

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONGREGATE LIVING AND SOCIAL SERVICES LICENSING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, October 22, 2024

6:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

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

Staff Present:

Rick Wood, Fire Marshal/Building Inspector

Members Not Present:

Alison Welsh
Ashok Bahl, Alternate

I. Call to Order: Roll Call

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

II. Minutes of Previous Meeting: September 24, 2024

A motion by Vice Chair Kopczynski to adopt the minutes of the September 24, 2024 meeting was duly seconded by Chair Oram and the motion carried unanimously.

III. Unfinished Business:

No unfinished business was presented.

IV. Applications:

- A) **Continued CLSS-2024-17:** Applicant, 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 City staff comments. Rick Wood, Fire Marshal/Building Inspector, stated that all Code and Fire inspections were complete, and the application was complete. Vice Chair Kopczynski asked if there had been complaints lodged against the property. Mr. Wood said there

were none he was aware of, adding that he visited the site in July. Vice Chair Kopczynski noted that he likes to have these things on the record.

Chair Oram welcomed the applicant, Beth Daniels, CEO of Southwestern Community Services, who said she had nothing new to add to the application.

Chair Oram opened the floor to public comments, and hearing none, he closed the public hearing.

Vice Chair Kopczynski said that from past experience, Southwestern Community Services are very good at communicating to the public, to the City, and to their neighbors. Hence why he wanted to ensure it was on the record that there were no complaints, noting that it is something the organization pays attention to. Vice Chair Kopczynski said he knew from years past that the facility had been well run, which is important. He asked if anything else had changed since the application was last reviewed. Ms. Daniels said that there had been some facility work including installation of a new ramp at the family shelter and new siding for curb appeal and to reinvest in the properties. Vice Chair Kopczynski said those were good things.

The Board considered the three criteria for approving the application.

The licensing board shall consider the following criteria when evaluating whether to approve, renew, or deny a congregate living and social services license application.

Criteria 1: *The use is found to be in compliance with the submitted operations and management plan, including but not limited to compliance with all applicable building, fire, and life safety codes.*

Criteria 2: *The use is of a character that does not produce noise, odors, glare, and/or vibration that adversely affects the surrounding area.*

Criteria 3: *The use does not produce public safety or health concerns in connection with traffic, pedestrians, public infrastructure, and police or fire department actions.*

Chair Oram said that the City staff report indicated that the three criteria for approving the application had been met. There were no objections from the Board.

A motion by Vice Chair Kopczynski to approve application CLSS-2024-17 for the Southwestern Community Services homeless shelter at 139 Roxbury Street was duly seconded by Mr. Savastano. The motion carried unanimously.

- B) Continued CLSS-2024-18: Applicant, 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.

Chair Oram requested staff comments. Mr. Wood stated that all inspections were complete, and he was unaware of any outstanding issues. Having personally visited the facility, Mr. Wood found it to be clean and well kept. He checked the record and found no complaints against the property in the previous few years. Chair Oram said the application and summary documents appeared to be complete.

Chair Oram welcomed the applicant, Beth Daniels, CEO of Southwestern Community Services, who said she had nothing new to add to the application.

Chair Oram opened the floor to public comments, and hearing none, he closed the public hearing.

Vice Chair Kopczynski noted that he was familiar with this site and changes made over time. He mentioned the neighbors: another congregate living facility, a private property owner, and a rental property that the Vice Chair said did not seem to be very well maintained or updated in a lot of ways. The Vice Chair referred to the rental property and asked Ms. Daniels if it had any less than desirable effects on Southwestern Community Services' operations. Ms. Daniels replied that she had not heard any feedback from her staff related to that property other than ensuring that the fence is intact and ensuring that the property boundaries are very clearly visible so that everyone is aware. Vice Chair Kopczynski said that in years past, there had been fairly raucous parties, etc., at that rental property, which was why he was curious if there were any challenges. Ms. Daniels reiterated that she had not heard about anything from her staff. Vice Chair Kopczynski said to let the Board know if she does.

The Board considered the three criteria for approving the application.

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Criteria 3: *The use does not produce public safety or health concerns in connection with traffic, pedestrians, public infrastructure, and police or fire department actions.*

Chair Oram said that the City staff report indicated that the three criteria for approving the application had been met. There were no objections from the Board.

A motion by Mr. Savastano to approve application CLSS-2024-18 for the Southwestern Community Services homeless shelter located at 32 Water Street was duly seconded by Vice Chair Kopczynski. The motion carried unanimously.

- C) **CLSS-2024-20: Applicant, Rhoda Jurkowski, Property Manager for Monadnock Affordable Housing, is requesting a renewal Congregate Living & Social Services License for a lodging house, located at 86 Winter St., and is in the Downtown Transition District and as defined in Chapter 46, Article X of the Keene City Ordinances.**

Chair Oram requested staff comments. Mr. Wood stated that the application was complete and there were no complaints against the property.

Chair Oram welcomed the applicant, Rhoda Jurkowski, Property Manager for Keene Housing; this lodging house at 86 Winter Street is one of the properties she manages. She had nothing new to add to the application.

Mr. Savastano stated that—as a neighbor—he personally really appreciated how the property was being managed compared to the past. He said that a few years prior, things were tough there, and changes Ms. Jurkowski implemented—such as moving the outdoor socializing space to the back of the property—had been very helpful to the neighborhood. So, Mr. Savastano thanked Ms. Jurkowski for her work. Ms. Jurkowski thanked Mr. Savastano for his comments.

Vice Chair Kopczynski said he was very pleased to hear Mr. Savastano’s comments because this property had issues as recently as a few years ago, including challenges with the City property next door. So, the Vice Chair said kudos to Ms. Jurkowski.

Chair Oram opened the floor to public comments, and hearing none, he closed the public hearing.

Ms. Seher noted that she had known both Ms. Jurkowski and Ms. Daniels for a long time. As such, Ms. Seher noted that Ms. Jurkowski is one of her favorite people in terms of providing housing and adapting to people in a person-centered way. Ms. Seher emphasized that it can be hard in neighborhoods, and she appreciated Ms. Jurkowski’s responsiveness, attention to this property over the years, and what she had done for people.

Vice Chair Kopczynski said that as these congregate living facilities are potentially constructed in neighborhoods, it is hugely important that any problem properties are improved and well-managed. The Vice Chair said that then, those that are improved—like this Monadnock Affordable Housing property—become a guiding light for others.

The Board considered the three criteria for approving the application.

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Chair Oram said that the City staff report indicated that the three criteria for approving the application had been met. There were no objections from the Board.

A motion by Ms. Seher to approve application CLSS-2024-20 for the Keene Housing lodging house located at 86 Winter Street was duly seconded by Vice Chair Kopczynski. The motion carried unanimously.

- D) CLSS-2024-21: Applicant, Peggy Winchester, Property Manager for Finch Capital, is requesting a renewal Congregate Living & Social Services License for a lodging house, located at 57 Winchester 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. Wood stated that this would be the first renewal for this property owner. He said there was only one complaint in the system for this property, but it was for the previous owner, and it was rectified within one day, so there was no problem.

Chair Oram welcomed the applicant, Peggy Winchester, Property Manager for Finch Capital, who said she had nothing to add to the application, stating that she runs a pretty tight lodging house at 57 Winchester Street.

Vice Chair Kopczynski noted that in this process, it is important for the Board and City to receive feedback from applicants on how this process worked for them. Ms. Winchester said it was a smooth process and all required inspections were complete. She said their fire system was having some issues, so it was being rebuilt and would be completed the day after this meeting. Vice Chair Kopczynski said he had seen many iterations of uses of this property and different owners, noting that the prior owner brought it up to speed and completed the initial Congregate Living and Social Services License well. Now, the Vice Chair said that Ms. Winchester was managing the property very well compared to when he was originally involved with it. Vice Chair Kopczynski was pleased this had been an easy process for Ms. Winchester, noting that this is about ensuring

that properties are safe and well managed, so he congratulated Ms. Winchester. Ms. Winchester thanked the Vice Chair, noting that it is not always easy with 12 kids living there.

Chair Oram opened the floor to public comments, and hearing none, he closed the public hearing.

Vice Chair Kopczynski said he thought the application was well done and that the property was well maintained. He thought it was achieving the goals that the City set out for when this Ordinance was created, so he was pleased. He felt that the improvement to the property was dramatic.

