



## **Heritage Commission**

**Wednesday, June 14, 2023, 4:30 PM**

2<sup>nd</sup> floor conference room, City Hall  
3 Washington St, Keene, NH 03431

### **AGENDA**

- I. **Call to Order** – Roll Call
- II. **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**  
March 8, 2023
- III. **2022 CLG** – Recovering Black History in Keene Project
- IV. **Downtown Infrastructure Project Update**
- V. **2021 CLG** – Italian Neighborhood Heritage Project
- VI. **New Business**
- VII. **Next Meeting** – July 12, 2023
- VIII. **Adjourn**

1 City of Keene  
2 New Hampshire

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5 HERITAGE COMMISSION  
6 MEETING MINUTES  
7

Wednesday, March 8, 2023

4:30 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room,  
City Hall

**Members Present:**

Cauley Powell, Chair  
Molly Ellis, Vice Chair  
Susan DeGidio (remote)  
Councilor Gladys Johnsen  
Rose Carey  
Brian Lee

**Staff Present:**

Evan Clements, Planner  
Will Schoefmann, GIS Technician

**Members Not Present:**

Marilyn Huston  
Louise Zerba, Alternate

8  
9 **1) Call to Order – Roll Call**

10  
11 Ms. Powell called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.  
12

13 **2) Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**

14  
15 Ms. Carey made a motion to accept the minutes of the November 9, 2022 and January 11, 2023  
16 meetings. Ms. Ellis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.  
17

18 **3) Elections – Chair/Vice Chair**

19  
20 Ms. Carey made a motion to nominate Cauley Powell as Chair. Ms. Ellis seconded the motion.  
21 The motion passed unanimously.  
22

23 Ms. DeGidio made a motion to nominate Molly Ellis as Vice Chair. Chair Powell seconded the  
24 motion. The motion passed unanimously.

25  
26 **4) Downtown Infrastructure Project Update**

27 Mr. Schoefmann reported that, after the last public listening session, the City Council decided to  
28 set up about five more informational workshops that would be open to the public. He stated he

29 would check the schedule and forward the information to the Commission members. He also  
30 stated the information should be on the City's website.

31 Mr. Schoefmann also reported that the City Manager announced the project start date may be  
32 delayed until 2025. He noted there are a number of federal grant funding opportunities that  
33 would not be available if the project were delayed further. Ms. Ellis questioned why anyone  
34 would want a delay. Mr. Schoefmann speculated businesses want more time to prepare for  
35 construction. He wondered if they want to organize a fund to help affected businesses, like Ted  
36 [McGreer of Ted's Shoe & Sport] and Luca [Paris of Luca's Mediterranean Café] did during the  
37 COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Clements stated he did not know but did not think delay would be  
38 helpful.

39 Chair Powell stated there is a working draft of the letter the Commission discussed sending to the  
40 City Council at their last meeting. She sought input on the draft.

41 At 4:39 PM, two members of the public arrived. Rita Haywood moved to Keene a year and a half  
42 ago and is looking to find a committee to work with. Jeananne Farrar has lived in Keene for 86  
43 years. She was a founding member of the Heritage Commission and the Historic District  
44 Commission. She is interested in the Commission's views on the project.

45 Councilor Johnsen arrived at 4:41 PM.

46 Mr. Schoefmann repeated his project update for the newcomers. Chair Powell asked Councilor  
47 Johnsen to keep Mr. Clements updated on any insights relevant to the Commission. Councilor  
48 Johnsen stated the Councilors want to make sure that they understand everything about the  
49 project, so they are having at least one more information session. She mentioned there was a  
50 wonderful turnout at both prior information sessions.

51 Chair Powell noted their meeting time was limited, but there would be other opportunities to  
52 discuss the project.

53 Mr. Clements returned the discussion to the draft letter from the Commission to the City  
54 Council. He suggested circulating and discussing the draft at the meeting but noted there is no  
55 rush to finalize it. Chair Powell stated members could send their input in writing after the  
56 meeting, as well. A revised letter could be the subject of a motion at the next Commission  
57 meeting.

58 Mr. Clements distributed copies of the draft. Chair Powell gave attendees a few minutes to read  
59 it. She then noted the draft was based on discussion at the last Commission meeting, as well as  
60 written input from Ms. Zerba and Ms. Huston. She invited others to send their input to her, as  
61 well.

62 Councilor Johnsen said the letter was very well written. She suggested stressing in the letter that  
63 the Commission understands that the area has to be dug up because the aging pipes and  
64 infrastructure under the street must be replaced and that is the reason the City is doing the  
65 project.

66 Ms. Haywood stated the current traffic pattern at Central Square is very confusing. She was  
67 driving from Court Street to Roxbury Street and had to be “straightened out” by a police officer.  
68 She feels the traffic lights are confusing. She thinks the proposed new circle might make more  
69 sense. She relayed that, at one of the information sessions, a woman was very angry the street in  
70 front of The Stage would be closed to deliveries, but she believes it would allow outdoor dining  
71 and sounds lovely, and deliveries could be made early in the morning.

72 Returning the discussion to historic elements of the area, Chair Powell asked Ms. Carey for her  
73 thoughts. Ms. Carey said she is in favor of the proposed plan because there would be more green  
74 space for events and gatherings. It would be safer to access; it would be more pleasant to be in  
75 the square area; it would be a less confusing traffic pattern.

76 Ms. Ellis noted she has a three-year-old, and she thinks about the memories he would make in  
77 the future about going to the common, which would be his heritage. She agreed with Ms. Carey  
78 that it would nice to have the space, particularly for pedestrian safety. She also noted there is an  
79 alley behind The Stage for deliveries.

80 Mr. Lee said the letter was great. He agreed with Councilor Johnsen’s suggested addition to the  
81 letter. He thinks the changes to the square will enhance or rediscover the original purpose of the  
82 square – for congregation. He noted that he recently had difficulty trying to cross the street to get  
83 to the gazebo in the square. He saw two near-accidents outside The Stage recently. He indicated  
84 a roundabout with traffic lights is odd. He thinks the beauty and history will be enhanced by the  
85 new design.

86 Councilor Johnsen noted the new plan preserves all the historic elements of the area. Mr. Lee  
87 suggested adding specific historic elements the Commission wants saved to the letter.

88 Ms. DeGidio agreed with Mr. Lee. She thinks the letter was great. She also agreed with Ms.  
89 Carey. She said they must look to the future. She thinks having fewer cars in the area would  
90 make for a more people-friendly space. Having more space for outdoor dining area would be  
91 good. The plan is a way to preserve and move into the future. She supports the plan.

92 Chair Powell read an email from Ms. Zerba:

93 My biggest concern is that Central Square remains as is to allow cars to travel  
94 around, thus making it a real square. Another important feature is the appearance  
95 of the street and square, including the church steeple. As people head up to Main  
96 Street it’s a beautiful sight, and I would like it to remain as such. Keene is the  
97 envy of all who visit, as well as our own community citizens. The City of Keene  
98 has received many awards due to its architecture, green space, trees throughout  
99 the downtown and common, and the overall appearance of a true New England  
100 town, as it is perceived.

101 Chair Powell continued that Ms. Zerba does not want to lose any parking spaces; she does not  
102 want to lose any trees unless they are dead, or it’s otherwise absolutely necessary; she does not  
103 want to lose parking for visitors of the church, especially those with disabilities; and she does not  
104 want any increase in traffic to School Street.

105 In response to Chair Powell's question, Mr. Clements stated that Ms. Huston is against any  
106 changes to the square.

107 At Chair Powell's invitation, Ms. Farrar discussed her position on the plan. She first noted that  
108 the Commission is doing a great job and commended Ms. Carey's neighborhood tours and work  
109 on the Italian Neighborhood Heritage Project. She then stated she is not in favor of the plan. She  
110 said she has many engineers in her family, and an engineer who grew up in Keene told her the  
111 traffic would be worse with the proposed changes. She is nervous about the lack of parking  
112 spaces, especially around the park, where children would be playing. She noted the many awards  
113 Keene has received for its architecture. She warned the plan would result in traffic overflowing  
114 into surrounding neighborhoods. She worried there would be parking meters in front of nice  
115 homes on residential streets. She noted Keene is the seat of Cheshire County and therefore the  
116 center of business, civic events, political events, festivals, etc. She thinks the current Main Street  
117 is well designed. She noted she almost got into an accident at the Winchester Street roundabout  
118 but has never gotten into an accident on Main Street. She understands people live differently  
119 now, but she is speaking on behalf of people who have a strong sense of place. She thinks the  
120 plan looks like a playground or park not a government and business district. She understands the  
121 infrastructure needs to be repaired as soon as possible, but the street should only be tweaked. She  
122 has great reservations about the plan. The history of Main Street is astounding. The area should  
123 still look like Keene, not a park.

