

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Tuesday, October 1, 2024**

**6:00 PM**

**Council Chamber,  
City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Alex Henkel, Vice Chair  
Councilor Michael Remy (arrived late)  
Joshua Meehan  
Elizabeth Wood  
Emily Lavigne-Bernier  
Joseph Perras  
Alexander Von Plinsky, IV  
Juliana Bergeron  
Kenneth Kost, Alternate (voting)  
Mayor Jay Kahn, Alternate (voting)

**Staff Present:**

Jesse Rounds, Community Development  
Director  
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner  
Rebecca Landry, Deputy City Manager

**Members Not Present:**

Harold Farrington, Chair  
Councilor Catherine Workman  
Councilor Michael Remy  
Armando Rangel  
Cody Morrison  
Leatrice Oram  
Joe Walier  
Councilor Philip Jones, Alternate

**1) Call to Order & Roll Call**

Vice Chair Henkel called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM.

**2) Minutes of Previous Meeting – September 3, 2024**

A motion by Vice Chair Henkel to adopt the September 3, 2024, minutes was duly seconded by Mr. Von Plinsky. The motion carried unanimously. Councilor Remy was not present for this vote.

**3) Outreach & Engagement Overview**

- A) Review of Outreach & Engagement Activities to Date**
- B) Recap of Recent Tabling Activities**

Ms. Brunner led a presentation on Master Plan activities to date. She mentioned that City staff had been tabling at events throughout the community, including the City’s Ward Optimization Weeks (WOW), and she said there had been great feedback. City staff also met with a couple of different groups, including residents of the Hundred Nights shelter. Ms. Brunner described the meeting with shelter residents as a great conversation, noting that she was a bit blown away by how passionate the residents at the meeting were about Keene; specifically, most of the residents at the discussion were lifelong residents, meaning they were born and raised in Keene. They each—all unprompted—shared their housing stories that included a lot of great input. Ms. Brunner summarized that there was useful feedback about how the City could better serve its residents in a memo she shared with the Committee. City staff also met with the Mayor’s Youth Council and students self-selected into groups to talk about the different strategic pillars identified in this Master Planning process. Staff were in the process of scanning and sharing the community comments from tabling events with the project consultants. The consultants will be typing the comments up, which will then be sent to the Committee. Ms. Brunner explained that a focus on safety stood out to her in the community comments. People mentioned safety is a reason they love Keene or safety is something they think Keene needs to improve on. Many also talked about the importance of having amenities in their own neighborhoods. She stated that having parks to walk to was an example of an amenity community members conveyed was important to them. Other tabling activities included the Sentinel’s event on September 7 and the International Festival and Clean Energy Fair.

Mr. Meehan thanked City staff for having the conversation with the guests at Hundred Nights, which he said was important. He stated that one of the values they had been trying to uphold as part of this process is talking not only with people who elect to provide feedback within surveys online, but also reaching people who will be profoundly impacted by the Master Plan but might be more difficult than others to reach for their feedback.

Mayor Kahn said that this was the second time the Youth Council had participated in a Master Planning conversation, and he thought this time was enlightening because they had pillars to discuss and group themselves into. He was also interested in seeing the Hundred Nights memo and asked Ms. Brunner to share it with the Committee. He said the shelter residents were an important focus group. Mayor Kahn also spoke about a tabling event at the Monadnock International Festival that Ms. Brunner set up and attended for three hours. Mayor Kahn stated Mr. Meehan and himself had tabled at the event afterward. Mayor Kahn also noted that he was struck by how many people were new to Keene, which he said was nice to see.

**4) Review Draft Key Themes / “Strategic Pillars”**

Next, Ms. Brunner reviewed the draft “Strategic Pillars” that the Steering Committee and Staff had been working on over the past few months of workshop-style meetings. Staff and consultants had developed draft language for the pillars using the Steering Committee’s feedback. She sought the Committee’s input on the drafts before they would be presented at the Future Summit.

She showed the matrix framework that was used in the Think Tank workshop in May when the community was asked to consider various possible future scenarios. The four quadrants in the matrix included “Innovative and Intentional Change2,” “Growing Older; Growing Smarter,” “Keep On Keeping On,” and “Thoughtful Community Based Innovations.” Specifically, the feedback in the matrix that Ms. Brunner showed included the expected future in green, preferred future in blue, and least preferred future in red. Overwhelmingly, the consensus for the most preferred future was in the middle of the top right quadrant, and the expected future was in the center of the matrix. Then, Staff and the Steering Committee identified key themes within those future scenarios. Ms. Brunner presented a diagram prepared by consultants regarding the preferred future, “Innovative and Intentional Change2,” developed at the Think Tank. Based on feedback collected up to August, consultants identified six key themes. Then, Staff asked the Steering Committee if anything should be changed, and Ms. Brunner showed what notes came out of their discussion.

Ms. Brunner continued, explaining that the themes identified by consultants include: (1) community collaboration & strategic positioning, (2) housing availability and affordability, (3) economic & business development, (4) transportation & neighborhood/regional connectivity, (5) workforce & community development, and (6) environmental stewardship & climate adaptation. Next, Ms. Brunner presented two stages of edits and the most recent, revised future scenario title and key themes based on feedback from the Steering Committee. The preferred future was re-named “Regional Magnetism: Collaborative approaches that generate innovative change,” after the term “magnetism” was used by Mayor Kahn at one of the workshops. One of the themes from the Steering Committee and outreach in the community was an emphasis on regional collaboration, and that Keene is the center that draws people in. Ms. Brunner stated this is not finalized, but a step closer to what the final version of the “preferred future” diagram will be. The pillars, or key themes, around the title had also been refined based on feedback from the Steering Committee in September. The pillars are as follows:

- Livable Housing – Expand enticing housing options for all.
- Thriving Economy – Grow a dynamic economy of the future that spans local to international.
- Connected Mobility – Build local and regional connectivity, transportation, and recreation networks.
- Healthy Community – Support vibrant community neighborhoods that reflect their unique identity.
- Adaptable Workforce – Foster a future-ready, abundant, and adaptable workforce.
- Flourishing Environment – Champion environmental stewardship and climate action.

Ms. Brunner stated that the visual diagram would also include the underpinning values of sustainability and collaboration.

Ms. Brunner sought Committee feedback on the changes.

Mr. Von Plinsky said he was pretty happy with the new language, particularly underpinning sustainability and collaboration. While he said everything Ms. Brunner showed was important, he thought sustainability and collaboration should be the solid foundation of everything else listed and subsequent decisions made.

Dr. Perras commended the staff and consultants for their impressive progress on this since his last attendance.

Mr. Kost agreed that the diagram looked nice. He reflected on the recent hurricane impacts on the southern U.S. and the “Flourishing Environment” Strategic Pillar listed. He thought about the potential for devastating floods in Keene that could change the City in a moment. He said it would be good to capture that aspect of Keene’s environment and really focus on stormwater. Mr. Kost was unsure how concrete the concepts Ms. Brunner displayed would become in the Master Plan, but he believed this issue would need a lot of attention in the Master Plan because it impacts everything else: development, land use, housing, etc.

Mayor Kahn spoke to Mr. Von Plinsky’s point, stating that the central pillar of Regional Magnetism would also be focused on collaboration and sustainability. The Mayor thought the diagram began to capture the difference between the best outcome and the most likely outcome, and that people are looking for *sustainable* change—not just *change*. He thought that “Regional Magnetism” starts to take on the common elements in the Strategic Pillars. Regarding safety issues and the “actualizing parts” of the community’s desires, Mayor Kahn said the safety component does not show up currently in this version of the diagram. He stated that community safety (e.g., health and educational institutions) is a key component, and he did not want to take it for granted as an important part of the community’s lifestyle.

Councilor Remy agreed that safety is an important concept and could fit under many of the Strategic Pillars, so he thought it would be good to make that clear somehow. He stated that if the concept of “safety” were to be included in the environment pillar, the concept of “environment” could extend beyond the natural world and also include our “living environment.” He stated that he likes the buckets (key pillars) as they are right now; however, he could go either way on the concept of pulling “safety” out on its own or solely acknowledging that it is connected to all the other pillars.

Next, Ms. Brunner reviewed the next steps in the Master Planning process. These Strategic Pillars would be reviewed at the Future Summit on October 5th, which is the transition from Phase 1 (Visioning) to Phase 2 (Implementation). She displayed a schematic of what would occur during Phase 2, when the actual Master Plan will be written. During the October 5th Future Summit, Task Forces will be formed for each Strategic Pillar to develop specific action items; for example, Mr. Kost’s mention of flooding could be an action item. Specific ideas had already come from the community, and those ideas would be summarized in a Vision Report on the City website (emailed to the Committee after this meeting). Ms. Brunner stated a handout, including an overview of each pillar and feedback from the community, was distributed to the Committee.

The October 5th event will connect the vision with the Pillars. The period of October–December 2024 will include a lot of consultant research on case studies and best practices, forming the Task Forces, and launching online discussion boards and the project website. The period of January–February 2025 will include Task Force meetings and establishing goals for each Strategic Pillar. Then, there will be a community survey to confirm/test those goals and strategies developed through the Task Forces. The consultants and Staff will work on the implementation matrix for each pillar to build out the Implementation chapter of the Master Plan. During April–May 2025, there would also be a process for the Future Land Use chapter, using ArcGIS StoryMaps. Ideally, Ms. Brunner said the Master Plan would be ready for the adoption process by July 2025.