Chair Oram agreed, stating that he got the sense from the application that the house was being tightly managed, and he appreciated the context about the fire suppression issue that Ms. Winchester was handling immediately; it is the Board's public duty to ensure these properties are safe. Ms. Winchester explained further that the fire system was working and would suppress a fire but was not correctly sending the daily check-in signal. Chair Oram appreciated the details indicating that it was being handled.

Ms. Seher asked if/how Ms. Winchester was communicating with Keene State College campus safety. Ms. Winchester replied that she had not worked with campus security, but she had security measures in place at the lodging house (e.g., the doors lock automatically). She said that if anything happens, the residents have her phone number and call her immediately. They also have a group text, and the residents will report on each other if they are not doing things, like taking out the trash.

The Board considered the three criteria for approving the application.

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Criteria 3: *The use does not produce public safety or health concerns in connection with traffic, pedestrians, public infrastructure, and police or fire department actions.*

Chair Oram said that the City staff report indicated that the three criteria for approving the application had been met. There were no objections from the Board.

A motion by Vice Chair Kopczynski to approve application CLSS-2024-21 for the Finch Capital LLC lodging house at 57 Winchester Street was duly seconded by Mr. Savastano. The motion carried unanimously.

- E) CLSS-2024-19: Applicant, Trevor Grauer, COO for Keene Cribs, is requesting a renewal Congregate Living & Social Services License for a lodging house, located at 85 Winchester 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. Wood stated that the Housing & Fire Inspectors were on site the day of this meeting and everything was satisfactory. There had also been no complaints against this property during the licensing period.

Chair Oram welcomed the applicant, Trevor Grauer, COO for Keene Cribs, who had nothing to add to the application.

Vice Chair Kopczynski asked if things were working well at the property. Mr. Grauer said yes. The Vice Chair was glad to see that the property had improved over time.

Chair Oram opened the floor to public comments, and hearing none, he closed the public hearing.

Vice Chair Kopczynski said that again, this was a property that had significant problems in years past but now appeared to be very well managed, so he thought it was perfectly appropriate to renew the license.

The Board considered the three criteria for approving the application.

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Criteria 2: *The use is of a character that does not produce noise, odors, glare, and/or vibration that adversely affects the surrounding area.*

Criteria 3: *The use does not produce public safety or health concerns in connection with traffic, pedestrians, public infrastructure, and police or fire department actions.*

Chair Oram said that the City staff report indicated that the three criteria for approving the application had been met. There were no objections from the Board.

A motion by Mr. Savastano to approve application CLSS-2024-19 for the Keene Cribs lodging house at 85 Winchester Street was duly seconded by Vice Chair Kopczynski. The motion carried unanimously.

V. New Business

Mr. Wood sought any feedback from the Board on the updated staff reports. Chair Oram said that the reports had been a huge improvement, particularly for the renewals, and being able to proceed through the three criteria efficiently, having them essentially pre-approved unless there are objections from the Board. He felt the process was better organized and he appreciated the draft motion language.

Vice Chair Kopczynski agreed. He thought that perhaps the Board needed to ensure it asks about how the license holders/applicants are working with their neighbors, etc. He felt that a lack of complaints registered against a property would imply a lack of problems. Still, he said he was making a mental note to ask applicants, when they are present, because it was a hugely important factor when the City developed this Ordinance and when the original licensing occurred, especially with uses like homeless shelters, which some neighbors do not care for; communications can be very important and should be on the record. Vice Chair Kopczynski stated that the properties that were renewed at this meeting were “not the bad ones. They were the good ones from the standpoint of their operations and how they have turned things around.” He continued, noting that if a property had problems or complaints, the Board’s questioning might be different. Still, he said that all applicants went through the original licensing process and compiled their applications with the intent of making the renewal process as easy as possible so that they only need to discuss what might have changed during the past year vs. relitigating the original applications. So, Vice Chair Kopczynski said the staff reports were helpful.

Ms. Seher asked where the notes were in the staff report indicating whether anything had changed since the original application. Mr. Wood pointed it out under “completeness,” and whether any documentation changed. Vice Chair Kopczynski added that there could also be a change of ownership that might not be reflected under the change of documentation. He said those things are important to know because he wants to understand what makes quality management, so there is a basis for other applicants.