124 Chair Powell asked what features are important to save. She said the trees in the center median  
125 are beautiful have a lot of character, and she does not want to lose them. They are likely to stay,  
126 though. Ms. Ellis said the area is not really a square. She suggested it be thought of more like a  
127 common, where everyone can congregate and have community events. That is the true heritage  
128 of the area.

129 Ms. DiGidio wondered what Mr. Paris and Mr. McGreer think about the project as businessmen.  
130 Mr. Clements said he understood their greatest concern to be that businesses remain open during  
131 construction and not experience any business interruption. He noted Keene is using the same  
132 consultant as Concord used, so the company understands how to reduce the day-to-day impact of  
133 construction on businesses. He noted that property owners in the area would ultimately benefit  
134 from the infrastructure improvements, although not necessarily their tenants.

135 Mr. Clements stated that Ms. Farrar's comments about place making resonated with him. He  
136 thinks that, particularly with her work with the history and preservation of the community, the  
137 issue of community identity should be highlighted in the letter. He noted the square is the  
138 economic engine not only for the city but also the county, so maybe turning it into a park is not  
139 the right decision. He noted he was only giving his personal opinion.

140 Councilor Johnsen, speaking as a Commission member and not a Council member, noted that a  
141 lot of people want a bike path, but wondered where it would go, since no healthy trees would be  
142 removed. She suggested the Commission might want to address that in the letter.

143 Ms. Farrar said an engineer told her the Concord project was different because it involved a  
144 straight Main Street, which is much less complicated than a five-exit roundabout. She said an

145 English engineer specializing in roundabouts said not to mess with it. It would be very  
146 complicated. She stated that many people are also worried about the cost of the project. She  
147 thought the City Manager indicated it would cost up to \$9,000,000. She noted it could get even  
148 more expensive. Once the street is dug up, they could find more problems. Mr. Clements noted it  
149 would not get any less expensive than it is now, and additional delay could jeopardize federal  
150 funds. Ms. Farrar wondered if the city would lose CLG (certified local government) money if  
151 they ripped up its history, and it was no longer a Preservation America community or no longer  
152 had a historic or heritage district.

153 Chair Powell returned the Commission's focus to the history and heritage of the area. She  
154 indicated there would be more in-depth discussion at a future meeting. She asked if any  
155 particular projects should be highlighted in the letter. She suggested the Preserve America  
156 designation and Main Streets of America award. Ms. Farrar added that Keene received the  
157 Distinctive Destinations award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Ten  
158 Best Public Spaces award from the American Planners Association for Central Square.

159 Ms. Farrar noted Keene has many parks, including the recreation department and a new park on  
160 Carpenter Street, which should be utilized more for gatherings. She noted there is a green in  
161 many places in New Hampshire, including Walpole. She said Keene is a little different. Since  
162 1828, the design has worked for all these years. She acknowledged there should be some safety  
163 improvements, though. She said the community is designated as a Pedestrian-Friendly  
164 Community. She lamented that people now want outdoor dining and a bike lane, but there's only  
165 so much you can fit on the streets.

166 Mr. Clements summarized the discussion about additions to the letter. He noted the Preserve  
167 America and Main Street America awards were important as aspirational for purposes of place  
168 making. He said Keene has been proven to be a great place, and they should make it better.  
169 Keene is the economic engine and county seat. There's a balance between urban features and  
170 rural living. The letter should acknowledge that the Commission understands work must be done.  
171 The area should be enhanced to allow for safe congregation. The project should leave a legacy.  
172 He suggested the Commission think about how they want future generations to use the space and  
173 live and move about in the square. He suggested including a few specific features, like the center  
174 median and trees, the Commission wanted to preserve. The idea of the common versus the  
175 square also goes into place making.

