

City of Keene
New Hampshire

FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, January 11, 2024

6:00 PM

**Council Chamber,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Thomas F. Powers, Chair
Michael J. Remy, Vice Chair
Bettina A. Chadbourne
Bryan J. Lake
Kris E. Roberts

Members Not Present:

All Present

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager
Amanda Palmeira, Assistant City Attorney
Duncan Watson, Asst. Public Works
Director/Solid Waste Manager
Andy Bohannon, Parks Recreation and
Facilities Director
Jesse Rounds, Community Development
Director
Steve Tenney, Police Captain

Chair Powers called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

1) Request to City Property - Ice and Snow Festival - February 3, 2024

Mr. Mark Remillard of 64 Blackberry Lane addressed the committee and stated he was before the committee on behalf of the Keene Downtown Group for the Keene Ice and Snow Festival. This is their 21st annual event and is scheduled for Saturday February 3 from 10 am to 4 pm. Mr. Remillard stated this is free family event. Some of the events being planned for the day are Sugar on Snow, Cartoons Horse Rides, Scavenger Hunt, Children's Train, Touch a Truck, Free Hot Cocoa etc. and 12 Ice Carvers.

Councilor Chadbourne made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Remy.

On a 5-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that The Keene Downtown Group be granted a street fair license to use downtown City rights-of-way for purposes of conducting merchant sidewalk sales, as well as use of downtown City property on Central Square, Railroad Square, and designated parking spaces on Central Square and Main Street to conduct the Ice and Snow Festival on Saturday, February 3, 2024 from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM, and reserving an inclement weather date of Sunday, February 4, 2024. In addition, the applicant is permitted to close off a portion of Railroad Street from Main Street to the exit of the Wells Street Parking Garage. This permission is granted subject to the signing of a revocable license and indemnification agreement, submittal of a certificate of liability insurance in the amount of \$1,000,000 listing the City of Keene as additional insured, submittal of signed letters of permission from the owner for any use of private property, and compliance with any recommendations of City staff. In addition, the petitioner is granted use of the requested parking

spaces free of charge under the provisions of the Free Parking Policy. The Petitioner agrees to absorb the cost of any City services over and above the amount of City funding allocated in the FY 24 Community Events Budget.

2) **2024 NH Department of Safety, State Homeland Security NHTOA Team Allocation Grant - Police Department**

Police Captain Steve Tenney addressed the committee next. Captain Tenney stated this is a 2024 Homeland Security Grant for the Swat Team. This year the department is being awarded \$5,142.41. This money will be used to purchase a new ballistic shield and a headset for the team leader to be able to communicate through two different channels.

Councilor Lake made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Remy.

On a 5-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to apply for, accept, and expend the 2024 NH Department of Safety, State Homeland Security NHTOA Team Allocation Grant in the amount of \$5,142.41.

3) **FFY24 New Hampshire Highway Safety Equipment Grant 24-095 - Police Department**

Captain Tenney stated this item is a highway safety grant in the amount of \$64,673.50 and will be used to upgrade computer equipment in cruisers.

Councilor Remy made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Roberts.

On a 5-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommend that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept and expend the FFY24 New Hampshire Highway Safety Equipment Grant in the amount of \$64,673.50.

4) **Invest NH Municipal Per Unit Award #MPU22-123 Authority to Accept and Expend - Community Development**

Community Development Director Jesse Rounds was the next speaker. Mr. Rounds stated the Invest NH Program that started in 2021 included a program to encourage cities to approve affordable and workforce housing referred to as the Per Unit Grant Program. For every affordable or workforce housing that is built the City can request up to \$10,000 from the State.

Mr. Rounds stated the developer for 310 Marlboro Street is including 15 affordable and workforce housing units and as a result the City was able to procure \$150,000.

Councilor Lake asked where this money would be going to, whether it would go to the City or the property owner. Mr. Rounds stated the property owner has taken advantage Invest NH and other programs and received funds through those programs. This money will go to the general fund.

Councilor Roberts asked how much the rent would be for a regular unit versus an affordable unit. Mr. Rounds stated he was not sure.

The Manager asked that the word “expend” be deleted from the motion. This motion should be to accept the funds, if at any time the City wanted to expend the funds she will come before the committee for authorization. Councilor Lake asked whether there were any restrictions on what these funds should be used for. The Manager answered in the negative.

Councilor Roberts made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Remy.

On 5-0 vote, Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept funds awarded to the City by the InvestNH program of the New Hampshire Department of Business and Economic Affairs as a result of the development of 15 affordable housing units located at the private housing development at 310 Marlboro Road.

