

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CITY COUCIL
WORKSHOP MINUTES

Tuesday, June 11, 2024

6:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Bryan J. Lake
Jacob R. Favolise
Edward J. Haas
Laura E. Tobin
Michael J. Remy
Robert C. Williams
Randy L. Filiault
Philip M. Jones
Andrew M. Madison
Raleigh C. Ormerod
Catherine I. Workman
Mitchell H. Greenwald
Kate M. Bosley
Thomas F. Powers

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager
Rebecca Landry, Deputy City Manager
Don Lussier, Public Works Director
Brett Rusnock, Civil Engineer

Members Not Present:

Kris E. Roberts
Bettina A. Chadbourne

Jay V. Kahn, Mayor

Mayor Kahn called the workshop to order at 6:00 PM.

1) Introductions

a. City Manager

The City Manager shared a handout with updates, questions/answers, and the draft regulations for downtown bike lanes. She recalled that there was interest in bringing a group of stakeholders together to consider what sort of regulations might be needed in the downtown for the new bike lanes proposed in the downtown redesign. The Committee has been meeting for a couple of months and drafted these regulations, which will be going to the Municipal Services, Facilities, & Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee for further discussion. After this workshop, the project would go back to MSFI on June 26 for a final recommendation before the Council's final vote on July 18.

b. Councilor Greenwald, Chair of the Municipal Services, Facilities, & Infrastructure Committee

Councilor Greenwald thanked the MSFI Committee for its work on this project over the past year. He also thanked City staff for their help, from whom he emphasized that there was *no* heavy handedness, manipulation, or personal agendas. He thought the consultants from Stantec had done a good job and listened to the Committee well. He said that other Councilors attended the MSFI meetings or spoke with him and Councilor Filiault outside of meetings to provide input. He thought the MSFI Committee had listened to all public comments. Councilor Greenwald thought the MSFI Committee's work to reach this deadline should be commended. He felt that the design before the Council was the result of a lot of compromise and he thought it was very close to the initial design approved by the Council, with a lot of refinement.

c. Public Works Director

Don Lussier, Public Works Director, said the purpose of this workshop was to recap the previous 3 months of work during public workshops and MSFI meetings. Having heard from the public and MSFI Committee, this workshop was the opportunity for any discussions, concerns, or questions about the direction of the project, to be incorporated in the final MSFI deliberation and Council vote. Mr. Lussier was happy with how the plans were coming together. When this portion of the iterative project concludes, the City will immediately launch the final design, which is when the finer details (e.g., colors of street treatments and sidewalks) will be determined.

2) Phase II Preliminary Design Alternatives

Mayor Kahn welcomed project consultants from Stantec: Ed Roberge, Dave McNamara, and Bob Corning. They presented on the main 4 project areas: Main Street, Gilbo Avenue, Railroad Square, and Central Square. Mr. Roberge provided an introduction before reviewing the project areas. He recalled that there had been public workshops and public comments at the MSFI meeting, so the process was open to the public along the way, and the public informed this proposed preliminary design. He recalled that in August 2023, the City Council selected a preferred alternative for this multimodal corridor, bike lanes were incorporated, and other details were agreed upon. Mr. Roberge said this had been a collaborative process and he felt that public input influenced the MSFI guidance.

Mr. Roberge discussed parking, which was an important issue to many in the community. Before the redesign, there were 239 parking spaces downtown, and 240 spaces were proposed in this preliminary design; after the project, there would still be 14 accessible spaces, which is more than required (10). While there were adjustments to the parking locations, parking was maximized where possible. Mr. Roberge also discussed trees, which were clearly important to members of the public throughout this process. Before the project, there were 157 trees

downtown. This preliminary design called for removing 63 trees and transplanting 18 (to proper locations with the help of the Public Works Department). In addition to the 75 remaining trees, 145 new trees will be planted. So, at the end of the project, there will be 221 trees downtown (might not start as 12-inch caliper). Mr. Roberge also mentioned that the consultants were mindful in developing this preliminary design to include 59 bike racks (3-bike or 6-bike) throughout the corridor.

a. Main Street

Mr. Roberge described the preliminary design of Main Street while showing a digital model to the Council. He reiterated that the consultants took a lot of time to inventory, analyze, and maximize opportunities for trees along Main Street. Further, importance was placed on creating opportunities for the trees to thrive. Creating a better downtown environment will create better trees for the future. Mr. Roberge showed an example concept plan for a section of Main Street (Church Street to Roxbury Street). He showed bike lanes on the plan and how they were distinguished from the sidewalks. He also showed the existing, licensed sidewalk cafés.

Mr. Roberge continued, summarizing the MSFI-preferred design of Main Street that the Council will have to consider:

- In general, on-street angled parking would be maintained.
- There would be a buffer between the bike lanes and sidewalks.
- In some areas, the sidewalks would be widened.
- An elevated crosswalk across Main Street from Railroad Square to Gilbo Avenue.
- Two lanes of traffic in each direction would be maintained.
- A center median wide enough for greenspace and trees.
- Left turn lane from Main Street to Emerald Street.
- Prohibit vehicle access from Lamson Street.
- Prohibit left turn from Main Street to Railroad Street.

Mr. Roberge recalled many public comments at the MSFI meetings about how bike lanes would be safely separated from the sidewalks. To ease this concern, he showed aspects that could be incorporated into the final design, such as crossing lanes that would separate the bike lanes from the sidewalks, in addition to “stop” and “yield” elements.

Mr. Roberge demonstrated a 360-degree visualization tool to better envision these design elements compared to existing conditions. For example, you can visualize the proposed gateway arches going from Main Street to Railroad Square and Main Street to Gilbo Avenue. This tool is now live on the project website.

b. Gilbo Avenue

Next, Mr. Roberge described the MSFI-preferred design of Gilbo Avenue:

- There will be 47 standard and 1 accessible parking spaces after reconstruction (compared to the existing 49 standard and 1 accessible. Including EV charging stations).
- The new parking spaces would be angled and under a new large, covered pavilion, with the opportunity for solar panels on top that could power many of the downtown electrical needs.
- Maximized sidewalk flexible use space
- He showed the proposed area for the Farmer's Market under the pavilion and noted that the public were interested in how this space would be used. Mr. Roberge listed examples, like arts or a major event.
- Improvements to redefine the Cheshire Rail Trail throughout the corridor, such as painting the trail (inspired by Arts Alive).
- He showed an area of enhanced landscaping, as well as a public bathroom, seating nooks, plantings, an archway (from Main Street), and improved lighting.
- Maintain parking spaces on Gilbo Avenue at Main Street.

Mr. Roberge demonstrated a 360-degree visualization tool to better envision these design elements compared to existing conditions.

c. Railroad Square

Mr. Roberge described the MSFI-preferred preliminary design for Railroad Square:

- Will add 1 parking space in a section of parallel parking.
- Improvements to support large events, including a temporary stage.
- A shared use path, a shade structure, a gateway arch to the Cheshire Rail Trail, flexible seating, plantings, and improved lighting.
- A bioretention swale for stormwater management.
- Bike facilities to the north with a shade structure.
- An opportunity for flexible use space for food trucks.
- Mr. Roberge showed a visual that depicted railroad ties painted on the pavement as a nod to the history of the space.

Mr. Roberge demonstrated a 360-degree visualization tool to better envision these design elements compared to existing conditions.

d. Central Square

Mr. Roberge described the preliminary design for Central Square and the MSFI-preferred alternatives:

- 2 southbound through lanes and a left turn lane from Central Square to Main Street, and 1 lane to West Street.
- Maintain a similar U-turn movement.
- Maintain 2-lane operation at the top of Central Square between Washington Street and Court Street.

- Multilane operation from the north of Central Square to the southbound lanes.
- The existing, historical elements of Central Square would be maintained, but the flagpole position would change.
- Modern traffic signals.

Mr. Roberge recalled how important it was to the public to maintain the history of Central Square. So, the consultants considered traffic signal design and traffic operations. Maintaining the U-turn lane was clearly important to the public and MSFI Committee. A left-turn lane would be added to allow a different movement, which would require a slight adjustment to sidewalks to avoid a lane overhang issue.

Mr. Roberge pointed out several things related to traffic at the top of the Square. One is an attempt to calm traffic with raised crosswalks across Washington Street and Court Street, as well as at the top of the Square to enter the center Common. There was also a focus on the City's efforts toward traffic calming. One MSFI preference was a 3-lane section southbound from the Court Street approach. There would be an option for through movement, a dedicated left turn lane, and 2 southbound lanes (as opposed to the 1 existing). The same 2 lanes along Washington Street and 2 lanes at the top of the Square would be maintained.

Mr. Roberge demonstrated a 360-degree visualization tool to better envision these design elements compared to existing conditions. Importantly, the sidewalk cafés would be moved from the edge of the sidewalks abutting parking to against the building frontage. Also, the Central Square greenspace would be much wider, including additional width for emergency vehicle movement. Two lanes would be maintained approaching Central Square from West Street and one right turn lane from Central Square to West Street. Further, improved and modernized traffic signals will enhance efficient traffic movement through Central Square. There would also be expanded plaza space to accommodate festivals or the Christmas tree.

Councilor Greenwald added that the MSFI Committee discussed the sidewalk to be able to walk around the Common. There would also be more news at the June 26 MSFI meeting about a new fountain and more.

3) **Design Decisions**

Next, the consultants explained the design decisions the Council must make and took questions from the Council. Councilors also shared their preferred design alternatives.

The Council needs to make the following design decisions for Main Street:

1. Left turn lane from Main Street to Emerald Street.
 - MSFI preference to maintain left turn lane. Results in relocating the crosswalk to the north.
2. Vehicle Access to Lamson Street.