Ms. Brunner sought Committee feedback on the proposed approach for phase two of the Master Plan process.

Mayor Kahn recalled a recent conversation during the Planning Board meeting, after which he and Chair Farrington discussed the need for data to inform this Master Planning process. Mayor Kahn felt that in this process so far, the goal setting had been grasping at ideas that were not grounded in data. He thought that at some point, a different consultant would come into this process to presumably offer that information, which he said would be important. Returning to the concept of the Master Plan in Keene being a regional idea, Mayor Kahn stated that the region Keene is attracting its workforce from is not just Cheshire County, which he said was well tapped out. He stated if Keene wants to fill positions and be a regional magnet, the City needs to stretch its boundaries, which he thought was happening. He said Keene needs to define its boundaries, because no one else would define multistate boundaries. He stated Keene and Cheshire County is 6% of the population of NH, but the City is drawing from a region that is much larger than the 74,000 people in Cheshire County.

Mayor Kahn referred to Dr. Perras' knowledge of the topic.

Dr. Perras stated that He provided some context. Every two weeks, Dr. Perras orients new employees at Cheshire Medical Center for 30–45 minutes. He stated there is a mix of new hires from outside of Cheshire Country, those who grew up here, and those who left and are coming back. He explained that if a line was drawn 100 miles around any direction from Dartmouth Hitchcock Lebanon, there would be 17,000 healthcare jobs available, 5,000 of which are nursing. He stated there are about 20,000 people in NH are actively looking for work. He said that Cheshire Medical Center is always looking well beyond Cheshire County to fill positions. Still, based on these experiences, Dr. Perras said there is something special about Keene that keeps bringing people back.

Ms. Lavigne-Bernier said that the period between October–December, like Mayor Kahn had stated, seems like the time in which more data would come in through case studies, numbers, and facts. Ms. Brunner answered in the affirmative. She clarified there will be consultants from three firms working on the Master Plan process, in which one consultant will be assigned to each Task Force. The consultant will be tasked with researching specific key-pillar topics. She stated there

will be an opportunity in that time frame to request specific information the Committee is looking for. Consultants would also be developing the Snapshot Report, which does not look at the broader region that Dr. Perras mentioned Keene is drawing its workforce from, but rather compares Keene to NH and national statistics.

5) **October 5 Future Summit**

Ms. Brunner reviewed the upcoming Future Summit agenda, which would begin with a presentation from the consultants on the entirety of the Master Plan project to date. Then, an 18' x 16' map of Keene would be displayed with materials, such as colored Legos, yarn, sticky notes, and tape. The materials would be associated with a key to mark neighborhood centers, transportation corridors, parks, among other amenities. Then, there would be consultant-facilitated breakout groups for each Strategic Pillar before returning as a full group for a report out.

Vice Chair Henkel opened the floor for comments from the Committee.

Ms. Wood asked if there would be a way to display the large map during the Pumpkin Festival the following weekend so community members could see it.

Ms. Brunner stated that she was unsure if Staff will be tabling at Pumpkin Fest. Discussion ensued about who might be available to facilitate tabling, , whether a large photo of the map could be used, and other ways the community might interact with it during the festival. Ms. Wood placed emphasis on interacting with the map as a more approachable way for people to engage with the Master Plan process compared to a facilitated working-session.

Deputy City Manager, Rebecca Landry, mentioned that the Revenue Office on the first floor of City Hall has large glass windows along the ramp going up to City Hall. This area could be used to display the map, pending facilities permission. She suggested getting creative to collect feedback from the public, potentially with a QR code.

Councilor Remy noted that the City was also invited the participate in Trick or Treating with downtown businesses. He stated Trick or Treating could be a good opportunity to draw people into a booth that also has the map displayed for a few hours, if a member of City staff is available. The businesses participating in the Trick or Treat event put a sticker in their windows to be included on the Trick or Treat map. Councilor Remy suggested a City table could be included on the map. Ms. Wood suggested that the City's booth could hand out candy with a QR code on the back for feedback on the Master Plan map.

6) **New Business**

None presented.

7) **Next Meeting: Tuesday, November 5 at 6:00 PM – to be confirmed.**

The regular November meeting date would conflict with the General Election. The Committee was hesitant to skip a monthly meeting. The Committee was open to meeting on a Monday instead and proposed November 18. Ms. Brunner would be in communication to confirm.

8) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Vice Chair Henkel adjourned the meeting at 6:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker  
October 8, 2024

Reviewed and edited by,  
Emily Duseau, Planning Technician