become active again. Someone sent him photos today of a site in the woods at Robin Hood Park. Other sites are along the bike trail heading toward Water St., and toward Beaver Brook Falls. They are everywhere, and they are a problem. There are different levels of homelessness, which he is sure they will get into. He is not criticizing anyone who is out there. As he has said, no one grows up thinking, “I want to be homeless and live in a tent in the woods.” However, many people *are* homeless and living in a tent in the woods, and injecting drugs with needles, because the needles are everywhere, which is also a problem. He does not want people walking in the woods to step on needles.

Councilor Filiault continued that there is more he could say, but that is the gist of his letter. He looks forward to hearing everyone else’s comments.

City Manager Elizabeth Dragon stated that she wants to talk about the work the City has been doing regarding homelessness over the last couple of years. She continued that homelessness is a complex issue that will not be resolved by one organization or one community alone. It will take all of us working together. As a City, Keene is often left dealing with the symptoms of this much bigger problem. Crime in neighborhoods, trash, and needles are symptoms of the larger issues related to homelessness. To make meaningful change, they need to engage their regional partners and the State, because a lot of this is beyond the City, and they have worked hard to try to do that. The ad hoc Housing Stability Committee worked for a year last year, and the report came out in December 2022. At the same time, staff undertook a Housing Needs Analysis for the city, which included a housing inventory, review of market conditions, and an evaluation of vulnerable, existing housing stock and neighborhoods. They also made several zoning changes, such as densification in the downtown, smaller lot sizes in the Rural District, and Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in all zones on both attached and detached structures. All of these are important parts of the puzzle. The City is currently undertaking an effort to create an on-street parking program. Parking is often a barrier to more housing opportunities.

The City Manager continued that the membership of the Housing Stability Committee includes a diverse group of stakeholders, and there was a lot of participation from local non-profits, churches, and members of the public including homeless representatives. The report is comprehensive and found on the City’s website by searching “housing stability,” along with the committee’s agendas and minutes. The report contains recommendations regarding homeless support and transition to permanent housing, increasing available housing, and regional

engagement and collaborative solutions. Several recommendations have been implemented and there has been progress made with most of the remaining items. She encourages anyone in the audience who has not looked at the report to do so. It is important to not attempt to recreate that work, but instead continue to build on those efforts. They know what the issues are, and each year based on capacity in the City's departments, budget constraints, and the City Council goals, staff attempts to prioritize how to continue to move these and other work plans forward.

The City Manager continued that a handful of towns and cities in the state carry a disproportionate burden regarding homelessness, and Keene is one of them. The existence of shelters and other non-profits providing services within Keene means they are not only serving Keene residents, but others from the region and state, and there is even a small percentage of people from beyond NH borders. She has worked in three other communities, and what happens in communities that do not have a shelter or these services is that when someone comes into their human services office and fills out an application, the first thing staff in that town do is call 211 to find an available shelter. If there is an open space in Keene, that applicant is transported to Keene. That is mostly how the other communities are dealing with homeless people who come to their human services departments and the community does not have shelters within its borders.

The City Manager continued that yesterday, she asked the City's Human Services Manager, Natalie Darcy, for some statistics to share at this meeting. Of the homeless individuals currently being served at the Southwest Community Services (SCS) shelter, 28% are from Keene, and the rest are from elsewhere in the county or state. At Hundred Nights, 39% of the individuals being served are from Keene. Hundred Nights previously had a year-round capacity of 24 and utilized churches for overflow. This year, the year-round capacity is 48, and they will be planning for overflow again, because a percentage of homeless people are living in the woods. This is for a variety of reasons. It could be addiction, mental health, not wanting to give up a pet to go into a shelter, or other reasons. However, they will come in on the coldest nights, and that is why Hundred Nights needs the help of local churches to manage that overflow.

The City Manager continued that for the past couple years, the City has taken a greater leadership role in the regional homeless coalition and participated in the state's housing groups. The City pursued and was successful, with the help of Senator Fenton, at making a change to the State's welfare laws to ensure that communities like Keene can seek reimbursement when providing services to residents from other communities. She is currently working with the Senator on more bills for this upcoming session. In addition, over the past couple years, (staff) has worked with property owners to clean up a few large encampments. Again, as Councilor Filiault was saying, these massive encampments have accumulated trash over decades of time. The City worked with property owners and the State to clean up one near the Stone Arch Bridge. Currently, they are working again in the areas of Pearl St. and behind Kohl's. Last year they worked with the owners of the property behind Hannaford's, who issued a "no trespass" order, installed fencing, and created a relationship with the Hannaford's manager to monitor the

property. This property has not yet been cleaned up and remains a magnet for homeless re-encampment. Many of Councilor Filiault's photos were of that site behind Hannaford's.

The City Manager continued that capacity is always an issue. There is much more work to be done than there are people to do it. However, the City has been strategic and thoughtful as to how they prioritize the work they undertake. A few months ago, she created a City Homeless Task Force, made up of leadership across the departments to discuss and brainstorm solutions and be creative. They tried a couple different brainstorming activities to try to think outside of the box, and it has been helpful. However, dealing with symptoms of this larger issue, they have also had to brainstorm solutions to that, and get creative on how they are cutting back different areas of the City, looking at the lighting, and thinking about all of the things they can do related to City infrastructure. The Parks and Recreation Director's team has been clearing brush and other debris in the problem areas, and today, she and the Public Works Director walked around the Beaver Brook area that also needs to be cleaned. That will require a brush hog, which they do every few years along the brook. The Parks and Recreation Director, with the assistance of Public Works, is evaluating lighting and fencing options on the trails in east Keene, and potentially around Pat Russell Park. It would require a significant amount of fencing. In order to secure the back area, the fence would have to go quite a distance. They took a quick look at the math for solar lights. Many of the City's trails have lighting, and they have been discussing whether they need to expand the lighting. It is approximately \$8,000 for one solar light, and if installed every 400 feet, it would be over \$100,000 per mile. Thus, that is something they need to look at in the capital plan and work with the bicycle and pedestrian advocates to raise money for.