- City staff, the design team, and MSFI agreed that this access is not preferred.
 - Results in added parking in that corridor.
3. Left turn lane from Main Street to Railroad Street.
 - The initial design restricted this movement, but the Fire Department requested that the Council consider a different option—a mountable island so emergency vehicles can pass through the area and get to Railroad Street easily if needed. The design team and MSFI agreed with this option.
 4. Streetscape character.
 - The MSFI Committee considered existing trees, movable tables, a base design with seat walls, and more flexible open space.

Councilor Remy referred to an example shown of the bike path that listed the material as asphalt instead of concrete. He stated his strong preference for the bike path to be the same material as the sidewalk so that if the bike path is unused in the future, it could be converted to sidewalk. Still, he hopes the bike path will be well-used.

Councilor Williams understood Councilor Remy's point but thought the bike lane should be very visually distinctive and asphalt would accomplish that. He questioned whether there was another way to accomplish Councilor Remy's goal. Mr. Roberge agreed that differentiation would be important for all zones: bike path, sidewalk, landscaping, cafés, etc. Bituminous material could be used for the bike path, for example, or the bike path could be painted. Typically, Stantec recommends bituminous material for bike paths.

Councilor Powers wanted to ensure that additional maintenance issues are not created unintentionally by using a particular material, like painted concrete. Mr. Lussier replied that maintenance would be required no matter what material. There is no such thing as maintenance-free infrastructure. That said, the City might have to maintain asphalt every 15–20 years, whereas painted concrete would likely need maintenance annually due to winter plowing. So, there would be maintenance and cost long-term either way, but operationally, he preferred a larger cost every 15–20 years vs. an annual project. Councilor Remy said his intent was that if in the second year it is clear that the bike path is well utilized, then a different texture could be added; if after 6–8 years the path has been repainted multiple times, it could be worth the investment to repave. Mr. Lussier mentioned a thermoplastic paint application, which is more expensive but lasts longer. Councilor Remy said his intent was for the City to have an opportunity to evaluate what treatment is best based on how the path is used before applying a unique texture or paint. He suggested that initially, the bike path should be concrete, which is the same material as the rest of the sidewalk, while still clearly differentiating the path from the sidewalk.

Councilor Tobin said she saw about a dozen bikes along Main Street the day before this meeting. She sees more and more people riding bikes. There is even an aspect of community involvement in the bike safety program at the Recreation Center. She felt confident that the bike path would

be used because the public asked for it. She thought it would be inefficient to go back after 1–2 years and redo it.

Councilor Filiault recalled that this topic was discussed by the MSFI Committee, and he thought there was agreement. He agreed with Councilor Remy in hoping that the bike path will be well used, which would surprise some Councilors. He recalled that the bike path would only be accessible during certain times of the year, so he thought using the same material initially would make more sense. Still, he agreed with Councilor Williams that the bike path should be distinguished from the sidewalk in some way.

Councilor Williams also felt that the bike path would be well used because he also sees bikes regularly on Main Street. He favored bituminous because he thought it would be easier long-term maintenance. He thought it would be awkward for a future Council to decide to change the bike paths to sidewalks, because they would be a different material and were not designed to be sidewalks.

Councilor Haas thought that bituminous would be a smart choice, with consideration of reducing ongoing costs. If wanting to reclaim space for sidewalks in the future, people could walk on asphalt as easily as they walk on concrete.

The rest of the Council weighed in. Councilor Jones said that asphalt would be the best choice with the goal to keep costs down. Councilor Madison agreed with using bituminous asphalt, noting that it is as easy to walk on asphalt as concrete. Councilor Favolise agreed with using asphalt. Councilor Lake wanted to ensure that the best, longest lasting infrastructure is used the first time; he also thought the City could come up with creative ways to keep the bike path safe. Councilor Workman agreed with prioritizing materials with the greatest longevity (so, no paint), but she was otherwise in favor of the MSFI recommendation, so the bike path is the same height as the sidewalk and clearly differentiated from the sidewalk. Councilor Powers did not think it would be right to lay a sidewalk (larger than existing) that could cause trouble in the future, like water getting under the sidewalk and freezing, so he favored concrete not asphalt. Councilor Greenwald recalled the City's sidewalk standards that call for concrete because it lasts longer (despite higher installation costs) and can be marked with a broom brush finish, for example; he added that in theory, cyclists on the east side of Main Street should only travel north, and on the west side only travel south, and the Councilor was unsure if that would work.

Mr. Lussier asked what Councilors would think of an alternative to incorporate color into the concrete, which would not be reversible, but would address the constructability concerns (i.e., unevenness, etc.). He thought it could be a compromise.

Councilor Bosley said that based on Councilor Powers' and Mr. Lussier's reminder about winter plowing, she had new concern about using two different materials, which could also harm City equipment. So, she thought it was best to differentiate with another color.

On a show of hands, the majority of the Council was in favor of concrete bike paths distinguished with a different color.

Mayor Kahn changed topics and questioned the left turn access from Main Street onto Railroad Street and asked about a portion of the proposed design. Mr. Roberge said the Mayor was referring to arrows on the map that indicate a ramp-up of the roadway onto a raised crosswalk that is contiguous with the sidewalk before ramping back down. This was an attempt at making it safer for pedestrians to cross so many lanes of traffic. He thought data showed that use of that left turn was nominal and one of the least busy movements along the corridor. There is also the emergency vehicle access, which is important to maintain. Further, it would not be safe for vehicles to turn on that wide ramp structure. Mayor Kahn wondered about creating a slip lane, much like Emerald Street in the opposite direction, to allow for the left turn while protecting pedestrians. His rationale was that people traveling north to south scanning for parking often use the parking lot on Railroad Street or the Wells Street lot. So, he thought it would open more parking potential.

Councilor Bosley disagreed, noting how much she dislikes the turning lane from Main Street to Emerald Street because she regularly watches vehicles using the lane prevent traffic from moving through the inner lane. She did not support a left turn slip lane there or onto Emerald Street.

Councilor Haas thought that anything that removes traffic from the Central Square area is a good thing. He thought the left turn onto Emerald Street was needed because without it, vehicles would have to continue on Main Street and turn around. So, he supported a left turn onto Emerald Street but not Railroad Street. He noted how complex this corridor is for someone unfamiliar. Councilor Bosley said she was not suggesting to remove the left turn onto Emerald Street, just that she hates it and thinks it is inefficient. In a perfect world, she would have more roundabouts for intersections like these.

The Council needs to make the following design decisions for Gilbo Avenue:

1. Shade structure/solar PV supported structure over (perpendicular) parking spaces on Gilbo Avenue. Solar would support not only on-street lighting, but also potentially the EV charging stations. The perpendicular parking spaces could be pulled out closer to the street to accommodate more greenspace. City staff recommended maximizing the structure for multi-use opportunities and solar potential; MSFI agreed.
2. On-street parking at intersection of Main Street and Gilbo Avenue.
3. Gateway structure at entrance to Gilbo Avenue corridor.

Councilor Williams asked how much solar energy could be generated from the pavilion and what type, as well as the potential revenue. Mr. Lussier replied that for planning purposes, he reviewed the downtown energy use with the Highway Superintendent, Harry McKelvey. Mr. Lussier said that 50 mw hours per year are required to power all downtown lighting and

accessory uses. Revision Energy provided an estimate of \$115,000–\$125,000 to offset that load, so that was the goal. A system that size would easily fit on the proposed pavilion, and a bigger system could offset more. Still, staff suggested that the energy produced be tied to what is being offset. The City’s Energy and Climate Committee reviewed the plan early in the preliminary engineering study phase and they were very supportive of the idea; it should be an efficient and effective way to meet the project goals and the City’s overall energy goals.

Councilor Lake questioned the size of that solar array, noting that an associated grant might be open until August. The City Manager said she forwarded the grant information to Mr. Lussier and the two of them were considering the grant qualifications and timeline. Mr. Lussier added that the grant maximum would accommodate the size of solar array proposed and he wanted to pursue it. The grant might also be removed from this project and shifted to the Gilbo Avenue/Railroad Square project planned in 2026 to better meet the grant requirements.

Councilor Jones asked whether rain and ice runoff would be diverted toward Emerald Street or another important feature, like the Rail Trail. Mr. Corning said no, he assumed there would be a gutter system that would tie to the stormwater system on Gilbo Avenue. Mr. Roberge added that a part of this project is the extensive storm drain system throughout the corridor. Ultimately, he thought the area Councilor Jones referred to would probably continue down Gilbo Avenue, but with upgraded storm pipes. The consultants will strive to find a way to capture all the water and return as much as possible back into the ground before flowing down toward streams and rivers.

Councilor Workman said she agreed with all the MSFI recommendations. She recalled the Committee discussing the gateway structure and painting the pavement. She thought Stantec did a good job highlighting that painting the pavement would likely be a partnership with Arts Alive. However, she recalled MSFI agreeing that such aesthetic options should only be pursued if costs allow. She hoped to implore the community to find a cost-sharing partner for some of these options.

Regarding a gateway structure at the entrance to the Gilbo Avenue corridor and Cheshire Rail Trail, Mr. Corning noted that there was MSFI support. Mayor Kahn noted the high cost of such structures (from experience at Keene State College) and suggested a fundraising effort. Mr. Roberge thought that reserving space for a potential structure was the more important decision at this stage, so that the City could make that choice in the future.

The Council needs to make the following design decisions for Railroad Square:

1. Expansion of plaza space for public seating (MSFI preferred), lighting improvements, and gateway arch to Cheshire Rail Trail, which would be moved to the north, along the edge of the street, to make the actual plaza pedestrian only. The square would be expanded to the east to allow for Madame Sherri’s restaurant patio, and to incorporate more hard surface spaces for multiple uses.
2. Railroad Square design options:
 - 1 – Minimal,

- 2 – Maximum green space, or
 - 3 – Improving connection to Square.
3. Sustainable green infrastructure.

The images shown by the consultants depicted a painted railroad through the Square. Councilor Favolise wondered how the rest of the Council felt about that design choice; he was unsure about it. Councilor Bosley said her first reaction was questioning where the brick pavers had gone; she thought they were a gift to the City, which the City Manager confirmed. Councilor Bosley did not prefer the railroad motif and hoped the City would find a creative way to repurpose those bricks if removed. Also, the Planning, Licenses, and Development Committee often licenses portions of Railroad Square, and she wanted to ensure that Madame Sherri's patio would be accommodated. The City Manager said that the plan is to provide for the same outdoor commerce opportunities that we have in the other areas of downtown, to have the opportunity to license that space, and to deal with some of the current drainage issues. Chair Bosley was pleased to hear there would still be commerce opportunities. She also hoped for alternative art.

Councilor Williams thought that the history of Railroad Square should be acknowledged in some way. He was fine with the painted railroad. He agreed with Councilor Powers about selecting the appropriate materials that can withstand weather.

Councilor Filiault had no preference about the painted railroad. From experience, he did not recommend using bricks on Railroad Square due to weather; water gets between and under the bricks, freezes, and causes damage each year and in some cases, creates a more dangerous situation for pedestrians. He recalled other failed instances of trying to pave with bricks downtown. He thought that Railroad Square should be the same, durable material as the sidewalk and bike path.

Councilor Greenwald said that the images shown depicted a stamped concrete, which is unique from everything else the Council had reviewed. Instead of painted railroad ties, he suggested acquiring old ones that could be laid flush with the pavement, which would allow for plowing. Councilor Greenwald recalled a previous slide that mentioned a performance area, which he thought should be against the Local Burger building. He did not anticipate that the painted railroad would make it into the final design. While he did not think it would be possible to source them, Mr. Lussier said that staff were looking into antique railroad ties. He understood the Council's desires for Railroad Square to pay respect to the history of Keene. He would bring more details to MSFI.

Councilor Haas asked about a recommendation for a shade structure over the Rail Trail parking on Railroad street. Mr. Corning replied that the shade structure was not a MSFI-preferred alternative, and they instead favored maximizing the solar array on Gilbo Avenue.

Councilor Bosley asked about the location of the proposed stage. The City Manager said it would be a movable stage only erected during events. Mayor Kahn said he also suggested that any

electricity available for the stage also be available at the east side of the Square. He thought that would draw as many people as possible onto the Square as opposed to large crowds backing-up onto the sidewalk.

Councilor Williams said that if riding a bike down the bike path going east and wanting to go up Railroad Street instead of using the shared use path, there would need to be a ramp from the elevated bike path down to Railroad Street. It is a problem at present, so he asked for that to be incorporated. This is important for many in the community, like wheelchair users.

The Council needs to make the following design decisions for Central Square traffic:

1. Signal phasing: maintain similar traffic operations from Central Square to Main Street.
2. Main Street U-turn alternatives.
3. 2-lane operation at north of Square between Washington and Court Streets.
4. Multi-lane operation at north of Square to southbound lanes—MSFI preferred.
 - Staff and consultants recommended a single-lane operation from the north of the Square to the southbound lanes.

Mr. Roberge recalled the frustrations expressed by the public about the traffic from Central Square backing-up and blocking access to Winter Street and West Street. So, the consultants proposed painted “Do Not Block” boxes in the Central Square roadway; while many might ignore them, it would be enforceable by the Police Department. A two-lane (10-foot wide each) operation at the top of the Square would provide bypass capability.

Councilor Remy thought two southbound lanes made sense, if the left turn lane is very clearly distinguished, better than today. On the U-turn, he did not have a preference, despite using the current one regularly; it is great when looking for parking. He was concerned that a two-lane operation at the top of the Square would create conflict, as it does today because the yield off of Washington Street, so he said it would be like getting on and off the highway. That traffic could then conflict with those coming off Court Street. He thought one lane would fix that problem, so he supported a single lane at the top of Central Square. On the southbound lanes, while he supported two lanes, he mentioned challenges if someone coming off Court Street tries to get around a car in the Square to get to West Street, which can cause accidents, so he recommended narrowing that area.

Councilor Greenwald supported two lanes at Court Street because it is a way to go down West Street. At the top of the Square between Washington and Court Streets, he preferred 2 lanes; at present, he said it was more like 3 lanes and narrowing that down to 1 lane with cars backing out would be ridiculous. So, he thought it had to be 2 lanes at the top of the Square, with 3 lanes going south onto Main Street. Councilor Greenwald agreed that many use the U-turn lane to find parking. He agreed with Councilor Remy that good signage would help all of this. He said it was not mentioned, but MSFI discussed eliminating the traffic signal at West Street, which would

relieve a lot of pressure from Central Square; there was a similar discussion of a yield instead of a dedicated red light from Roxbury Street onto Central Square.

Councilor Favolise agreed that the top of the Square should be 1 lane because it would be safer for pedestrians and vehicles. He thought Councilor Remy described a double merge situation, with conflicts between traffic in Central Square and cars coming in southbound from Washington Street; there would be a similar situation at Court Street. He cited his own car accidents on Central Square. He also thought it was better for pedestrians to only have to navigate through 1 lane of traffic vs. 2 or more. He agreed that the U-turn is useful both for parking and for those visiting the east side of Main Street to easily reverse direction to go home on Lower Main Street; it also helps to keep that traffic out of Central Square, so he supported keeping the U-turn. Councilor Favolise did not have a strong preference for the other decisions.

Councilor Workman did not agree with the MSFI recommendation on the U-turn or the multi-lane operation at the top of the Square. She did not support a U-turn lane because she frequently has to travel in the left lane on Main Street and a U-turn lane impedes the flow of traffic, and cars trying to make the U-turn are often backed up because there is not an opportunity to enter the flow of traffic in the other direction. She said to make it greenspace instead. Next, Councilor Workman said she is passionate about only 1 lane at the top of Central Square because it would enhance pedestrian and vehicle safety. She said she counted at least 5–6 different things drivers must pay attention to in that small span of roadway—traffic merging, pedestrians, cars backing out, and more. She recalled that is 1 lane, it would be a 20-foot-wide lane that would still allow for parking in front of The Stage without impeding traffic. She also supported 3 lanes southbound.

Councilor Filaault agreed that this had been a project of extreme compromise for the MSFI Committee. He recalled the public feedback at the listening sessions and MSFI meetings, when the constituents talked a lot about the U-turn slip lane (in addition to the bike path). He said it should work better than it does today, because there would be a designated lane. Also, in talking with the engineers, he felt confident that the U-turn traffic would not be impeded by traffic southbound out of Central Square because of the modernized traffic signals. Almost everyone he spoke with agreed that without that slip lane, all of the U-turn traffic would have to go through Central Square, which would have a significant impact on that traffic pattern, not to mention the safety impacts of forcing more vehicles through those 5 crosswalks. So many vehicles are just looking for parking and should not be forced through Central Square. Regarding the number of lanes at the top of the Square, Councilor Filaault supported 2 clearly marked lanes at the top of the Square because the raised crosswalk will protect pedestrians better and better facilitate traffic flow, particularly during rush hours. Two lanes would also allow traffic to back out more easily. He thought it was a commonsense proposal. Councilor Filaault agreed with Councilor Greenwald that if the final vote on the whole project came down to 1 lane at the top of the Square, he would vote “no.”

Since the responses to the number of lanes at the top of the Square seemed mixed, Mayor Kahn asked for further input.

Councilor Lake supported 1 lane for most of the space between Washington and Court Streets because there would only be 1 lane of traffic feeding into that section vs. the 2 (or 3, to some) at present. If only 1 lane of traffic is entering the northern portion of the top of Central Square, he did not understand the need for the second lane until approaching Court Street, where there are backups at the crosswalk because of people crossing and cars stopping. He understood a separation of cars going to Court Street vs. West Street after the crosswalk (if provided enough space), but he saw no need for 2 lanes before that at the top of the Square. Councilor Lake also agreed with Councilor Remy that the drawings showed Washington Street having a straight shot into that northern lane, which seemed more problematic than it currently is.

Councilor Greenwald said there would be a lane going around the Square heading north from Lower Main Street and a lane for traffic going to Washington Street; so, he thought that accomplished Councilor Lake's point. Councilor Lake replied that his contention is that Washington Street should not be given its own dedicated lane entering into a spot where traffic will be crossing over to get to Court Street, causing a conflict, whereas he felt that a single lane would not. He imagined that the intention was a yield from Washington Street in to Central Square, but he said with an open lane in front of them, people would likely drive into that lane without yielding, which also poses a conflict on the crosswalk, because that would be the spot that drivers start trying to change lanes. Councilor Greenwald disagreed.

Mayor Kahn said that for 28 years, he drove from the College to Court Street, and as such, he felt that not allowing that traffic to move into an independent lane would cause significant backup in the Square.

Councilor Bosley thought that requests for a show of hands to determine consensus were premature. She thought the information shared at this workshop would help each Councilor to decide how they intend to vote. Mayor Kahn said that was fair. Councilor Bosley said that each Councilor was basing their judgement on the current pattern of traffic on Central Square. For example, Councilor Workman based her judgment of the U-turn on her dislike, while it is an existing jut-out at Church Street that blocks the right lane, causing the back-ups. Councilor Bosley said that removing that issue at Church Street would allow the 2 lanes to move and provide a completely vacant third lane. She felt it would operate properly. On the number of lanes at the top of the Square, Councilor Bosley said she regularly watches how the 3 existing lanes there operate and even with 3 lanes, she said drivers are terrified of what to do there; that fear often causes drivers to back-up in 1 lane, blocking access from Washington Street. She said the traffic pattern would change if only 1 lane vs. 2, and it would eliminate that back-up. Today's traffic patterns are not the same as they will be after this design. So, Councilor Bosley was not opposed to 1 lane at the top of the Square for pedestrian safety; she did not think it would be detrimental to traffic. Her concern was ensuring that emergency vehicles can get through Central Square.

Councilor Tobin recalled a comment that drivers would not come down Washington Street to travel to Court Street, and thus if there were 2 lanes, no one would use the right lane. She said there would be a very short window for drivers from Washington Street to stop before the crosswalk and then cross lanes and merge into traffic. Whereas with 1 lane, the vehicle would merge before the crosswalk with fewer distractions. So, Councilor Tobin supported 1 lane at the top of the Square.

Councilor Jones asked if the intention of the final design is to allow the Fire Department to travel anywhere south by going down the Washington Street side of Central Square and follow the traffic pattern around the Square. The City Manager said the Fire Department would maintain their same route. Mr. Lussier added that there were specific conversations with Fire and Police about the mountable area on the east side of Central Square—a suggestion from the Police Department—that will facilitate emergency vehicle movement even if there are other cars blocking the traffic flow in Central Square. Also, a 1-lane option would be 20 feet wide, which is deliberately wide enough so that even if a delivery truck was blocking a portion of the Square, emergency vehicles would still be accommodated.

Mayor Kahn left the workshop from 7:06 PM–7:11 PM.

Councilor Haas thought that the wide single lane at the top of the Square would accomplish everything needed, while also allowing for a much-needed wider sidewalk. He supported keeping the U-turn because it will keep traffic out of Central Square. He did not support the proposed rights-on-red (which were proven unsafe) from Roxbury Street into Central Square and from West Street onto Main Street, in part because there is low visibility around the buildings.

Councilor Greenwald suggested focusing on what seemed to be the primary issue of contention: the number of lanes at the top of Central Square between Court Street and Washington Street. He asked Mr. Lussier if there was a way to test the 1-lane operation by blocking one lane with cones, for example. Councilor Bosley still thought there would be the problem of 3 lanes entering Central Square, which would require modifying all of Lower Main Street to get an accurate representation of what that traffic pattern would look like at Central Square. She encouraged her colleagues to go and watch how the traffic behaves today. She said the traffic naturally zippers into 1 lane. Mr. Lussier said it would be very difficult to set-up an accurate and fair comparison without adjusting the lanes and signal timing, and more.

The Council attempted to determine consensus on the number of lanes at the top of the Square. All Councilors present were in favor of 1, 20-foot-wide lane, *except for* Councilors Greenwald, Powers, Filiault, and Jones.

Mayor Kahn sought a final count on whether to maintain the U-turn lane. Councilor Tobin was unsure because she was still considering how many drivers use that lane to cut-off cars in the other 2 lanes. Councilors Bosley, Remy (his mind was changed by considering how much of that

traffic would go into Central Square), Filiault, Williams, Haas, Jones, Madison, Favolise, Lake (because only 1 lane northbound), Greenwald, and Powers supported keeping the U-turn. Councilor Workman did not support a U-turn lane.

Councilor Favolise asked—knowing that the U-turn lane would encroach on the outside lane to some degree—whether the U-turn makes sense. Mr. Roberge explained that to make that that U-turn movement as safe as possible, part of the sidewalk would be removed to ensure the ability to make that turn without a full lane encroachment by a larger vehicle, for example. This is also why adding the small stacking lane would be important to have the capacity to make the U-turn safely. Also, the new traffic pattern timing (i.e., the traffic signals) could be modified to optimize the desired traffic flow.

Councilor Filiault asked if—in the future—the single lane at the top of Central Square could be redefined as two 10-foot lanes; would the State of NH allow that? Mr. Roberge replied that it would meet that minimal 10-foot width, but he encouraged considering future widening if that need is determined.

Mayor Kahn asked if a 22-foot lane was possible since there would still be 3 feet added to the sidewalk, and Mr. Roberge agreed that would allow for 2 lanes more comfortably. Councilor Greenwald said the MSFI Committee had already discussed removing a few feet from the north end of Central Square to accommodate the 22 feet if that is the will of the Council. Mr. Lussier said that if this is the will of the Council, he recommended taking the extra feet from the sidewalk instead of the north end of the Square because there are mature trees close to that curb line.

Councilor Filiault said the Council was talking about a multi-million-dollar project, one of the largest in the City's lifetime, so if the majority want 1 lane, it should be 22 feet so allow for 2 lanes if things change in the future. Thus, at the MSFI deliberation, if he sees that the majority want 1 lane, he will support it, but only if it is 22 feet wide, so the City is not pigeonholed in the future. After the contention over the past few years, he hoped to see the Council compromise on this final item. Mayor Kahn said Stantec had 2 weeks before the next MSFI hearing to develop this 22-foot option for the Council to consider.

Councilor Bosley thought the 22-foot single lane was a good alternative. As long as it is not striped, people will use it as a single lane. She referred to the jut-out at Church Street that she mentioned previously, noting that in a second look at the plans, she saw that it would remain in this design, so she asked whether that would create a pinch point in the traffic pattern because it blocks the empty right hand lane of traffic. Mr. Roberge replied that during analysis, because there is no definition of where vehicles should be. With new pavement markings, the confusion over lane use should not be as substantial. He agreed that at 5:30 PM, looking toward Central Square from Eagle Court, that inner lane is entirely empty. The hope with the new design and better signage, is that if there is a long queue heading into Central Square, the dedicated right turn lane onto Roxbury Street should help channel the traffic better. Councilor Bosley recalled an

earlier comment that cars stack at the exit to Court Street from Central Square, she thought the island there needed to be wide enough to keep 2 vehicles from stacking next to each other trying to enter Central Square. Mr. Roberge showed a comparison of the current island shape and the proposed, demonstrating how it would calm that competition, in addition to the raised crosswalk. Altogether, he thought the traffic would be calmed there. Lastly, Councilor wondered how her colleagues felt about eliminating the traffic signal at West Street. She thought it could create some confusion about who has the right-of-way, which could lead to pedestrians getting hurt; it would operate more dangerously, because those with a green light will assume right-of-way around the Square. Councilor Bosley also disagreed with Councilor Haas, because she loved the idea of a right turn on red from Roxbury Street and thought that drivers could manage it safely.

Councilor Powers asked if all traffic signals would be overhead and Mr. Roberge said yes, with mast arms. The consultants were still evaluating the potential of 2 slip ramps: from Central Square to West Street and from Roxbury Street to Central Square. The public feedback on whether those lanes should be signalized had been 50/50. The free movement should reduce the number of traffic signal phases, improving efficiency of the overall system. Still, there needs to be adequate sight distance for crosswalk safety. He showed how the curb line at the Roxbury Street slip lane would be adjusted to improve that sight line. There would also still be pedestrian signal heads at each of the crosswalks; the consultants were collecting more public input on their efficacy before the final MSFI deliberation.

Councilor Lake said that there should be a traffic signal from Central Square to West Street because, as Councilor Bosley pointed out, cars should stop for the crosswalk like anywhere else. He also did not think there should be a right-on-red from Roxbury Street into Central Square to ensure easy and safe passage of emergency vehicles.

Councilor Greenwald reminded his colleagues that bicycles would also be streaming across these intersections, which would only add to confusion. There would still be “walk” signals, but he noted that many pedestrians have confusion over when they have the right-of-way or must wait for a walk signal.

Councilor Tobin found it interesting that drivers seem to have confusion over right-of-way particularly at Central Square. For example, when she is at the crossing of West Street and Central Square—compared to all other intersections in the city—she has to wave on drivers who have a green light because they do not know who has the right-of-way. So, she thought it had less to do with driver trepidation as Councilor Bosley suggested. Councilor Tobin said there are also challenges crossing Roxbury Street from Central Square onto Main Street because of the right-on-red. Councilor Bosley said something to Councilor Tobin off-mic.

Based on these comments, Mayor Kahn suggested that the consultants bring more details on traffic signals at Central Square to the next MSFI meeting.

Councilor Remy recalled Mr. Roberge stating that changes to Central Square would better facilitate the Pumpkin Festival tower, but the Councilor did not think that space would accommodate the tower (56 feet wide), nor would the grass as it is quite heavy.

Mayor Kahn asked about lighting around the public restroom. Mr. Roberge said the space would be fairly wide open, and he showed where lighting would be as well as the proximity to the covered pavilion. There would also be lighting along the edge of the parking lot.

Councilor Tobin recalled advice to avoid clusters of the same tree species to help prevent diseases. So, she asked the consultants to ensure the various tree species are evenly distributed.

The Council needs to make the following decisions for the Central Square Common:

1. Raised crosswalk tables at the north of the Square, Washington Street, and Court Street.
2. Pedestrian flashing beacon signage at mid-block crosswalks (not the crossing in front of the Church for historical purposes).
3. Common improvements:
 - Minimal: Central Square features and circulation remain unchanged (except for opening up the bandstand with several additional panels of steps that just make it more accessible and more open for the performances).
 - Enhanced: Central Square features and circulation improved with added perimeter path.
 - New: Central Square circulation more direct to maximize greenspace. Includes repositioning the gazebo and some added features like an amphitheater.

Mr. Roberge said the preference of both the public and the MSFI Committee is the “Enhanced” option for central square treatments.

Councilor Powers asked that the Council and consultants keep in mind that there are 36 American flags on Central Square several times per year; they need a better base, but he asked the consultants to make sure they remain. Any changes along the edge of the Common would impact the flags.

Councilor Workman asked the consultants to consider whether there could be a flashing pedestrian crosswalk from Central Square to West Street.

Mr. Lussier thanked the Council for the helpful input and listed next steps:

- June 12: project website updated with visualizations
- June 26: final MSFI consideration
- July 18: Council vote on MSFI recommendation

- June 25: a series of meetings with downtown businesses on construction management and coordination at 10:00 AM, 2:00 PM, and 5:00 PM (likely at the Library; there will be a press release), as well as a survey on businesses' hours of operation, delivery times, special access needs, and more.

4) Adjournment

There being no further business, Mayor Kahn adjourned the meeting at 8:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katriona Kibler, Minute Taker
June 18, 2024

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