Mr. Savastano asked if there was a clear procedure on the City website for neighbors to raise concerns about any of these properties. Mr. Wood said yes, there is an online portal through the City of Keene website where people can lodge anonymous complaints or search any property in the City by address to see any history of complaints or if there are open complaints, including notes from staff. He said City staff had worked to improve that communication back to the complainant to let them know what happened for better communication using the system.

Vice Chair Kopczynski referred to the original CLSS applications that these license holders submitted, noting that their communications plan included things like inviting neighbors or the

public in annually for a meet-and-greet, etc. He said the Board wants to know that those are occurring as intended, but those are not the same as complaints, so Mr. Wood would not know if those engagements were occurring as planned without direct communication with the applicants. Chair Oram wondered if the Board should ask to address that at some point. Vice Chair Kopczynski replied that when the Board asks applicants if anything has changed during the past year, they can ask them to elaborate more on what they did to follow their communication plans. He said that importantly, these applicants spent a lot of time—and in some cases a lot of money—developing these plans that the City has integrated and kept on file, so for the long-range health of this licensing process, the Vice Chair thought the Board should be asking these questions; that the onus should be on the Board and not on City staff to follow-up. Ms. Seher agreed, citing Southwestern Community Services as a beautiful example of shelters that treat people as a part of that community who should be respected, which Ms. Seher said they can be proud of. Vice Chair Kopczynski thought that was true of the lodging houses too; even if their neighbors are other college students, he said that outreach and exercising the communications plans is an important part of an operation and marketing, if nothing else.

Chair Oram recognized Beth Daniels, CEO of Southwestern Community Services (SCS), who explained that there is a housing and homelessness crisis across the country, so SCS is always looking at the different types of housing, and said it takes being open to all kinds because we cannot solve the issue with just one way. She said these social service agencies have tasked the City with being open to looking at boarding houses, shelters, and alternative housing. She said this licensing process through the City had lent some legitimacy and provided a sort of structure to strive for that legitimacy. Further, she said it allowed for exploring other solutions to housing because the more City residents see the social service agencies being held to task—and being willing to be held to task—Ms. Daniels said it would open the conversation for other housing solutions down the road. So, overall, she thought this was a positive cycle, and that this Board and the City were lending legitimacy to everything the local agencies were doing by putting them through these paces, and she thought it would have other ways of paying off in the long run as well.

Ms. Seher added that she thought the nursing facilities might not have seen Ms. Daniels' perspective yet and might feel that this process is redundant with the State of NH processes, but Ms. Seher said it is different, so she appreciated Ms. Daniels' comments. Ms. Daniels agreed that this process is different than the State's licensure, as that the City's process focuses on abutters, community relations, and more.

Chair Oram thanked Ms. Daniels for providing him with valuable perspective. At certain times, the Chair said agencies had pushed back against this Board, which he said had been somewhat uncomfortable, and he had asked himself if the Board was putting those agencies through a process that was truly valuable to both them and the community. He said Ms. Daniels had answered that question for him in a way he did not know, which was beneficial, and he was appreciative. As such, Chair Oram felt more committed knowing that this was legitimately helping these agencies in some way.

Vice Chair Kopczynski said there was an ongoing shift in how the City relates to its neighborhoods. Of late, Mr. Wood had been visiting neighborhoods many evenings through the Ward Optimization Weeks (WOW!) initiative and Senior Planner, Mari Brunner, was working on the Master Plan update and community planning. Things were ongoing at the neighborhood level. In the past, Keene's community planning had been more so at the macro level, which the Vice Chair said works in some ways. However, at the neighborhood level, he said it was clear that the Water Street and School Street neighborhoods are very different, for example. Vice Chair Kopczynski said that this licensing process is a mechanism that the City thinks makes it possible for these congregate living and social service uses to fit in every potential neighborhood in the City, honoring the concept of neighborhoods and how these uses would fit into the neighborhood fabric because they will only work if they do fit. Ms. Daniels stated that whether it is neighborhood revitalization, housing development, or a shelter, the use must work with the neighbors. While it could be nerve-wracking, Ms. Daniels thought the other license holders would agree that this licensure was lending legitimacy to their overall processes, which would open further opportunities for them to find more solutions for community members in the future. So, Ms. Daniels thanked the Board.

VI. Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Oram adjourned the meeting at 6:41 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker
October 29, 2024

Reviewed and edited by,
Corinne Marcou, Board Clerk