The City Manager continued that the KPD has added directed patrols to the east Keene neighborhoods, which was already mentioned tonight. She is glad it was noticed. The Fire Chief and the Parks and Recreation Director have been talking with Morgan Britton at the Serenity Center about the needle exchange program and the possibility of expanding the needle disposal options. In addition, City staff are looking for additional locations for Narcan distribution. The city is having many overdoses, and the availability of Narcan is saving people's lives, because emergency services cannot possibly get there fast enough. The PRF Director has been talking with property owners about clearing an area that abuts the Hundred Nights fence line, which has become problematic. That property owner is willing to work with the City on that. The City is currently addressing a lighting issue near the basketball court, where there has been increased activity. She has a meeting in the next couple of weeks with Hundred Nights staff to discuss winter plans. She understands from the Community Development Department that the UCC church is going through a process to set up for overflow capacity for the winter months. This is crucial, and she is happy to see that everyone is thinking about and planning for this.

The City Manager continued that Councilor Filiault asked her yesterday about the Library. Oftentimes, people in need of services are at the library, which is one of the places where they can use Wi-Fi and stay warm or cool, depending on the outside temperature. Back in January,

the Library set up social service agency hours to help bring services to those in need who frequent the library. She has seen several organizations have joined this effort, such as a staff member from SCS who goes there and helps people apply for services. The City's Human Services Manager continues to work on the welfare association, to advocate for all communities to be part of the solution. Staff has been working hard to try to get all of the surrounding communities to understand that they need to work on a solution together. As she mentioned, she is working with Senator Fenton on some additional legislative changes. They are currently talking about one related to landlords accepting tenants with Section 8 vouchers. One of the things they focus on is helping people to get from the shelters into housing, and oftentimes, it will involve something like a Section 8 voucher, which helps with or entirely pays the rent, depending on the situation. There are many barriers to that, so they are looking at incentives and ways to eliminate barriers. They are talking with the State about ways to encourage mobile support services, bringing the services to the people who need them, instead of requiring everyone in need of service to congregate in a handful of communities across the state, and getting the other communities to provide supportive, transitional housing in their communities.

The City Manager continued that she serves on the Governor's Opiate Abatement Commission, which has been meeting with local service providers regarding substance misuse and advocating on the Commission for the needs in this section of the state. She has heard that the area needs more sober housing for women, as there is sober housing for men, but once individuals go through their treatment programs there is often not a place for women to go; thus, she and other staff members have advocated for that at the Commission. She has a grant application ready to go for a social worker position at the KPD. The person would proactively follow up on drug-related calls, to connect the person with the appropriate services. The KPD does not have the time to do that, and this would be a proactive position, where the person would follow up on the police call log and connect people with whatever services they need. This person would work closely with places like The Doorway and The Serenity Center to build strong relationships.

The City Manager continued that as mentioned, they built public restrooms as part of the Pat Russell Park. They are waiting for a part to come in. Once it comes in, those bathrooms will be programmed to be open from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM. She needs to say, they have already experienced vandalism. Long before her arrival here, the City had public bathrooms, which had many vandalism issues and ultimately were closed. However, they are looking at other public bathroom options. In a letter, someone had mentioned an innovative solution, the "Portland Loo." Staff had talked about that in the past as an option for Gilbo Ave. Better options now exist, so staff will discuss that with the Council during the CIP process when they look to include projects over the next several years and time it with the downtown project.

The City Manager continued that in closing, she is happy to report back to the Committee at a future meeting, regarding a list of suggestions. However, she wants to say that homelessness across the United States has increased dramatically. After the conclusion of several federal COVID assistance programs, a spike was seen everywhere, and these issues will continue to

grow. The City will do its best to continue to respond to all of the symptoms of the larger problems, but in her opinion, the most impactful things they can do in addition to that are:

- Support things like supportive housing projects to move people from shelters into housing
- Support mobile support services, to stop bringing people to a handful of communities
- Support transportation options in the state, to get people where they need to go
- Continue to work on statewide welfare law changes
- Find ways to use Keene's existing shelter capacity to serve more of our community and less of the people being referred by 211 or other welfare directors
- Create pathways for people to get services they need by being proactive. For example, the proposed social worker at the KPD
- Support mental health and other crucial support services.

The City Manager continued that there is a desperate need for mental health providers in our region. Staff has been talking to Monadnock Family Services (MFS) for the last several years, regarding trying to integrate them more into the KPD. The State went through a process to create this mobile response for mental health crises in the state, but it is not working. Staff has talked with Phil Wyzik (CEO of MFS). The City needs to address these things if they really want to make a difference. These types of changes, while harder to accomplish, will have larger impacts on not only what they are seeing in east Keene, but in Keene's downtown; on all of the trails; on public, undeveloped land; on private land not actively monitored by property owners; and so on and so forth.

Chair Greenwald stated that he hopes everyone hears that City staff is really working on the issue. He continued that the reason everyone is here tonight is to offer observations, and creative solutions and suggestions that could maybe be worked into what the City is doing. He asked for public comment.

Chuck Redfern of 9 Colby St. stated that regarding lighting, he is not sure solar lights would create the needed safety. He continued that he thinks hard-wired lights are needed, which would perhaps increase the cost, but the solar lights the City Manager spoke of sound more expensive than the models Pathways for Keene purchased with the City over five years ago. The problem (with solar lights is that as someone is approaching, you have to be literally right there before the light turns on. He talked with Mr. Bohannon about this. Mr. Bohannon says the lights are better now because they turn on when you are a little further out. However, he still thinks people like to be able to look down a way and see it all lit up so they know what they are walking into. With LED lighting, like the innovative ones for the roundabouts that have just been improved on lower Winchester St., you can keep the cost at a minimum. He recommends hard-wired lights. They also have conduit going down the rail trail from downtown all the way to the Public Works building. They might be able to put wire through there economically. It is worth checking out.

Mr. Redfern continued that there was a time when he worked for Homeland Security in Concord. The man he worked with was a former police officer for the City of Concord, and he admitted that Concord was bringing its homeless people down to Keene on a fairly regular basis. That shocked him to hear. The Keene Sentinel did a public service today, with an article about the problems Concord is having. He recommends the City establish communications with the folks in Concord, because they are going through the same problems as Keene, according to the article. He also recommends bringing back the ad hoc committee, keeping it ongoing, and keeping citizens involved. It should be at the Police Department, with the to-be-hired social worker as the liaison.

Nick Germana of 206 Baker St., State Representative for Ward 1, stated that part of east Keene is in his district. He continued that he lived on the corner of Water and Valley Streets for seven years, including right after when the great recession hit in about 2010. They also saw a spike in homelessness then. Much of what they are seeing now with Russell Park is what they were seeing when it was Carpenter Park. Many of these issues are not new. Things got a little better after that spike in 2010 and now they are seeing (similar issues) again. These “changes” are in some way not really changes; we have experienced them before. Housing is obviously a huge issue, all over the state. Everyone is struggling with it and they need to keep struggling with lots of innovative approaches like those that the City Manager was talking about.

Mr. Germana continued that he knows there are needle exchange and needle disposal efforts, which he thinks they need to double down on. The Federal government is beginning some grants to study safe injection sites in New York City and Providence, RI. That will not happen anytime in the immediate future, but with the substance abuse problem all throughout the state, they will continue to see substance abuse on large levels and it will be in public. Thus, the question is how to mitigate the potential danger to the people who are using the drugs, needle exchange being a big part of that, and the danger posed to people in the community who are finding needles in the parks, and so on. There are many pieces to the puzzle, and he encourages everyone to think as creatively and boldly as possible about how to address the issue of substance abuse through needle exchange, needle disposal, and down the line, at least discuss safe injection sites.

Gabby Miceli of 45 Franklin St. stated that substance abuse is not going away. She continued that she works in social services and works closely with people struggling with it. She carries rubber gloves with her, and would like to see needle disposal areas, boxes, or something that would be secure. She envisions something like the dog waste bags, with places where you can grab them. She will pick up needles with her gloves, but she is not going to carry the needles all the way to her house if she is out running or walking the dog, so she would like to see some type of solution for that. It could be an interim solution as they figure out the larger needle exchange programs or safe injection sites.

Tracy Desteph of 110 Church St. stated that she sees what happens at the park every day. She continued that as everyone has said, there is no easy solution. She has been a Keene resident for

several years, and used to be the vice president of an insurance company. Her landlord does allow Section 8 vouchers. She is disabled and lives on Section 8. She first lived on Mechanic St. next to the fire station, and had a service animal. She used to walk and stop at the park (near China Wok) before the church was able to block it off and contain it for what public property is meant to be used for. She looked up a city in Washington that has a sign about what is allowed in public areas and what is prohibited. She showed an example of a sign the City of Keene could have, saying what is allowed and not allowed. She continued that the notifications to the public would allow fines of \$35 to \$500.

Ms. Desteph continued that she saw the police on foot on her way here. They are holding cameras so they can have more behind them to defend what they are doing, so it can be seen. She goes outside at night and can see people doing drugs at the corner. The police have taken the time to come through and monitor it. Some of these people cannot be helped and do not care. She gives them food, clothes, and whatever they need when she can. She has seen the police flash their lights through there. She has seen the CDC van drive through the area, offering money to test people's blood for infectious diseases, for data collection purposes. If you offer a person addicted to drugs \$40 cash for their blood, they will sell their blood. She has gone to those areas to pick up needles. She does not know if a needle exchange would be any better. There are needle exchanges in Maine where her sister is a pharmacist, so probably the data there in Maine is better than the data here.

Morgan Britton stated that she works at the Keene Serenity Center, a recovery center that helps people who have substance use disorder. She continued that she personally runs the syringe service program; thus, Keene does have needle exchange. The Serenity Center actively goes out and picks up syringes if they are found. They have been out more frequently lately and walk the streets of Keene for 90 minutes to two hours. They find about one or two syringes each time. On social media, things get blown up. Out in the public, you are not finding piles of syringes. The Serenity Center is here, and if they are notified that there are syringes, they will happily stop what they are doing and go pick them up. This resource is available to everyone.

Chris Coates of 30 Gilsum St., County Administrator for Cheshire County, stated that he thanks Councilor Filiault for his letter, thanks the City Manager for her words, and thanks Chair Greenwald for leading this conversation. He continued that it is the start of a conversation he knows he wants to be part of. He and the City Manager have talked, and they will be at the table. He was born here in Keene and lived on the corner of Church and Valley Streets for his first 17 years. These issues have been here all along. He was not allowed to go down what they called "lower Church St." because of murders, motorcycle gangs, and other issues. Carpenter Street was not what it is today; they used to have to mow it themselves. It was always an issue. But it is different today. The substance abuse issue is massive in this area.

Mr. Coates continued that previously, about 15% of people entering the Cheshire County Department of Corrections Facility in Keene had some type of substance abuse, and now it is about 87 to 90%. Of that group, another 80 to 85% have mental health issues. The Corrections

Facility is probably the biggest substance abuse treatment facility in the area, one of the biggest mental health facilities in the area, and one of the biggest homeless shelters in the area. When people leave the Corrections Facility, by law, they just go out the door and that is it. But they do not want people on Rt. 101, so the Corrections Facility has worked with the City Manager over the past year about this. They put money in the budget and now send people to wherever their hometown was or wherever they request, to a point.

Mr. Coates continued that he is wearing four hats tonight – he is the chair of Keene Housing, which is doing everything it can to bring forward housing. They currently have a project at Roosevelt School that will add 60 units in the coming years. He is also new to the Hundred Nights board, which he wanted to join because he wants to know what he could do to help. In addition, he chairs the United Way Campaign, which gives a lot of money to these organizations. The County wants to be part of the discussion. He does not know what that means when he says it, but he knows he will be at the table as the conversation goes forward.

Steve Bragdon of 51 Railroad St. stated that he has not lived in town as long as Mr. Coates but has been here quite a while. He continued that in the last 6 months to a year, he has noticed a pick up in the problems that are around his area, such as a lot more activity in the garage, a lot more activity underneath the entrance to the upper garage, and around the area in general. It is not positive activity. He commends the KPD. They have been down there and have done a good job of taking care of some of the problems. As most people have said, the problems are not easily solvable. He is a great believer of looking at the problem from high up and coming up with a big solution, but the big solution will take at a minimum the State and the Federal government. He wants to see more of a focus on the problems in the neighborhood and what they can do to fix them. He thinks the City has already taken a big step toward that and he is hopeful that that will continue. It is unfortunate that 60% of the homeless people that the City of Keene is servicing are not from Keene. The City cannot solve that issue; the State has to do that or help with that.

Bradford Hutchinson of 305 Marlboro St. stated that he is a serious candidate for Mayor. He continued that he has been paying attention to this issue for a long time. He was born in Keene and came back in 1987. For well over 20 years, he has been in the downtown area every day. During the past two and a half years especially, when he began doing a migratory waterfowl habitat restoration project at Ashuelot River Park, he has been on the Jonathan Daniels Trail every day. He bikes that trail at least once a day. He lives on Marlboro St. just before the ice rink, and when he leaves his house to go downtown on his bike, he typically goes down to Eastern Ave., picks up the beginning of the rail trail and goes all the way down the rail trail across Water St. and behind American House. He typically rides that trail at least twice a day, often several times a day. He also goes to Water St., West St., up to Robin Hood Park, out to Wheelock Park, and behind Melanson's. The Stone Arch Bridge was mentioned, and the homeless camps right behind Pat Russell Park. Today he found a homeless camp in Ashuelot River Park, which has only been there a couple months. In 2021 there were no homeless camps in Ashuelot River Park, which he knows because he surveyed the whole park.

Mr. Hutchinson continued that to wrap it up, in one of tonight's letters, the writer indicated seeing people with needles sticking out of their arms on the rail trail. He continued that he challenges that, and asks to see a picture, because he rides that trail every day. There is increased use, but there is no one with needles sticking out of their arms. There is a lot that needs to be done, and it will get done.

A speaker that identified themselves as Mo and provided no last name stated that she runs Granita Restaurant at 51 Railroad St. She continued that she appreciates the police presence. She asked quite a few times for more walkability in the early hours of 4:00 AM, which is when Granita's staff arrives to prep. Her staff members have expressed to her that they are afraid to come to work, because someone (from the street) ran after one of the prep chefs. The other day, a Granita's customer was sitting on the patio, eating an expensive dinner, and a homeless person sat down on the bench nearby and defecated on the bench. That is not something anyone wants to see. Her solution is to remove all benches in town for at least a year, on Main St., Railroad St., and everywhere. They should do away with all benches and anywhere that homeless people can sit or lie down. When she arrived at work around 8:00 this morning, there was a needle on Granita's walkway and dirty underwear on the bench in front of the restaurant, and the restaurant's lock had been picked. She is upset, because she cannot retain employees – they are afraid to come to work. Then she has to bring in her son, who has to watch a woman inject drugs into herself, on this bench. Her son asks, "Is she a doctor?", and she has to explain to him, "No, we're going to call a doctor for her." Her son's response is to ask if she is getting a shot. She does not want to have to explain this to children.

Mo continued that regarding City staff's comment that there are not enough people to help, she thinks everyone here would raise their hand and go clean up an area. She will do it herself. She did it the other day, with police officers. There is trash everywhere, all the time, to throw in the dumpster. If staff puts out a sign-up sheet, people will clean up the city.

Carl Jacobs of 81 Wyman Rd. stated that like others, he has heard these issues and has tried to figure out what he can do. He tries to look at these issues in terms of what he can do, and tried to contribute as a City Councilor. As he listens to everything tonight, the word "sanitation" comes to mind. They have been talking about public bathrooms for a long time, and they are hearing about people using the ground as a public bathroom. He thinks the City can do better than this. It is not a huge dollar amount and has nothing to do with maintenance, as he understands it. He thinks they should "do something or get off the pot." He hears about hazardous waste (clean up). They have the technology to address a hazardous waste site, so his question is why they are not addressing it. He understands many other issues have been brought forward, but they should think about the bathrooms in particular. It will not solve the whole problem, but it will make things better in a variety of ways. He encourages them to get this moving in a positive direction.

James Duffy of Winchester stated that he is a board member of Hundred Nights, a member of the guiding council of the Monadnock Interfaith Project (MIP), and rents a studio on Roxbury St.,

and is thus in Keene frequently. He continued that things are getting more concerning. Some people say “worse,” yes, but there is also a lot of community interest and energy around this issue, which is heartening. He is glad people brought up tonight that this is not a new issue. Certainly, there are 50% more homeless people in NH now than there were last year at this time. That is the first time there have been over 2,000 homeless people in NH since 2008, when a bad recession was going on.

Mr. Duffy continued that he is not speaking officially for Hundred Nights, but the Hundred Nights shelter has come a long way and is doing a lot of good work for this community. Over 50% of Hundred Nights’ donations come from private citizens, civic groups, and private businesses. That is a testament to Mindy Cambiar and all the staff members who have worked so hard over the years. He understands that people are afraid and concerned and that this is shocking and there is no obvious solution, but it is not helpful to draw attention to the shelter as a cause for the problems people are seeing. It is not helpful to say, “People are coming in from all over.” Yes, people come from other places; there is an arrangement with the State. However, most people who come into Hundred Nights are from Cheshire County. In addition, 11 towns donate annually, as well as the City and the County, to Hundred Nights. In Keene or Cheshire County, there is a .5% vacancy rate. It is very advantageous for property owner managers, landlords, and that kind of market, to invest little and take more out. Keene has the worst housing stock he has seen, in many cities of size in New England and other cities, and it is an issue. In 1990, there was a Keene article about the looming housing crisis. In 2004, it was the culmination of a huge effort, mainly due to issues in southeast Keene with college students. A committee was formed, and Keene State College and City staff were involved, along with City Councilors, businesses, and residents of the southeast neighborhood. Many, many recommendations came out of that. One, he thinks, was a “disorderly house” ordinance.

Mr. Duffy continued that one thing the City Council has not been able to do is follow the recommendation to have annual inspections of apartments and rental units in the city, which the Council at the time voted down. He thinks it is imperative to ensure the safety and health of residents and neighbors in these areas. In addition, Keene’s Comprehensive Master Plan focuses on neighborhood development. What the City can do is start looking at these neighborhoods, and encourage development that includes middle-income housing, affordable workforce housing, and subsidized housing, all within a few blocks of each other.

Erica Gascoyne of Alstead stated that she is a Friend of Hundred Nights and was pleased to see two of its board members here. She continued that she wants to give a testimony. Yesterday was a Friends meeting, and she was in the donation room with some others, and a woman who works there told her that she used to be in the shelter. She had a 14-year-old and was pregnant. She felt so grateful to Hundred Nights for helping her that she now works and gives back to Hundred Nights. That is a testimony of Hundred Nights and the people who work at and support the organization. There are good people there. Yesterday, she talked with a guest at Hundred Nights. She asked him how he has come to be there, and he told her that he had had a job working with autistic children, but his workplace closed down. That put him into a place where

he could not afford rent, and he has been homeless. He is a good man who helps others. At Hope Chapel, the church she attends, a couple who have been coming regularly are homeless. They are keeping away from areas with drugs, but housing is hard to come by. Someone else she knows has a voucher from the City but cannot find a place and is homeless. There is a big problem, but she wants to encourage people to see that Hundred Nights is doing such a good job. It would be good to get some sort of counseling in Hundred Nights so the guests can have help in addressing their issues. She wants to remind people that the homeless people they tend to avoid are people, loved by God, created by God just as much as any other. Anyone could find themselves in such a situation.

Angela Pape, Community Organizer at MIP, stated that MIP was very present with the ad hoc (Housing Stability) committee. She continued that they had asked to have two people appointed to the committee, and one of them was and one of them was not, and MIP was present at every meeting. She is grateful that steps forward are being taken. The Church of the Nazarene has now opened a safe parking program so people can sleep in their cars, partnering with SCS. She would love for the ad hoc committee or some other committee to reopen the conversation. It was frustrating to MIP that people were “cherry-picked” for committee membership, and she thinks a lot of wisdom was left out of the conversation. These issues are complicated and hard and require all of our best thinkers and all the perspectives sitting around the table, thinking and brainstorming together. She encourages the community to lean in. She appreciates the City Manager’s perspective regarding building on the work they started, because yes, there was some good work. However, they cannot just say, “Oh, we did that report, we’re done.” They need to keep the conversation going.

Elsa Worth, Rector at St. James Episcopal Church on West St., stated that she is also here with MIP. She continued that she is so appreciative of the respectful feeling in the room. She came to say that when it comes to suffering, all of us suffer. Some people suffer a lot. She does not think that any of us expected to live in an era of so much suffering, especially as Americans. She does not anticipate suffering to lessen in the next few years, when it comes to poverty and wealth disparity, homelessness, drug abuse, mental illness, lack of care for those things, and a shortage of staff in every industry and organization she knows. She is here to advocate for our community developing a mature attitude toward suffering, not saying, “Oh, we’re going to solve this!,” because these are huge, mysterious problems, and there are no easy answers. Sometimes the answers are not what you like. She advocates for wisdom in our deliberations, communications with one another in the community, and compassion most of all, because she has seen things in the paper, and she has heard people talk in dehumanizing ways. As they are watching in the news overseas, dehumanizing rhetoric leads to violence that no one wants to see. She advocates for continued compassion, and respect, as she has happily felt in this room this evening. She prays that leadership keeps that first in mind when they talk about these issues that have to do with suffering and are not easy to solve.

Kay Kendall-Georgina stated that she is third generation Keene. She continued that her grandparents’ house was across the street from Chris Coates and they played together as children

on Church St. She still lives on Douglas St. There has been a lot of talk tonight about vilifying the homeless. She thinks they can all agree that Keene has some great services and great shelters, but she wants people to also agree to not vilify the taxpayers, the people who are noticing the uptick in crime, and the people afraid to go out. Councilor Filiault got the ball rolling, but the people in east Keene have been fed up with what they are seeing, what is happening to people's properties, the break-ins, and the lack of police presence. Lately, things have been a bit cleaner, so their activism has helped. If you go on social media and say anything about a homeless person, you "get attacked and intimidated," but people need to say that they are seeing what they are seeing. How about people vilify the villains instead. Regardless of where people came from or which shelter they are from, if they are doing drugs in public, leaving needles, selling drugs, or doing commerce in the bushes, they are criminals and that needs to be addressed. Criminal activity and unsafe activity are what the neighborhood wants to address. She was glad to hear the City Manager talk about what the City is already doing, and Councilor Filiault did his exposé, which was very sad. They really have a problem, and just because it is not new, does not mean they need to accept it.

Ms. Kendall-Georgina continued that she has suggestions. Regarding Code Enforcement, there is a building that sleeps 48 (the Hundred Nights shelter), but a few buildings down the street, someone cannot rent the five rooms in their house because Code says you cannot have five unrelated people (in one dwelling). Someone tried to build a building with four apartments and had to break it into two, because Code said they had to install a sprinkler system. That was too expensive. Therefore, there are fewer houses. Regarding vouchers, they need to change some laws. She suggests getting rid of the "comfort animal" law. She is allergic to animals and she will not rent to anyone who has a voucher, because she cannot have pets in her house. There are many small changes like that, a little tweak here and there, which might make a difference.

Lindsay Bartlett of 324 Water St. stated that she is proud to live in a neighborhood with Hundred Nights and to have this opportunity. She continued that as painful as it is to see all these issues, sometimes what people need is to have the issues in their face. These issues have been happening, and now they are happening to us, so maybe this is an opportunity. She believes there is some sort of silver lining here. She is delighted that people have been speaking from the heart tonight, and not afraid to express their fears. Expressing fears does not mean they do not want Hundred Nights here. She worked for MFS for almost 18 years. She just retired from a job working in a school for children who have experienced trauma, and some of the people there are homeless. She works with students who do not know if there will be a bed for them when they go home. Sometimes that is what it takes for us to be able to open our eyes. As a society, we tend to be uncomfortable with the dialectics – on one side, you can be incredibly afraid and concerned, and of course, no one wants to come home and see a stranger sitting in their living room. But what can someone do to make sure that does not happen? Maybe there are a few things someone can learn to respond in a way that will not aggravate the person. People need to get comfortable with being both afraid and compassionate at the same time. They do not need to be comfortable. This is not comfortable, which people need to understand. People need to listen

to each other, and listen to understand rather than to respond. If people do that more, there will be more solution-oriented thinking.

Nicole (no last name given) stated that she is a resident of Hundred Nights. She continued that she has been homeless for about four years, on and off, due to DCYF taking her children and her boyfriend going to prison. She cannot afford a place to live by herself. She has a Section 8 voucher, but it is impossible to find an apartment in this town that is affordable for her. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology and three wonderful daughters. She was thrown into the homeless community, going from being a stay-at-home mom in Keene to a homeless person in Keene. She understands people get nervous and concerned about what people are doing in the street and in front of their yards. To her, being inside Hundred Nights feels like being in jail. Residents are recorded all the time, they cannot bring lighters or cigarettes into their bedrooms, and must follow many rules. It is good, but you cannot control everyone. Many people at the shelter have gotten comfortable, and she feels that Hundred Nights is making people comfortable instead of making them uncomfortable enough to want to better themselves. Hundred Nights is giving people the freedom to use drugs, the freedom to spend their SSI checks on drugs. What else is there to do? Nothing. If people cannot work, cannot get a place (to live), cannot afford a vehicle, then yes, they have shelter, but they do not have the support they need to move forward. Some people have been in (the shelter) for years and should not be. Some people in the shelter have mental disabilities and belong in a different kind of home.

Nicole continued that she has a hard time with the stigma. She is not a drug addict, but people see her in town with drug addicts, or with a backpack, and look at her like she is. She does not steal, does not lie, and does not disrespect people, so it is hard for her to be stigmatized. She has ideas regarding needles. The City has disposal locations for dog waste bags, so she suggests they put some up around town for needles, too. People will use them. People who use drugs try to respect that, in a sense, although there are some who are lazy and do not care. There are people like her who do not do that and clean the needles up when they see them. She carries a sharps container with her and helps clean up.

Nicole continued that she has tried to get an apartment, but landlords tell her she has to earn an income of three times the rent. She cannot work and is on SSI. Making only \$820 per month will not get her an apartment, especially by herself. Her boyfriend is not here, so her only option in this town is to be at Hundred Nights or sleep outside, which is now not doable, because you cannot camp outside anywhere. You cannot even sit next to the bike path without being told that it is private property with no trespassing allowed. Where can she sit and relax outside of the shelter around all those drug addicts and mentally handicapped people? Those are triggers to many people.

Laura Tobin of Center St. stated that Nicole is not the first person who has said something like that. She continued that she thinks for people like Nicole who are working hard to get out of that situation, it is hard to have it projected on you that there is nowhere you are allowed to be, and "you can't do this" and "you can't do that." Someone mentioned wanting counseling in the

shelter, and she feels silly, but she thought that was an option there that everyone knew about. From what she is hearing, it sounds like a big answer could potentially be just offering services, such as mental health counseling and access to resources. She understands that when you have fallen and are in survival mode, there might be resources, but knowing that the resources are there or having the strength and energy to access them is very difficult. What if there could be courses and resources offered? There could be volunteers to offer financial guidance, such as how to plan to get out of the shelter. It is a valid point that for many people it has just become a way of life, because there is not an easy way to understand how to get out of it. How do you save up for a security deposit when all your money is going toward the emergency, day-to-day things? She loves the United Way's theme this year, "Imagine what we can do together." With all the people here, it would be great if they could find some actionable items, such as showing up in places that could really help support the community. She would love to be given some action items.

Beth Daniels stated that she is the CEO of SCS. She continued that this conversation was encouraging tonight. She heard suggestions about sharps containers, lighting, and other things. When she thinks about the experience of homelessness, she often thinks of it on a spectrum of human condition. Some things people said tonight caused her to get a little choked up. She thinks there are places where we can all play to our strengths for the solutions on the spectrum. They talked about safe parking, sharps containers, the police having more training, having a social worker work with the KPD, and more. She thinks there are some solutions, but the key words are actionable steps, and everyone finding the place on that spectrum where they have resources and can play to the strengths they have available to them. Recognizing that in this day and age, no one is going to pull a card out of their pocket and say it is the solution. This is a layered problem, so the solutions must be layered as well.

Molly Pinney of 30 Kingsbury St. stated that she is thankful to everyone here and everyone who came to the meetings hosted at her house. She continued that they thought 5 or 10 people would show up, and then it was over 37 people. She also thanks and acknowledges Nicole for sharing her perspective. As they move forward with solutions, it is important for everyone to hear from people who are directly impacted. It is heartbreaking to hear long-term residents say they are not sure if they want to stay in east Keene, and to hear area businesses say they are having a hard time thriving in this situation. She thinks Hundred Nights is doing some great work, but if they are over capacity they will not be able to do the great work they are doing. The Serenity Center is an incredible resource to know, regarding the fact that people can make a phone call to people who will come pick up needles. It would be smart to have some signs, maybe along the bike path and downtown, letting people know that there is a sharps container or this phone number to call if they need safe disposal.

Ms. Pinney continued that she is inspired by seeing so many people here tonight; it feels like a good turnout. There is a lot of energy and passion in this room, and if they can direct it toward a solution, they can do very positive things. She does have another concern, regarding holding landlords accountable. She has spoken with City staff before about some of the buildings in

disrepair, and staff said all they can do is send a letter and hope for the best, and she feels like there should be more for people who are not maintaining their properties. She does not know how all of that works but she wants to find out. She and a friend were talking the other night about everything that is going on, and her friend said she had to use Narcan on someone in Keene recently. That is sad for everyone. They all need to come together and work together. The neighbors in the east Keene community are here, excited to make positive change, and as someone else said, they want to be given a list of action steps that they, as neighbors, can take to help drive that change. By “neighbors,” she means the Hundred Nights residents as well, who are part of the neighborhood and community.

Chair Greenwald asked if there was anyone from the public wishing to speak who had not yet spoken. Hearing none, he asked if anyone who has already spoken had more to say.

Vicky Morton stated that she is happy to hear that people have some possible action steps to move things forward. She continued that this is a daunting situation. She would like to hear from the Police Chief about whether they can utilize an auxiliary force, what it would look like, and whether they can hire individuals to be part of the KPD and take lesser priority calls, or if that is just out of the realm of possibilities. In addition, she thinks they should activate the “See something, say something” program that the City used to have. It would be wonderful to have neighborhood associations. The east Keene neighborhood has joined together and has started having conversations and getting to know each other. Pre-pandemic, a southside Keene association used to meet at what is currently American Homes. There used to be a college/police liaison and the ward Councilor used to attend. It was for information sharing and networking, and replicating that throughout the city could help with community development. The City Council is not in this alone. Clearly, the east Keene residents are willing to step up and help. All the Council needs to do is tell them what they need them to do. If they are going to look at Code/Code Enforcement once again, she wants to know if there is a way residents can help. If there are things the citizens of this community can do to facilitate actions to meet goals, she asks that the Council let them help.

Krishni Pahl stated that she wants to reiterate what Ms. Morton said. She continued that City staff cannot do everything. East Keene residents are asking staff to tell them, the residents, what they can do. They want a list of action items, whether it is being part of a committee, cleaning up, or something else. They want to do it, because they like their neighborhood and want to live there for a long time.

Bradford Hutchinson stated that when you need a police escort, “you can’t do better than Chief Stewart.” He continued that we could easily have a much worse problem in Keene with homelessness, drug addiction, needles, and so on and so forth. He has been listening to tonight’s meeting very carefully. Taking out the benches is one of the worst ideas he has ever heard. The City needs to put *more* benches in and be more thoughtful about where they are. There are at least 15 to 20 places on Main St. where the physical infrastructure was made for putting in benches. A month or two ago, on Gilbo Ave. where the Farmer’s Market is, the City took out

the two benches. Two people who used to hang out there all day started instead hanging out in front of a restaurant on Main St., and then the City removed that bench. There should be two benches in front of that restaurant, and in front of Chair Greenwald's office, instead of the three-foot trashcan and granite niche. All of the benches were removed because someone did not like to see the homeless person sitting there. He himself has witnessed this on Main St. over the years. This type of attitude has to stop. Homeless people are being abused in Keene, and being crucified by certain individuals. He talks with homeless people every day. He knows people who are homeless and he does not assume they are drug addicts. He thanks Nicole for speaking tonight, which he convinced her to do. He wanted the Committee to hear from a Hundred Nights resident. Certain staff members at Hundred Nights should have been terminated years ago and should not have been hired in the first place. There are problems at Hundred Nights no one wants to talk about. "They" the homeless people are lied about, lied to, verbally kicked out without documentation, gaslit, manipulated, and bullied. There is verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse going on against the homeless every day at Hundred Nights and other places in town. He could and would do a lot more, if he got better cooperation, which he thinks will happen. He wants to leave on as hopeful a note as he can. There is excellent turnout tonight and he hopes everyone leaves encouraged and energized.

Councilor Filiault stated that he wants to thank everyone for showing up. He continued that many times, the Committee will hear that people want to talk to them, and then only two people show up, so he is grateful to people for following through tonight. This is how things get done. Whether the Committee members or people in the audience agree or disagree, one thing he has always said is "silence is not an option." As long as they are talking, things can get done. Several people mentioned needle clean up, and the particular site he was talking about and took photos of is on private property. The City has no access to it, so unless the property owner requests a cleanup, the City has no jurisdiction to do so.

Councilor Filiault continued that the City Manager alluded to that based on the numbers, about 60 to 64% of the people in Keene's shelters are from outside of Keene. That is a problem, and it is not a secret. They know other communities and dropping people off in Keene. He looks at it as the State of NH shirking responsibility. Other communities do not want to build shelters and then say, "Well, we don't have a shelter," and send people to Keene, and feel like they are done. Other towns write a check. It takes much more than writing a small check to take care of someone, being part of a community. He feels that the State should require every town and city in the state, based on population, to have homeless beds in their town or city. He heard a State Representative say, "We don't have a homeless population in our town." Clearly, it is because the homeless people in that town are sent to Keene. If every city and town was required to have beds, then the burden would be shared. Some people argue that Keene is closer to services, which is true in some instances, but sometimes it is not. Sometimes people just need a place to stay for the night. If every city and town were required to have a bed it would be different. For example, Hanover does not have a homeless shelter, and thus can claim they "do not have a homeless problem," but that is because they send homeless people somewhere else. If they turn Hundred Nights into holding 120 people it would fill tomorrow, because the rest of the state

would send people here. If up to 66% of the people staying in Keene's shelters are not from Keene that is a problem. It is a State problem. The State of NH always says it likes to have local control, but what that means is, "We just want you to deal with the problems so we don't have to handle them." Until the State deals with their responsibility as they should, and he knows the City is working with the State Senator, this problem will not go away. You cannot create enough beds until every town and city does their job.

Councilor Workman stated that she wants to thank everyone for coming out tonight. She continued that the vibe of the conversation was a bit different from the one they had about a year ago. She knows who the social workers are in the room, the ones with boots on the ground, and she is one of those people. She has lived in the Monadnock region since 2009 and has worked in the region in social services since 2010. She also chairs the Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Coalition (MDEIB), which she takes very seriously. The City issued a proclamation saying it is a welcoming city. She does not want to vilify taxpayers and property owners and people who are concerned. She hears those concerns, and they are valid. Everyone has the right to feel safe in their community. She wants to caution people about their language. Language is very important. She has heard language such as "addicts," "bums," and "'they' are not welcome here." That sends chills down her spine. That same terminology, "'they' are not welcome here," has been used in regard to many vulnerable populations. She does not want that to be our Keene.

Councilor Workman continued that people want to know realistic expectations and things that they can do. Since she has been a social service worker for many years, that is right up her alley. She wants to empower people to feel empowered, and to take back control. There are many ways to do that. Technology is wonderful. She encourages private businesses, property owners, and landowners to enhance the security on their own property. (For example, get) motion detectors in their yards, or Ring cameras. The KPD has a program allowing residents to share footage with the KPD if they record something of concern. Regarding trash removal, they heard about how homeless outreach workers give folks in encampment areas trash bags and they are not used. Realistically, it is not like camping where you 'carry in, carry out.' If people used/filled the provided trash bags, where would they take them? It is illegal to dump trash in someone else's dumpster. Thus, much of the trash is just left there. Maybe the City could implement something where if it is carried out to a specific site, the City will come get it once or twice a month. Regarding needles, they are not just used for drug injections; they are also used for diabetic supplies. She asks people to please not photograph homeless people or others in the community. That is an immense violation of privacy and an issue of dignity and respect.

Councilor Workman continued that she hears people talk about social services and the need for resources. She knows what such agencies pay, because she worked at them. She has a master's degree in psychology with a concentration in forensics. These social service agencies cannot keep workers. An article in the paper talked about one agency's difficulties attracting and retaining staff. People cannot imagine what it is like for someone to have to relive/re-share their trauma every six months when they get a new caseworker or new therapist. Given the wages, the

agencies cannot keep experienced staff, and instead get folks right out of college who just need to gather some experience and move on to a better paying job. Again, she wants to empower people to look at ways to help, to control the aspects that they can control. You cannot control other people's behavior, but you can control your own home and what you do around it. Just as there are bad actors in every profession, there are bad actors in the homeless population as well. She understands that and sees that, but she wants to be really clear about the need to come together as a community to solve this problem, to mitigate the risks.

Councilor Williams stated that he wants to start by endorsing everything that Councilor Workman just said; she is very smart person. He continued that he wants to thank everyone who showed up, especially from east Keene, which is his neighborhood. It is a wonderful neighborhood. He has had the opportunity to live just about anywhere in America, and east Keene is what he has chosen, because it is a caring, dynamic, artsy community full of good people. He appreciates the remarks about the infrastructure in east Keene. Yes, the sidewalks are a mess; he has been saying that since he was elected four years. They are starting to do something about it but more money needs to be invested in it, and they need to figure out how to pay for that, because it does affect the quality of life. It is a piece of infrastructure that was rather deserted by the City after the financial crisis years ago. Maintenance fell behind, and they are seeing the price for that now, when people say they are ashamed of the sidewalks on the east side. Someone mentioned dirt bikes and drag racing, which is of particular concern to him. When he has felt unsafe in the neighborhood, both times it was due to being threatened by someone in a vehicle, not a homeless person. This problem affects attitudes at all levels of income.

Councilor Williams continued that he wants to call out something that was mentioned here a couple times, a positive action the City took. It started with the meeting here in March of 2022 and the creation of the ad hoc committee. One outcome of the ad hoc committee was the safe parking program. People who are temporarily sleeping in their vehicles have a safe place to go, thanks to the Church of the Nazarene making their parking lot available to people who have been screened by SCS. People have to go through the screening process to participate, but people are able to stay there overnight in their cars, and they need to be safe. He wants to point it out because it is very innovative. This is the first safe parking program that he knows of on the east coast, and Keene can be proud of that, and proud that it was members of the community who stepped up to make that happen.

The City Manager stated that when she brings her report back to the MSFI Committee, she will have a list of things that people can help with.

Chair Greenwald stated that he, too, wants to thank everyone. He continued that everyone spoke respectfully, and listened, and he thinks something positive will come out of this. He has a list of suggestions, and the City Manager has suggestions. He encourages people to fill out the comment cards and forward them to City staff, passing on any positive ideas they have. It is important to work together on this. He asked for a motion.

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

On a vote of 5-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee recommends that the safety concerns be referred to the City Manager with the request that there be a report back to the Committee.

2) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Greenwald adjourned the meeting at 8:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

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