176 Mr. Clements said he thinks it was a great letter, and the suggestions would make it better. Chair  
177 Powell agreed, noting she would circulate a revised draft of the letter.

178 Ms. Carey requested adding something about how the traffic pattern would impact surrounding  
179 areas, with a focus on School Street. Mr. Clements said he would provide an update but did not  
180 think it should be in the letter. Councilor Johnsen noted she often has close calls with accidents  
181 in the area all the time. Chair Powell noted there used to be a police officer directing traffic there.  
182 Councilor Johnsen said that many of the younger councilors are thinking younger, and that is  
183 important. Mr. Clements noted Keene's population is aging, however, so the design should not  
184 only be for the next generation. Ms. Haywood said attracting young people is also important.

185 Ms. DeGidio made a point to thank Ms. Farrar for her perspective. She said Ms. Farrar was  
186 amazing and gave the Commission a lot to think about. Even though Ms. DeGidio supports the  
187 project, she thinks Ms. Farrar brought up important points. Ms. Farrar responded that  
188 preservation has been her passion for 25 years.

189 Ms. Farrar left the meeting at 5:21 PM.

190 **5) 2021 CLG – Italian Neighborhood Heritage Project**

191 Mr. Clements noted Mr. Schoefmann had to leave but wanted to show an example of a story  
192 map. Mr. Clements said he would show the story map but couldn't speak about it much because  
193 he was not involved in the project.

194 Chair Powell said she would not be able to do more interviews because the person filming would  
195 be away. Additional clips would have to come from the completed interviews. Mr. Lee has  
196 already cut some new clips but may send additional ones to consultant Ray Corson. Councilor  
197 Johnsen noted she still wants the City Council to hear about the Commission's work at some  
198 point, maybe once the story map project is done.

199 Mr. Clements explained that a story map is a scrolling story that includes graphics and GIS maps  
200 and information. He showed a story map for the Dillant-Hopkins Airport regarding leasing and  
201 development opportunities. It includes location maps and an overview of the facilities with  
202 additional information. It is easy to scroll and get a sense of everything. The story moves with  
203 the map. It is somewhat interactive. It is good for visualizing points.

204 Chair Powell noted the technology would work well for the project, with different photos  
205 moving to different areas, some historic, some modern, showing embedded videos, and using the  
206 map to move the reader around. Mr. Clements agreed about the benefits of using a story map for  
207 the project.

208 Mr. Clements asked Commission members to send Mr. Schoefmann ideas about how a story map  
209 could be used for the project. It would be built out based on the posters Ms. Carey and Ms. Ellis  
210 put together and additional photos and videos. Ms. Carey noted she wants to add something  
211 about the Pearl Street School, which was sawed in half and separated into two buildings at some  
212 point. Ideas should be sent to Mr. Schoefmann.

213 **6) 2022 CLG – Recovering Black History in Keene Project**

214 Mr. Clements had little to report. There is a tentative plan for a consultant to meet with the  
215 Historical Society to talk about how their respective projects fit together. He said the project is  
216 on track. He is hoping to kick the project off at the upcoming meeting in April. Chair Powell  
217 noted she plans to invite Jenna from the Historical Society and Kabria, the consultant working on  
218 the project to the meeting.

219 **7) Gift Confirmation**

220 Mr. Clements reported that he received a letter from the Historical Society thanking the  
221 Commission for donating a DVD presentation about the history of Keene Middle School, but he



222 was unaware of such a DVD or donation. Neither Chair Powell nor Ms. Carey were aware of  
223 such a DVD or donation. Mr. Clements said that, after double checking with Ms. Zerba and Ms.  
224 Huston, he would reach out to the Historical Society for clarification.

225 Ms. Carey asked if the Commission is a member of the Historical Society. Chair Powell said she  
226 thought so, and that membership was annual. She noted the Commission could pass a motion to  
227 renew the membership when the time came.

228 **8) Next Meeting – April 12, 2023**

229 Chair Powell asked if anyone had questions before the meeting adjourned.

230 Ms. Carey noted she had the displays Councilor Johnsen brought forward and was happy to set  
231 them up anywhere, possibly in the lobby. Councilor Johnsen suggested she check with Patty  
232 [Little, City Clerk]. She wants councilors to see the display. Chair Powell suggested waiting until  
233 the story map is done and publicizing it by displaying the plaques. Ms. Carey will hold onto the  
234 displays. She is willing to set them up. Councilor Johnsen said she was impressed with the  
235 displays and appreciated the interviews.

236 Ms. Carey wondered if a story map for Central Square would help people visualize the plan.  
237 People get overwhelmed with such a confusing subject. She suggested the Commission could  
238 collaborate with the City of Keene. There could be historic photos. Councilor Johnsen said the  
239 engineers could be asked to do it. Chair Powell noted it is in the Commission's wheelhouse to  
240 incorporate a narrative history of the area in a story map. She noted there is time to do research if  
241 the project doesn't start until 2025. Ms. Carey suggested having the story map available at  
242 workshops might be helpful. Mr. Clements expressed support for the idea but wasn't sure if it  
243 was feasible. He said he would reach out to the communications director about it. Chair Powell  
244 suggested waiting until the plan was more solid before making a story map.

245 **9) Adjournment**

246

247 There being no further business, Chair Powell adjourned the meeting at 5:36 PM.

248

249 Respectfully submitted by,  
250 Wendy Chen, Minute Taker

251

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



# Recovering Black History in Nineteenth-Century Keene, New Hampshire

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For nearly three years, the Historical Society of Cheshire County and the Monadnock Center for History and Culture in partnership with the Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire have been working on Recovering Black History in the Monadnock Region (RBHMR), an innovative citizen archivist project that aims to recover the history of African Americans in the region. These citizen-archivists—led by Jenna Carroll, Director of Education at the Historical Society of Cheshire County—have searched through census records, town histories, vital records, newspapers, and more. A truly impressive amount of data has been compiled. The goal for 2023 is to examine this data (and perhaps expand it) and also figure out what it means. My role is to help Jenna Carroll and her team do that—with a focus on Keene, New Hampshire.

## Project Goals

Since significant research has already been compiled as part of RBHMR, my part of the project has three key goals:

1. **provide** an in-depth review of the research that the RBHMR team has conducted (about Keene) so far and identify potential research paths;
2. **compile** more data (within a four-month time frame) to deepen our knowledge of the Black experience in nineteenth-century Keene, New Hampshire (roughly from the 1780s to 1920s); and
3. **contextualize** RBHMR's research findings (along with any new information my team finds), describing and analyzing themes and possible narratives.

## Project Phases

### Phase 1: Data and Location Familiarization (April 2023 to June 2023)

This phase focuses on gaining a deep understanding of the research already done by RBHMR community-archivists; reading background secondary sources related to the history of New Hampshire, slavery, and free Black community life in New England (as explored by scholars such as Cheryl LaRoche); and identifying potential research paths for further archival exploration.

Phase 2: On-Site and Digital Archival Research (July 2023 to November 2023)

After identifying viable research paths, the research team will visit repositories in the New England region (primarily in the Boston area and Keene, New Hampshire); explore digital databases, including but not limited to property records and newspapers; and collect and process all sources (with a notation of collections explored that returned *no* information about African Americans).

Phase 3: Interpretation and Contextualization (December 2024 to March 2024)

The final phase of this project focuses on interpreting and contextualizing the sources we have gathered, specifically analyzing themes and placing Keene's Black history within a wider context of Black New England history. A narrative report will be written, and a presentation will be delivered summarizing our findings and providing recommendations for public history initiatives.

**Project Deliverables**

My work will be geared to reviewing the data already recovered by citizen-archivists and then interpreting and contextualizing this data. Further digital and on-site research will add to this data but is not the project's primary goal.

To that end, our specific deliverables include 1) **writing a narrative report**, 2) **giving a presentation** contextualizing the data about nineteenth-century Keene, and 3) **compiling new archival research**. It is my sincere hope that this report becomes the basis for outreach materials and further collaborative work with the Heritage Commission and partner organizations including the Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire for developing public history projects such as a walking tour, exhibitions, historical markers, and interpretative signs.