5) Recommended Actions to Address the Current and Future State of the City's Street Trees - Conservation Commission

Mr. Sparky Von Plinsky Chair of Conservation Commission addressed the committee next. Mr. Von Plinsky stated staff was before the Conservation Commission in August to address the condition of trees in the City. Based on that meeting a letter was sent to the Council. The letter addressed several points, including:

- conducting an inventory of street trees in the public right of way
- allocating additional funding for the street tree program
- cost sharing between a property owner and the City of Keene
- tree replacement with a focus on native trees for trees that are approaching the end of their life

Reviewing each point in turn, Mr. Von Plinsky stated that currently there is \$5,000 designated specifically for the downtown tree maintenance program, and \$3,000 in the budget is intended to replace street trees throughout the City. Mr. Von Plinsky noted that \$3,000, according to City staff, would probably cover approximately five trees of a 1 ½ to 2-inch diameter. That budgeted amount has not changed in decades.

The next item outlined in the letter was cost sharing similar to what has been done in Manchester and Nashua. This cost sharing would be between a property owner and the City and it would focus on trees that affect the street, but are not necessarily in the public right of way.

With regard to the recommendation to establish a management plan for the aging stands of red and white pine trees. Mr. Von Plinsky stated this recommendation goes hand-in-hand with what Andy Bohannon will be doing for the City parks. He stated it is looking more and more likely that there will be a collapse of those red and white pines planted after the 1938 hurricane, which would be quite noticeable. The final recommendation in the report, dealt with the importance of native trees.

Mr. Von Plinsky concluded his remarks by stating there is considerable expertise within the Commission's membership and they would like to partner with the City in any way the Council felt was appropriate.

Councilor Williams addressed the committee next. The Councilor stated living on the east side and listening to neighbors talk about the quality of the neighborhood one of the things he noticed is that our natural assets are starting to fade. Over the last few years trees that have been lost have not been replaced. The trees in East Keene are much older. He indicated trees are important for attracting bees, butterflies but also for controlling runoff. Trees are an infrastructure asset that is necessary and is a quality of life issue. The Councilor stressed the importance of taking care of trees and looking to the future and to make this resource remains available for future generations.

Vice-Chair of the Conservation Commission Andrew Madison was the next to address the committee. He stated he agrees with the two prior speakers but would like to offer his expertise as a hydrologist. He noted street trees control run off during major stormwater events. Councilor Madison indicated we are seeing more of these precipitation events. If the City loses trees in the core area of Keene, we will see our stormwater systems stressed. By maintaining street trees, it gives stormwater the opportunity to infiltrate into the soil and gives trees the opportunity to uptake water. He stated this resource is important for the City and something the City needs to invest in.

Ms. Louise Zerba of 340 Pako Avenue addressed the committee on behalf of the Keene Rotary Club. Ms. Zerba indicated the Rotary Club has established a new service committee referred to as the Greenup Committee. That committee is looking at several possible projects - one of which is the planting of trees in the city and perhaps replanting trees as a result of the downtown infrastructure project. Ms. Zerba stated the Rotary Club is looking to collaborate with all the clubs and schools in the City to ask for their support to put this program in place.

Mr. Peter Hartz 12 Brook Street commended the Conservation Commission and the Rotary Club for their initiative. He indicated Keene has always been known as a Tree City, but we no longer qualify as a Tree City because the City no longer meets the requirements for that specific organization and haven't met the requirements for a number of years.

Mr. Hartz stated there is already an organization to shepherd a community's efforts at becoming a Tree City. There are four requirements: an active Tree Board or City Department; a Tree Care Ordinance, a Community Forestry Program which is funded by at least \$2.00 per population (20,000 people would be \$40,000 into a tree budget). Finally, there also needs to be an Arbor Day observance not to be tagged along with Earth Day. Meeting these criteria will enable the City to apply for funding through various government programs.

Mr. Hartz went onto say this brings to mind the dilemma Keene is going to experience downtown with the infrastructure project. He stated when the project evolves he is hoping for limited removal of trees. Trees in the downtown were planted 40-50 years ago and there was an intentional landscape architectural design and he hoped the downtown redesign would include a professional landscape architect. He stated this is an effort he would like to assist with.

Councilor Remy noted he believes the Conservation Commission serves as the board responsible for trees; and that there is a tree ordinance in place. He continued there is a forestry line item

currently in the City budget that has a balance of \$54,000, which exceeds the \$2.00 per capita criteria required by the Tree City standards.

The Manager agreed and went on to say Keene has been a Tree City for 44 years and that record is only exceeded by the Town of Durham, which has had the designation for 45 years. She indicated she would like Duncan Watson Asst. Public Works Director to outline the efforts the City is already undertaking with regards to an inventory of street trees in the City. There is a project in the capital plan that is being proposed for some forestry management as it pertains to our parks. The Manager continued she is interested in expanding this program and discussions have covered whether there should be more funds in the operational budget for the planting and removal of dead trees.

Asst. Public Works Director, Duncan Watson addressed the committee next. Mr. Watson the City barely makes it over the finish line to be considered a Tree City and also agreed the City trees in large part are stressed and are hurting. Over the last few years, the City has been mostly a haphazard and reactive approach – it spends most of the money on tree care not tree planting. Mr. Watson stated in conjunction with this meeting, staff met with the Conservation Commission. The City is starting to address some of the issues outlined. He noted the City is actively conducting a City tree inventory which will allow the City to have an active tree program.

Mr. Watson continued there are City trees in the right-of-way, but there are also City trees on private property. It has been a long-standing practice that if a private property owner requested a tree and there was a tree available, it would be installed, but not much thought was given to its ongoing maintenance. Many City trees are reaching the end of their life span and they are being stressed by climate change and invasive species. The tree inventory will allow them to develop the protocol and specifications necessary to have an active tree program through a future operating budget submission. Kurt was the tree warden and that too needs to be addressed. Within the last 18 months, we treated some of the ash trees that were stressed due to the emerald ash bore, some were too far gone, but some seems to be a stabilized a little bit, but this is really a drop in the bucket to maintain these incredible valuable resources in a more purposeful way.

Councilor Roberts stated he likes the idea of the partnership to address this item. He talked about the trees he has around his house and during the summer months he doesn't use air conditioning due to these trees. These trees also block out noise on Grove Street, helps with carbon reduction etc. He felt the community needs to be educated more about the benefits of trees planting.

Councilor Lake thanked the Commission for bringing this item forward and noted that Maple Avenue is going to look a lot different in a few years as those trees are getting to the end of their life and he felt it would be good to see a plan formulated for those trees. He felt the plan Manchester has for tree sharing seems very reasonable (50%) share. The Councilor asked that the City look into a similar plan for Keene. With respect to the inventory the City is pursuing he asked if there was a timeline for completion and what it would look like moving forward to maintain this inventory. Mr. Watson stated the inventory should be completed sometime this spring, and the inventory is being added into the City's Asset Management system and this is how it will be managed going forward.

Councilor Chadbourne stated she is happy this item was brought forward by the Commission. She noted on her street on one block (ten houses) they have lost three trees in the last two years.

She indicated on Washington Street the City established a permeable sidewalk as a testing area and in doing so lost a few trees. She indicated she had raised this issue with staff as perhaps going back to what the sidewalk used to be and bringing those trees back. The Councilor stated there is a lot of pride in this community when it comes to the quality of life and the relationship with nature. She stated she was disappointed in how little has been invested for trees in the City and she hoped this was an opportunity to change that direction.

Councilor Remy stated there is Account 523730 Tree Planting and there is Account 523720 Tree Maintenance. He noted the overall program is substantial and asked for clarification of the two accounts. Mr. Von Plinsky apologized that he failed to mention the \$40,000 which staff had indicated was for tree maintenance; noting that the bulk of that money is reactionary. The Manager added mostly the City is removing trees and addressing issues as they come along. She added due to staff's conversation with the Conservation Commission trees are being looked at as an asset and she felt they were moving in the right direction.

Councilor Chadbourne referred to the area on Washington Street she previously referred to and asked how this area can be changed to plant trees again. Mr. Watson stated staff will be looking at these type of issues with this program. He added he is involved in the downtown project and any tree that is healthy and can be saved will be saved, but there will be quite a few trees that will be removed but the plan is to plant a tree similar in size.

Chair Powers asked whether the permeable surface referenced by Councilor Chadbourne is a deterrent to trees. Mr. Watson answered in the negative. Councilor Chadbourne stated what she was told the permeable surface was providing too much water for the trees and was drowning the trees. Mr. Watson stated because there has not been a good tree program in the City, figuring out what tree should go where has not been evaluated properly, but the goal of the program would be to make sure the right tree is planted in the appropriate location.

Councilor Chadbourne made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Remy.

On a 5-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the report be accepted as informational and the City Manager be directed to consider the recommendations as part of the upcoming budget and capital planning processes.

6) Cemetery Master Plan - Parks, Recreation and Facilities Director

Parks, Recreation and Facilities Director Andy Bohannon stated this item is with respect to completing a Cemeteries Master Plan. He indicated Monadnock View Cemetery is an active cemetery in the City. He noted the front area is the location for future use. It has been expanded as much as possible and is filling up fairly quickly. A cemetery master plan will also give the City the opportunity to make sure it is compliant and keeping with other communities of similar size. Mr. Bohannon noted there is funding available through the Cemeteries Trust Fund B, which has a healthy balance. He added he has been before Trustees of the Trust Fund and the plan is go back before the Trustees regarding this issue once the new Cemetery Superintendent has got a chance to get settle in his new role.

The Chair asked whether the analysis will only concentrate on Monadnock View Cemetery. Mr. Bohannon agreed and added most of the other cemeteries have been accounted for by families.

Councilor Lake made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Remy.

On a 5-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the expenditure of up to \$65,000 in the Cemetery Trust Fund B – Capital Reserves be authorized for a professional services contract to create a Master Plan for Monadnock View Cemetery.

7) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 6:58 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker