

City of Keene
New Hampshire

JOINT PLANNING BOARD & MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE
WORKSHOP
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, September 3, 2024

6:00 PM

Heberton Hall, Keene Public Library

Master Plan Steering Committee Members

Present:

Harold Farrington, Chair

Josh Meehan

Joe Walier

Leatrice Oram

Councilor Michael Remy

Cody Morrison

Sparky Von Plinsky

Juliana Bergeron

Kenneth Kost, Alternate (Voting)

Councilor Phil Jones, Alternate (Voting)

City Staff Present:

Jesse Rounds, Community Development
Director

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

Megan Fortson, Planner

Members Not Present:

Councilor Catt Workman

Elizabeth Wood

Alex Henkel, Vice Chair

Emily Lavigne-Bernier

Joe Perras

Mayor Jay Kahn, Alternate

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Farrington called the meeting to order at 6:10 PM and asked for roll call. Chair Farrington invited Councilor Phil Jones and Ken Kost to participate as voting members.

II. Minutes of the Previous Meeting – August 6, 2024

A motion made by Mr. Von Plinsky to adopt the August 6, 2024 minutes as presented was duly seconded by Mr. Walier. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Workshop (led by staff)

a) Review of Draft Key Themes

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner, gave a brief overview of the project for attendees who were not present at previous meetings. She noted that the project is currently in “Phase 1,” which is focused on updating the community’s vision for the future. Engagement efforts to date included a first community survey, which garnered 648 responses, interviews with key members of the community, a workshop that took place in May, and visioning sessions that were held throughout the summer and are ongoing. She explained that the results of the visioning sessions and the second survey regarding different future scenarios revealed that most respondents would like Keene to move towards the scenario called “Innovative & Intentional (Change²).” This is the scenario that includes the most change; however, there is a very clear consensus that people want to be in the middle of the scenario – in other words, they want change, but not extreme change.

Based on the public input received throughout the first phase, the consultant has identified six draft “Strategic Pillars,” or themes for the Master Plan, which are as follows:

- Pillar 1: Community Collaboration & Strategic Positioning
- Pillar 2: Housing Affordability
- Pillar 3: Economic & Business Development
- Pillar 4: Transportation & Regional/Neighborhood Connectivity
- Pillar 5: Workforce & Community Development
- Pillar 6: Environmental Stewardship & Climate (leadership) & Adaptation

Ms. Brunner explained that the majority of these pillars were discussed at the August 6 Master Plan Steering Committee meeting. At that meeting, the Committee was asked to discuss whether these are the appropriate themes and whether they should be re-worked or re-worded. The next step in the process is to further discuss the proposed pillars and identify action steps that can be taken towards achieving each of them. This will set the stage for the Future Summit on October 5, which is when the community vision will be unveiled and presented to the community,

b) Breakout Groups

Meeting attendees were separated into three breakout groups and each group was assigned two pillars to discuss. Ms. Brunner gave each group a sheet with notes related to their specific pillar that were taken during last month’s meeting. Each group was also given a worksheet and asked to write down at least five key action ideas related to their strategic pillar.

Report-out on Economic & Business Development (Theme #3)

Leatrice Oram did the report-out for this group and stated that key action areas discussed by her group included developing communication and support plans for neighborhood businesses; identifying industries of various sizes (small- to mid-sized) that align with Keene’s resources; investing in technological infrastructure to expand the potential capacity for remote workers; capitalizing on existing resources (such as the Dillant-Hopkins Airport) to make incremental

strides towards building/attracting businesses to the area. She noted that her group felt that this theme tied in closely with the Community Collaboration & Strategic Positioning theme.

Report-out on Housing Affordability (Theme #2)

Josh Meehan did the report-out for this group and stated that the key action areas his group discussed included performing an inventory of taxed/untaxed land in the City; creating a housing trust fund; and making zoning and other code changes related to parking, density, fire suppression system installation requirements, and mixed-use sites to help encourage development in Keene. He also mentioned potentially creating a specific housing concierge position that could be used to help guide developers in the area. He also mentioned the potential usefulness of social impact bonds. Another member of the group noted that while there is a lack of developable land left in Keene (“green fields”), there is a lot of potential for adding additional dwelling units on already-developed commercial sites, such as above existing big box stores in commercial shopping plazas or by converting surface parking lots to housing. The group discussed the need to create more housing options in Keene and not just rely on other towns to fill this gap/need.

Report-out on Community Collaboration & Strategic Positioning (Theme #1)

Councilor Mike Remy explained that his group felt that collaboration is already intrinsic to how the City of Keene operates. He went on to state that his group would like to see the development of housing in Keene to help financially support the services that the City provides. Additionally, the group discussed that Keene’s strategic position moving forward will need to answer the question of, “*Who do we want to be when we grow up?*” He also mentioned that the group would like to see purposeful/intentional population growth in the future and not just population growth for the sake of increasing the number of residents living in Keene.

Report-out on Environmental Stewardship & Climate (leadership) & Adaptation (Theme #6):

Sparky Von Plinsky explained that this group discussed prioritizing existing infrastructure and networks, including in already developed areas where transportation currently exists. In addition, the group brought up the idea of mitigating environmental hazards through the creation of public/private partnerships, ensuring that sustainable development is a priority, and preparing for emerging technologies (i.e. – smart buildings). For this group, the bottom line is that in order to attract young people to the area, the City needs to be designed to have amenities, such as bike lanes, lakes, parks, etc. Additionally, invasive species need to be controlled in public areas, such as at Pat Russell Park. An invasive species management plan and/or environmental stewardship position (and if not a position, then a partnership) would be helpful. Ms. Brunner noted that the City may be able to do a Flash Vote poll in the future related to invasive species.

Report-out on Workforce & Community Development (Theme #5)

Mr. Meehan stated that this group discussed matching training opportunities to available jobs; coordinating further between local businesses/employers and institutions of higher education to create these opportunities; creating a forum for neighborhood groups to meet together and flourish; and expanding the accessibility of childcare using emerging opportunities (such as home-based daycares) by removing regulatory barriers. Mr. Kost noted that it will be important to intentionally attract new populations to the area. Mr. Remy noted that skill-matching between jobs and available employment opportunities is a challenge currently faced within the community.

Report-out on Transportation & Regional/Neighborhood Connectivity (Theme #4)

Ms. Oram stated that the community may need to recognize the challenges associated with providing traditional public transit (e.g., fixed-route bus service) in a rural area where the demand does not justify the cost. Instead, attendees agreed on the need to encourage walkability by having parking at the rear of buildings and encouraging/offering more ride-share options or other solutions appropriate for rural areas.

IV. October 5th Future Summit

Ms. Brunner explained that the next phase of the Master Plan Process will start at the Future Summit scheduled for Saturday, October 5th from 9:00 am – 12:00 pm in Heberton Hall at the Keene Public Library. She noted that sign-up sheets are available to volunteer to serve on a “task force” related to each of the six pillars.

V. Fall Outreach & Engagement

Ms. Brunner noted that volunteers are needed for tabling a number of local events coming up, including the Keene Sentinel anniversary celebration on Saturday, September 7th.

VI. New Business

There was no new business to be discussed.

VII. Next Meeting: Tuesday, October 1st at 6:00 PM

VIII. Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Farrington adjourned the meeting at 7:52 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Megan Fortson, Planner
September 10, 2024

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner