

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONGREGATE LIVING AND SOCIAL SERVICES LICENSING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, September 24, 2024

6:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Andrew Oram, Chair
Medard Kopczynski, Vice Chair
Alison Welsh
Jennifer Seher
Tom Savastano

Staff Present:

Jesse Rounds, Community Development
Director

Members Not Present:

Ashok Bahl, Alternate

I. Call to Order: Roll Call

Chair Oram called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM.

II. Vote for Vice Chair

A motion by Ms. Welsh to nominate Mr. Kopczynski as Vice Chair was duly seconded by Ms. Seher and the motion carried unanimously.

III. Minutes of the Previous Meeting: May 28, 2024

A motion by Mr. Savastano to adopt May 28, 2024 minutes was duly seconded by Ms. Welsh and the motion carried unanimously.

IV. Unfinished Business:

Jesse Rounds, Community Development Director, thanked the Board Clerk, Corinne Marcou, for her work as there was no unfinished business to present.

V. Applications:

- A) **Continued CLSS-2024-14: Applicant, Samuel Lake, Executive Director for Keene Serenity Center, is requesting a Congregate Living & Social Services License for a Group Resource Center, located at 24 Vernon St., and is in the Downtown Core District and as defined in Chapter 46, Article X of the Keene City Ordinances.**

Chair Oram requested staff comments. Mr. Rounds said this was a continuation but that the Board would be resolving the issue of the 2024 license and voting for the 2025 license as well. He explained that the last time the Serenity Center was before the Board, it was inadvertently discovered that there was a minor permitting issue with a bathroom on the property. Now, Mr. Rounds said the bathroom, all inspections (including Fire), and this CLSS application were all complete.

Chair Oram welcomed the applicant, Samuel Lake, Executive Director of the Keene Serenity Center. Mr. Lake said he was glad to hear that if approved, the license would be for the whole of 2025, because it had been a rocky start to this process. He explained that the Serenity Center is a local nonprofit recovery community organization. It is a day program only, which he said is an oddity for this license because compared to other CLSS license holders, the organization does not provide housing; though he said he could direct those looking for housing to anyone willing to provide a spare room. Mr. Lake called it a rare program that offers harm reduction, recovery, coaching, and a lot of outreaches outside of the physical location at 24 Vernon Street (i.e., community engagement). The Serenity Center tries to be involved with every community organization that it can, such as the Greater Keene Homeless Coalition and the NH Harm Reduction Coalition. The Serenity Center also has a transportation program and a harm reduction program. The office at 24 Vernon Street is open Monday–Friday, 9:00 AM–5:00 PM, but there are evening groups and spaces are rented to external groups for AA and NA meetings.

Vice Chair Kopczynski said he remembered the Serenity Center’s history. Ms. Welsh stated that she appreciates the services that the Serenity Center offers that are a big help to the community. Ms. Seher said that she thought the neighborhood plan submitted with the application was really great and comprehensive, and she also appreciates what the Serenity Center does. Mr. Lake appreciated those comments.

There were no public comments.

Mr. Savastano said the application seemed complete to him.

Chair Oram asked Mr. Rounds if—since City staff were doing well to provide the Board with good summaries of the applications, making it clear that the applicants were meeting the three criteria for granting licenses—if the Board could motion to accept all three criteria together in the absence of objections. Mr. Rounds replied that it would be perfectly acceptable from the staff’s perspective, and he thought it would only be a change of practice, not a change of a Rule of Procedure (he later confirmed in the Rules). Vice Chair Kopczynski thought it was a good idea, noting that initially, the only model the Board had to follow was the Zoning Board of Adjustment, which is a completely different Board with completely different mechanisms. Over time, the Vice Chair thought it might be best for this Board to codify its formal practices that identifies as most effective, especially if it makes the process easier for applicants and City staff. The Board had no objections.

A motion by Ms. Welsh to accept City staff’s opinion that the three criteria for approving the application had been met was duly seconded by Mr. Savastano. The motion carried unanimously.

A motion by Vice Chair Kopczynski to approve Continued Application CLSS-2024-14 for the Keene Serenity Center Group Resource Center located at 24 Vernon Street was duly seconded by Ms. Welsh. The motion carried unanimously.

B) CLSS-2024-16: Applicant, for Becky Beaton, Executive Director for Hundred Nights, Inc., is requesting a renewal Congregate Living & Social Services License for a homeless shelter, located at 122 Water St., and is in the Downtown Growth District and as defined in Chapter 46, Article X of the Keene City Ordinances.

Chair Oram requested staff comments. Mr. Rounds said there were no issues with the Building, Fire, or Property & Housing Inspections. This was a license renewal at the new location. He said the applicant made some changes to their outreach plan that Mr. Rounds thought aligned well with the interests of the community, but that was at the Board's discretion.

Vice Chair Kopczynski noted that there was a change in the plan from gathering people a few times annually to attending the East Keene Group meetings, which the Vice Chair called a positive change. While he did not ask for a modification, the Vice Chair suggested adding contact information for their direct neighbors in the future as well: the condominium association, the furniture factory, and Southwestern Community Services workforce housing project. Vice Chair Kopczynski said those neighbors might not attend the East Keene Group meetings and therefore might not know the valuable work going on.

Chair Oram welcomed the applicant, Becky Beaton, Executive Director of Hundred Nights, Inc. at 122 Water Street, who had been in that position since April 2024. She had been making the effort to attend the East Keene Group meetings because she saw how valuable they were for neighborhood connection. She explained that the shelter itself was supporting 48 individuals on any given night and had been at capacity since opening. Unfortunately, they were turning people away, so the definite need was clear. Ms. Beaton supported the Vice Chair's recommendation to reach out even further to neighbors, explaining that she was in communication regularly with Southwestern Community Services as a community partner to ensure they are serving all community members. Vice Chair Kopczynski advised that if Ms. Beaton needs contact information for other neighbors or community partners, she could call Mr. Rounds or Ms. Marcou.

Mr. Savastano referred to page 1 of the neighborhood relations plan, under Who We Are, he quoted: "Our vision is a community where all people are equally valued and supported, where every individual in Cheshire County will have access to appropriate stable housing." Mr. Savastano asked if the shelter accepted referrals from outside of Cheshire County. Ms. Beaton replied that one requirement of being licensed through the State of NH is being a part of the "211 System," so Hundred Nights frequently receives calls from outside Cheshire County. However, she said the relationships being built are primarily within the City. She has a monthly meeting within the City of Keene and with other local community organizations. So, she said the majority of the individuals served are from Keene or Cheshire County, but the 211 System requires accepting individuals from outside of the County. Mr. Savastano asked if the 211 System is linked to Hundred Nights' funding. Ms. Beaton said yes. Mr.

Savastano said he was curious because the plan stated: “Our goal is to collaborate with the community to see, hear, and support those among us who are equally deserving of dignity...” Ms. Beaton said that generally speaking, it is not people coming into Keene because they reached out to Hundred Nights, but they had already come to Keene, and are now among us for the most part.

Ms. Seher said the neighborhood relations plan was much better than she remembered it in the past and she appreciated it. She quoted: “Identify opportunities to positively engage with our neighbors and community and establish a procedure to follow for any neighbor or community contact...” Seher asked if those procedures were already in place. Ms. Beaton replied that there is an email dedicated to neighbor communications, a process in place for phone call and email follow-up, and guests are participating in neighborhood events like a local clean-up day, and they are discussing how to support the adjacent section of the bike path, and more. Ms. Seher said those were good ideas and noted her connection to American House, stating that American House was interested in more connection and supporting Hundred Nights more in a neighborly way to work together on the bike path vision. Ms. Beaton said she loved that idea because none of the groups could accomplish that goal on their own. Ms. Seher said she would help put Ms. Beaton in contact.

Vice Chair Kopczynski said people talk a lot about homelessness, some of which is propaganda. However, he said that what many people are mad about is trash and debris. He said that not everyone congregating and leaving trash on the bike path are homeless or coming out of Hundred Nights, but they get blamed, and sometimes truthfully. So, he encouraged Ms. Beaton to work out a program—especially one that Hundred Nights could take ownership of and share—that he thought could be successful, reduce complaints, and increase acceptance of this population. Vice Chair Kopczynski stated that people only see through some strange lenses sometimes.

Ms. Welsh referenced a system for restorative justice plan in 2023 that Patrick Heneghan helped with. Ms. Beaton replied that this was a continuation of a prior plan with Mr. Heneghan and Hundred Nights guests and staff were still very involved with him twice monthly.

Chair Oram said he really liked the bike path idea that Ms. Beaton mentioned. He thought Hundred Nights would be interdicting a stereotype by getting involved, which he said was smart.

There were no public comments.

Vice Chair Kopczynski was glad Ms. Beaton was present but said that this would take a lot of work in many different directions. He thought about all the challenges developing housing and the goal to get those unhoused into housing. He added the need to work together on these issues, but he mentioned that many do not want to work on homelessness, and they want others to do it, which he said would never solve the problem; we will all need to work together with clear goals. He thought the bike path would be a good place to start; the effort could begin at Main Street to make it visible. Vice Chair Kopczynski said he regularly tells people that we cannot surrender the bike path and the parks, we have to participate in keeping them active, clean, and in the front of people’s minds.

Ms. Welsh asked if the City has an adopt a road program. Vice Chair Kopczynski was unsure if it still existed as it used to for cleaning up litter along roadways. He compared it to the annual Green Up Keene event that his son started. He noted that even in the classiest neighborhoods, there will be trash alongside

the roadways. Those are the things—like rehabilitating rundown homes and cleaning litter—that uplift neighborhoods. Without those efforts, Vice Chair Kopczynski said there can be a psychological impact, so others think it is okay to litter, etc., too.

A motion by Ms. Welsh to accept that Hundred Nights, Inc. met the three criteria for approving the application was duly seconded by Mr. Savastano. The motion carried unanimously.

A motion by Ms. Welsh to approve Application CLSS-2024-16 for the Hundred Nights, Inc. Homeless Shelter at 122 Water Street was duly seconded by Vice Chair Kopczynski. The motion carried unanimously.

- C) **CLSS-2024-17: Applicant, for Beth Daniels, Executive Director for Southwestern Community Services, is requesting a renewal Congregate Living & Social Services License for a homeless shelter, located at 139 Roxbury St., and is in the High Density District and as defined in Chapter 46, Article X of the Keene City Ordinances.**

Chair Oram requested staff comments. Mr. Rounds reported that the applicant could not be present. So, he advised the Board to continue this application until the October 22, 2024 meeting.

Chair Oram motioned to continue Application CLSS-2024-17 until October 22, 2024 Congregate Living & Social Services Licensing Board meeting at 6:00 PM in the City Hall 2nd floor Council Chamber. Ms. Seher seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Chair Oram asked—if City staff had found the application to be complete—that ... there is a requirement that the applicant must appear before the Board. Mr. Rounds said that was correct. Chair Oram said that otherwise the Board could have been efficient in a different way.

- D) **CLSS-2024-18: Applicant, for Beth Daniels, Executive Director for Southwestern Community Services, is requesting a renewal Congregate Living & Social Services License for a homeless shelter, located at 32 Water St., and is in the Downtown Transition District and as defined in Chapter 46, Article X of the Keene City Ordinances.**

Mr. Rounds reported that this was the same case as for Application CLSS-2024-17 above.

Chair Oram motioned to continue Application CLSS-2024-18 until October 22, 2024 Congregate Living & Social Services Licensing Board meeting at 6:00 PM in the City Hall 2nd floor Council Chamber. Mr. Savastano seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

VI. **New Business**

Mr. Savastano sought Board feedback on a letter he was considering submitting to the editor of the Keene Sentinel, as the City Attorney, Tom Mullins, suggested seeking their input. He provided copies

for the Board which he explained he used language from the City website to help with this draft. Mr. Savastano said his intention was to inform the public that this Board exists and that it is an outlet for the public to show its support different agencies or to express concerns about various issues. He noted past experiences with challenges navigating the City website or providing feedback.

Chair Oram thought it was a thoughtful idea because it was clear that either people do not know this Board exists or do not know the extent to which this board exists. So, he thought clarifying for the public would be helpful. Vice Chair Kopczynski said he agreed, stating his belief that one of the failings of how governments work is how they relate to their citizens. He questioned how to change those barriers and noted that the City had been working very hard on outreach, but this Board has a unique way of doing things. So, the Vice Chair thought greater education of applicants and the public would be beneficial. For example, he doubted anyone in the East Keene Group knew about this meeting, for better or worse. Ms. Welsh liked the letter.

Ms. Welsh thanked Mr. Rounds for the staff report, which she found helpful. The Board agreed. Chair Oram called it clearer and precise. He understood much of that was because many were in a renewal stage and it would be different for new applications, but he appreciated the focus and the new language to be more efficient.

Mr. Rounds noted that this would be his last meeting with the City and that he appreciated all the time the Board had committed to these community organizations. He hoped this Board would become a place for new ideas and cooperation. The Board would continue being led by Ms. Marcou, who had laid so much of the good groundwork, and the new Staff Liaison, Rick Wood, Fire Marshal/Building Inspector. The Board wished Mr. Rounds well and thanked him for his work to streamline things.

VII. Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Oram adjourned the meeting at 6:42 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katrnya Kibler, Minute Taker
October 1, 2024

Reviewed and edited by,
Corinne Marcou, Board Clerk