

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, February 4, 2025

6:00 PM

Council Chambers,
City Hall

Members Present:

Harold Farrington, Chair
Alex Henkel, Vice Chair
Leatrice Oram
Joshua Meehan
Alexander Von Plinsky, IV
Joe Walier
Councilor Philip Jones, Alternate (Voting)
Kenneth Kost, Alternate (Voting)
Jay Kahn, Mayor, Alternate (Arrived at 6:19 PM; Voting)

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner (Remote)
Megan Fortson, Planner
Michael Hagan, Floodplain
Manager/Code Enforcement Officer
(Remote)

Members Not Present:

Councilor Michael Remy
Cody Morrison
Emily Lavigne-Bernier
Dr. Joseph Perras
Elizabeth Wood
Juliana Bergeron
Councilor Catherine Workman, Alternate

1) **Call to Order and Roll Call**

Chair Farrington called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

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

A motion by Councilor Jones to adopt the minutes of the December 3, 2024, meeting was duly seconded by Mr. Walier and the motion carried unanimously.

3) **Update on the Strategic Pillar Task Forces**

A) **Review of Draft Goal Areas for Each Pillar**

Megan Fortson, City Planner, provided an update on the Strategic Pillar Task Forces. She explained that over the two weeks before this meeting, the first Task Force meetings had occurred for each of the six Strategic Pillars. She said each one-hour meeting was well attended. Each Task Force received information on the data that had been collected to date via the survey, discussion boards, visioning

sessions; they also learned about demographic data and case studies related to each individual Strategic Pillar. After introductory remarks, the consultants sought feedback from the Task Force members. In conjunction with the consultants, Ms. Brunner used that Task Force feedback—along with all the other sources used to collect data throughout the course of this project—to create a short document (presented to the Steering Committee) listing the themes, objectives, and goals identified for each Pillar. Ms. Fortson said that moving forward, the Task Forces would each meet twice more during February and March to continue fleshing out each of the Pillars.

Ms. Brunner added that the document the Steering Committee received was a high-level summary of some of the emerging themes and goals that had developed from all the discussions to date. She asked the Steering Committee to review the lists and provide Staff with anything missing or any other feedback. She emphasized that these were not final, but more of a snapshot of where the discussion was at this moment. She said that when developing this handout, she noticed cross-cutting themes under multiple different Pillars that she found interesting. Ms. Brunner read the goal areas for the six Strategic Pillars:

1. Livable Housing: Boost infill development, remove barriers to housing development, encourage smart growth and housing that reflects community character, increase the diversity of housing types and price points, and address the housing needs of all residents.
2. Thriving Economy: Expand Keene’s industries, prioritize sustainability and resiliency, attract and grow businesses, strengthen Keene’s position as a leader, foster an inclusive economy, and expand the workforce. Ms. Brunner said that goal to “expand the workforce” might get moved to the Adaptable Workforce Pillar, noting how connected the two Pillars are.
3. Connected Mobility: Mari stated that some of these goals came from the survey and additional methods of engagement outside of the Task Force meeting. The goals are as follows: Maintain a comprehensive multimodal mobility network that is safe and accessible, aim to eliminate all traffic deaths and major injuries (for local roads), expand mobility options, promote environmentally sustainable transportation options, and improve local and regional connectivity to support economic growth.
4. Vibrant Neighborhoods: Support a built environment that encourages social connections and interactions, foster relationship building and collaboration, ensure safe and efficient movement around town (aligned with Connected Mobility), ensure a high quality of life for all residents, and cultivate a business-friendly environment.
5. Adaptable Workforce: Expand credential pathways, broaden partnerships and increase collaboration, meet quality of life needs and reduce workforce barriers (e.g., addressing the need for more childcare options), and prioritize workforce and community health and wellness.
6. Flourishing Environment: Proactively conserve and protect natural and agricultural landscapes; lead from the front and showcase the benefits of environmental stewardship; promote sustainability through eco-friendly policies, initiatives, and projects; embrace new technologies, strategies, and practices to advance sustainability goals; and leverage partnerships and collaborations to implement sustainability initiatives.

Ms. Brunner added that throughout all of the Pillars’ goals, there were overarching themes of public health and community well-being. There was also a large theme of accessibility related to age-friendly

policies and design. Mari continued by stating that a lot of folks have brought up that our population is aging, and anything that we do to improve accessibility will support that age group. She said that participants also continued to regularly mention education, civic engagement, sustainability, and resiliency. Chair Farrington welcomed comments from the Committee.

When reading about boosting infill development, it reminded Mr. Kost that the Steering Committee had a conversation about all the other areas in Keene that were already developed, underdeveloped, and areas of vast paving, like shopping centers and parking lots. He felt like infill was a desire, which to him sounded like houses-between-houses, yet the City had many of these lots that were acres of pavement ripe for development. So, in conjunction with the Flourishing Environment Pillar, he suggested adding a couple of words in the Master Plan about how to drive development in those areas as well; he thought it would be very important.

Ms. Oram thanked Ms. Brunner for reading these goals. Ms. Oram was unsure how much these topics were considered “emerging goals,” rather than “themes.” Ms. Oram said some of the language moved beyond “goals” (she would email Ms. Brunner in more detail). For example, Ms. Oram wondered if the Task Force discussed how rational or reasonable the topic of “addressing the housing needs of all residents,” or the others, would be for a 10-year plan. She thought it was unlikely that the City would address all the housing needs of all the residents in Keene in the next 10 years, so she wondered why the City would develop a plan for something it could not achieve. Ms. Oram said there were a few recommended goals from the Task Forces that seemed very lofty to her, and she was unsure of the background conversations. Ms. Brunner said it was a good point. Ms. Brunner continued by stating that in the process, the conversations had still been broad. The first focus group meetings were only for one hour, most of which consisted of the consultants introducing information. So, she thought the second meeting would be more conversational about the specifics, and she said that staff/consultants would be providing them with some guiding questions to ensure they touch on everything desired. Ms. Brunner explained that a part of the Steering Committee’s role would be to filter and screen the Task Forces’ feedback through the lens of what is within the City’s realm, what the City could partner with other organizations on, and what is completely outside the City’s realm. While many great ideas would spring from the Task Forces, the City could not be capable of all within a 10–15-year plan.

Under the Livable Housing Pillar, Chair Farrington said that helping to maintain or upgrade the existing housing inventory had been an acute need in Keene also discussed by other public bodies. For example, he spoke about the number of elderly residents in homes that they could not maintain. Additionally, Chair Farrington was surprised that there was no mention of the Dillant Hopkins Airport under the Connected Mobility Pillar. While it was somewhat addressed under the Flourishing Environment Pillar, Chair Farrington did not want to lose track of energy as a theme overall. Similarly, he did not want to lose track of target population in general, not necessarily under Workforce. Chair Farrington appreciated Staff’s effort and the useful summary.

Chair Farrington welcomed and introduced the new Community Development Director, Paul Andrus, who was in the process of moving to Keene from New Mexico with his family. Mr. Andrus said he was excited to be here, having grown up in the western NY area. He went to Southern University of NY

Binghamton and said he always intended to move back northeast to be close to family in NJ, NY, Boston, and Canada. He was also excited to be doing the really good work happening in Keene and was happy to hopefully add value and support to the table. Mr. Andrus brought 20 years' background in affordable housing, so he was excited to come to a community with a Housing Authority and development partner. He also noted what a hard-working group the Community Development Department staff are and how much pride they take in what they do.

4) Topical Presentations:

A) Keene Hazard Mitigation Planning – Kürt Blomquist, Emergency Management Administrator

Chair Farrington welcomed the City's former Public Works Director/Emergency Management Director (30 years; retired 2023) and the City Manager's current Emergency Management Administrator to discuss the City's local Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) and how it relates to the Master Plan. Mr. Blomquist explained that the City of Keene's HMP is a specialty plan, and it is a locally developed document that identifies potential natural and manmade disasters. While not a requirement, Keene added manmade disasters to its plan. The HMP identifies hazards Keene is subject to and assesses the risks associated with the hazards. Risks primarily mean the probability of an event occurring. For example, Keene is subject to earthquakes, but the risk of an earthquake is relatively low because they do not happen often in NH. Mr. Blomquist explained that as the HMP Risk Assessment identifies the disaster events that could occur in the City, it outlines long-term strategies for how to reduce the impacts of future events. In other words, the plan focuses on resiliency; The plan asks the question of how Keene can reduce the impacts of disaster events so the community can recover and come back to a new version of the way it was. The HMP is required by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and is supposed to be updated every five years. Keene's was last updated in 2018, so this update was late, but Mr. Blomquist said it took some time to get grant funding. However, the HMP is required for the City to receive certain FEMA public assistance funding when a hazard occurs to bring public facilities back online.

Mr. Blomquist reviewed the following HMP components: Hazard Identification, Vulnerability Analysis, Risk Assessment, Mitigation Strategy Development, Mitigation Actions (connected to the City's five-year Capital Improvement Program), Implementation Plan (outlines intersectional departmental responsibilities), Monitoring & Evaluation, and Community Engagement (e.g., surveys & public meetings). The final HMP must be adopted by the City Council. Next, Mr. Blomquist discussed that Keene is subject to the following natural hazards:

- Flooding:
 - Keene sits in a bowl and has six watersheds within it. Keene discharges to a very flat river, which is called the Ashuelot River.
 - An issue since special legislation was passed to straighten Beaver Brook in 1870.
- Drought:
 - A greater threat since 2016–2020.
 - Keene is currently in a moderate drought, which is related to climate change.
 - Issues with Keene's private wells that are going dry.

- Keene operates a water system. The two water supplies for Keene are Babbidge Reservoir and Woodward Pond in Roxbury, and four gravel-packed wells are scattered around the City on Court and West Street. Water conservation will need to be addressed.
- Extreme heat:
 - Mr. Blomquist thought this issue was being under looked, as heatwaves were lengthening. He noted that New England buildings were not designed for extreme heat, but rather were designed for the cold.
 - At this time, there were few large, air-conditioned gathering spaces in Keene in the event of needing to shelter people in the summer months.
- Wildfire
- Lightning strikes
- Tornado wind/downburst/severe wind:
 - Mr. Blomquist said these were increasing compared to his first decade with the City, especially more microevents. For example, there was a recent wind event that affected Tanglewood.
- Hurricane/tropical storm:
 - Flooding is a greater issue related to hurricanes and tropical storms. Mr. Blomquist recalled past impactful storms and said he thought that with climate change, the City would experience the side effects of these storms more.
- Earthquakes:
 - While the risk is very low, Keene is subject to earthquakes. He cited a recent 3.4-magnitude earthquake just off the coast of Portsmouth.
 - Mr. Blomquist said that as Public Works Director, he was always waiting for water main breaks because the earth has moved.
- Severe winter weather:
 - Severe winter weather is another high risk for Keene, along with flooding.
- Erosion/landslide:
 - Erosion and landslides are fairly high-risk hazards in Keene because areas become very steep as you move away from the urban center in the valley. Steep slopes, combined with drought and heavy precipitation, increase the risk of landslides and erosion.
- Hazardous materials spills:
 - This is an example of the manmade side of the HMP.
 - Four State highways converge in Keene and the City is a transportation hub, so the risk of a spill is higher.
- Dam failure:
 - At this time, Keene had five high-hazard dams: Robin Hood Pond, West Street Dam, Babbidge Reservoir, Woodward Pond, and the Three Mile Reservoir (built in 1985 for flooding on the eastside).

Mr. Blomquist continued by stating that some other manmade hazards the City was considering included cybersecurity and solar storms that could interrupt communications & emergency services. Those risks would be considered in the HMP.

Next, Mr. Blomquist showed an example of an Existing Protective Matrix that would come out of the HMP (column headings from left-to-right: Existing Program or Activity, Description/Area Covered, Department or Local Contact, Effectiveness, and Improvements or Changes Needed/Comments). These are existing programs/activities identified that would be protective or increase resiliency. The Matrix covers the various ordinances and programs adopted by the City to protect the community's health and human safety. In addition, the Matrix describes how the ordinances and programs fit into the overall strategy for mitigating hazards, the departments/individuals responsible for them, ratings of their effectiveness, and what things need to change over the next five years to improve them. He also showed an example of existing potential mitigation strategies used in identifying gaps in coverage for flooding to demonstrate how City Staff determine gaps in the current program. Additionally, Mr. Blomquist provided an Implementation Strategy example for flooding from the HMP with priority mitigation actions that also outlines who (leadership), when (deadline), and how (funding source & estimated cost).

Mr. Blomquist continued. For example, there are properties the City may consider acquiring because FEMA would likely not pay repeatedly for damage to the same structure, so Mr. Blomquist said FEMA's philosophy would be to buy someone out or buy the property before it is developed. So, he questioned whether the City should consider acquiring parcels like those along the Ashuelot River, just south of Tanglewood Estates, for example. In addition to identifying potential properties to acquire, as a part of this project, data was also being collected. For example, he explained that Beaver Brook is prone to flash floods, but there was no collection system to indicate how quickly the brook would rise as water would move through the City. A data collection system would be useful to be able to warn people or look at evacuation plans. So, information was needed to determine what additional monitoring equipment the City should have. Mr. Blomquist also spoke about the age of the City's facilities, such as the Martell Court Pump Station, which is also built in the floodplain next to the Ashuelot-Branch Rivers confluence. So, he said there could be considerations for making those facilities more resilient. There is a page in the HMP about actions the City could take to be more resistant to those events.

Mr. Blomquist concluded his presentation by explaining that the HMP pulls from a lot of other plans and ties into the Master Plan. The City must consider how the hazards it is subject to reflect on the places it wants to go. If the City were to build more in the rural area to densify, how would the risk of wildfires and erosion in those areas change? What could the City be doing to minimize those risks? He said the HMP looks at the directions the City wants to move in—as outlined in the Master Plan—and determines how to make those directions resilient to the events that occur there.

Vice Chair Henkel asked if there were any mitigation actions so significant that they should be incorporated as a part of the Master Plan. Mr. Blomquist said he did not necessarily view the Master Plan as a project plan. To him, the Master Plan had always been a high-level document on what the City wants and how it wants to accomplish that. Then, the HMP takes that direction and identifies how to make those areas more resilient. While a goal in the Master Plan could be for the community to be more resilient, an HMP provides the opportunity to become more specific about that resiliency. Mr. Blomquist provided an example of how one hazard, like a wildfire, could require the intersecting coordination and support of multiple City departments (Fire, Public Works, Police, Community Development, and more)

and community groups (medical, Eversource, and more). He said it would only become more challenging in the future.

Mr. Walier asked if there were things in place already in the City that could be prioritized and improved upon moving forward rather than starting over new. Mr. Blomquist said yes, that would be a part of the ongoing evaluation and use of the Protective Matrix he demonstrated. That is how the City evaluates how well it has been doing and how City departments identify projects that should be on the list to submit requests through the process; everything is ultimately driven by the Tax, Water, and Sewer Rates and Fees and what the community is willing to support. He said the HMP suggests how to prioritize things when there are so many hazards that it becomes challenging (e.g., the Fire Department wants three fire trucks, but Public Works wants \$1 million for culverts).

The Mayor asked and Mr. Blomquist confirmed that the HMP was at the end of its five-year cycle. Mayor Kahn hoped the update would be in place by summer 2025. He asked for a copy of the presentation. Mr. Blomquist agreed to provide the slides and share the current HMP.

Mayor Kahn stated that had a relative living where there was recently a hurricane in Asheville, NC. Based on what he had learned, the Mayor advised that Keene's HMP was missing a Communications section. Mr. Blomquist said there was a section, but he did not highlight it in this presentation. The Mayor said that when Asheville's internet went down, communications about how severe the localized or generalized impacts were could not reach hazard relief organizations. He said that at this time, Keene's resiliency is weak, with some places that are—in fact—communication islands or deserts, which he said needed to be addressed in the HMP and Master Plan. With various technological issues facing our nation, Mayor Kahn said it would be important for Keene to be on the front edge of communication resilience. Mayor Kahn thought that would be within the community's appetite. While "Communication" does not have a clear category in the Master Plan, he thought it affected every category in the Master Plan.

The Mayor also expressed again that Keene did not have a forward approach for how to attract climate refugees to Keene's climate resilient location. He believed that there was a case to be made about how resilient Keene's location is to natural hazards and he was unsure if this was a topic to cover in the HMP. He said it would have to emerge from the Master Plan to provide a path forward on population growth, which is one of the priorities this Steering Committee identified for the community.

Lastly, Mayor Kahn referred back to Vice Chair Henkel's comments about zoning. The Mayor questioned if the HMP creates zoning implications that lead to the Master Plan, or if the Master Plan creates zoning implications independently. Relative to zoning, this HMP could guide the City to the measures it needs to include to make more land available for development. He said that if the City stayed with its current developable land, it would reduce the amount of land for future development because of climate change. So, the Mayor said the City would need to look forward to how to maximize the land it had for zoning and development.

Mr. Blomquist addressed the Mayor's comments. On communications and connectivity, Mr. Blomquist said Keene is high risk at this time. While more towers are being built, these still have risks because networks are not local and alternative communications plans are needed for when they go down; in addition, businesses need continuity of operation plans. The HMP identifies these risks and vulnerabilities. Mr. Blomquist talked again about reducing the risk of erosion on hillsides by potentially limiting development in certain areas. The HMP is connected to the City's other planning efforts to guide decision making that will help the community be more resilient. Mr. Blomquist said these hazards *would* happen; he recalled 40% of downtown being underwater in 2005 and said it would happen again. He said these various channels exist to help people recover quickly, move through an event, and get their lives back together as quickly as possible. Mr. Blomquist spoke again about how the City's various plans, like the HMP and Master Plan, work together to reduce risks.

Ms. Oram said she understood mitigation to be about reducing (hopefully) the likelihood of the impact of a future disaster, whatever it may be. Having had an HMP in place for so long, she asked how the City accounted for its liabilities, like Brownfield sites, which would also be impacted by future disasters. Mr. Blomquist said it was a good question and that it went back to the risk, the vulnerability, the action that could cause something to happen, as well as what the City could do in the long-term that would reduce the Brownfield's impacts. He briefly commented on the history of Brownfields and that they are a result of learning from past decisions, citing manufacturing examples in Keene.

Mr. Meehan said this conversation was interesting because it made him think of what the Master Plan is intended to accomplish. It struck him that it was much like developing a strategic plan for the City. He was thinking about Mr. Kost's comments about infill, which were distinctly different than the discussion about using land differently on West Street, and then Mr. Meehan heard this presentation. Through all of that, Mr. Meehan cautioned about using so many nebulous terms of art so that it would result in a Master Plan that is not particularly useful to the City Council and staff. For example, Mr. Meehan said that Flourishing Environment is not necessarily the same thing as sustainability. He was worried about vague terms once the Master Plan is fleshed out that would make it hard to implement.

Mr. Blomquist followed up with an example regarding infill development. He said that sometimes, you must ask why properties remain undeveloped. For example, on the southeast side of Carpenter Street and continuing south, there are empty lots that look great for houses, but they flood during heavy rains. He said there were a list of properties the City had reviewed in the past that were wide open for development but when considering Zoning and Master Planning, he said there were reasons they had not been developed upon. Mr. Blomquist explained, for example, that the reason all the houses on Brook Street were on a hill was because those who built there knew of the basement flooding potential. All these risks and vulnerabilities must be taken into consideration when developing policies to minimize impacts later.

Mr. Kost followed up on Mr. Meehan's comments. Mr. Kost noted that there are rules for where development is permitted in floodplains and wetlands, though he imagined potential issues with people wanting to build in privately owned wetlands or floodplains. So, he wondered if the Master Plan could build in directives with a vision against building in those locations (i.e., recommending building on the

hillsides); except for private owners/developers. He suggested linking it to other City restrictions, as suggested, to provide more areas for stormwater absorption. Mr. Kost thought there was a lot that the City could do to take ownership of keeping people from building in unideal areas. Mr. Blomquist restated his opinion that the Master Plan is a high-level document, and he did not believe that the Master Plan should list specific properties. Rather, the Master Plan could list conditions to take into account. He said the Master Plan is a high-level document with guiding principles for the next 20 years. He did not encourage digging deeper into the specifics. Mr. Blomquist encouraged understanding the risks and how to minimize them. Mr. Kost said that there would be a Land Use Plan/Future Land Use Map in the Master Plan that would identify flood areas and wetlands, and he asked if that could be where the Steering Committee could specify what he was describing, not exactly what should go in those land areas. Mr. Blomquist said yes, and that section of the Master Plan should be reflective of high-risk areas.

Mayor Kahn asked when the updated HMP would be available. Mr. Blomquist said he anticipated it coming to Council for adoption in June 2025 and the Mayor said that timing would be interesting for this Steering Committee. The Mayor elaborated more on the communication difficulties in Asheville, NC, commenting on the business impacts; banks could not transact, and businesses could not use credit card machines. So, he said that is all a part of flood mitigation. Mayor Kahn also pointed out that if the City wants to grow, it will need to put boundaries on that. He said that began to address Mr. Kost's point about the interface of Zoning and risk compared to opportunity. Mayor Kahn questioned what the City's goal/vision for growth is.

B) Floodplain Programs – Mike Hagan, Floodplain Manager

Chair Farrington welcomed Mike Hagan, the City's Floodplain Manager & Code Enforcement Officer, to discuss the FEMA Community Rating System (CRS) program and flood map updates. Mr. Hagan began with some history. Keene has been participating in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) since 1983. The NFIP plays a critical role in protecting both homeowners and businesses from financial losses due to flooding. In the early 2000s, Keene opted into the CRS, which is a voluntary program that encourages communities to adopt higher regulatory standards. These higher standards help to reduce flood risks, improve resilience, and protect community property values. Thanks to Keene's participation in the CRS program, at the time of this meeting, the City was at Level 8, which helps participating homeowners to reduce their flood insurance rate. It is also more affordable than some other communities that are in the same risk category and same risk area outside of Keene who are paying \$3,000/year for flood insurance. Whereas flood insurance policies in Keene at this time were approximately \$1,200/year depending on the property and house. By participating in this program and having those high regulatory standards, Keene not only gains added resiliency, but also the reduced flood insurance rate on a yearly basis. Additionally, Keene qualifies for FEMA grants for properties that could be identified as at-risk that would help with Keene's resiliency and mitigate flood risks.

Mr. Hagan explained that the CRS is regulated by the flood insurance rate maps for Keene, which the City adopted on May 23, 2006. These maps are critical for determining flood risks and setting insurance rates for properties. On December 5, 2024, FEMA sent the City new preliminary maps and provided the City 30 days to review them. City Staff took their time to make sure the City's information matched and

did find some discrepancies. The City provided a large packet back to FEMA to try to correct some of those discrepancies.

Mr. Hagan described the next steps in the preliminary map change. As a part of that process, the City planned to host some public meetings in the upcoming months to encourage property owners to review the preliminary maps, provide feedback, voice concerns, ask questions, and engage in discussions about the potential impacts of the new maps. He said there were a lot of new properties identified in the floodplain, so Staff were reviewing how that would affect overall development in the area. If property owners believe there are inconsistencies in the preliminary maps, they would have an opportunity to file a formal appeal with FEMA. Mr. Hagan said the City's goal was to ensure that the updated maps were accurate and reflected Keene's flood risk, and that the property owners would have a chance to address any of their concerns. Additionally, at the February 20, 2024, City Council meeting, the Council would receive updates to the Floodplain Ordinance to allow for appeals and variances, which is a requirement set through the State of NH. If adopted, there would be a process for appeal by interpretation to the Zoning Board of Adjustment, or a variance, if someone feels the City has interpreted its Ordinance or higher regulatory authority incorrectly. Mr. Hagan concluded by stating that Keene remains committed to effective floodplain management through its participation in the NFIP and FEMA CRS program. This is a commitment that helps to protect the community by reducing flood insurance costs and providing access to funding for flood mitigation. The City was actively working with FEMA to address any of the differences in the flood maps and was encouraging residents to participate in the flood map roll out and review.

Mr. Kost asked where the maps would be available online and questioned if they would be available via FEMA or the City of Keene. Mr. Hagan said the Keene Communications team was putting together a full webpage with exact sites in which residents could search for their specific addresses on the maps to identify the changes. He said FEMA did a good job through a third party to roll out a good program compared to times in the past. The City hoped to have their webpage up by approximately February 10.

Mayor Kahn asked the end date of the 90-day appeal period. Mr. Hagan explained that there was a 30-day appeal period for the City and then the City had a community outreach meeting for staff participating in the NFIP to review the process. The 90-day appeal period had not started yet because it was pending all the feedback from Cheshire County, as not just Keene was getting the updated maps. Mr. Hagan expected to hear the beginning date of the 90-day period soon. This was why the City was developing its own separate website so all information would be available to the public.

All this information presented would be available to the Steering Committee via staff.

C) Housing Vulnerability Analysis – Planning Staff

Ms. Brunner led a presentation on the Housing Vulnerability Analysis that was conducted as a part of the Housing Needs Assessment that took place in 2023. Keene's existing housing stock has been and continues to be at risk of being lost or deteriorating in quality. To review housing resiliency in Keene, staff asked for this Housing Vulnerability Analysis, and the consultants looked at three specific housing

stock aspects: (1) properties directly in harm's way (floods), (2) the nature of those properties (condition and quality), and (3) houses in areas with a high concentration of households that may struggle to manage and recover from hazards. Data was used from the Assessing Department, such as whether the houses were in good, fair, or poor condition relative to other homes of the same age, or census blocks that may struggle to manage a hazard and recover from it afterward (e.g., seniors or low-income residents). Ms. Brunner showed a table displaying the various criteria titled "City of Keene: Housing Vulnerability Index Criteria and Scoring," which listed the various scores and weighting for flood vulnerability (located in FEMA Floodway, FEMA 100-year floodplain, FEMA 500-year floodplain, in area flooded in 2005, or in area flooded in 2012), housing condition (classified as poor or very poor, built prior to 1940, built 1940–1960), and socioeconomic demographics (located in High Senior Concentration Census Block Group, located in High Poverty Census Block Group, or located in Moderate Poverty Census Block Group). For example, flooding was weighted very high risk.

Next, Ms. Brunner showed the geospatial maps of the combined flood risks/hazards that included the Floodway, the 100-year Floodplain, the 500-year Floodplain, and the areas that flooded in 2005 and 2012. She also showed a map of the housing properties that intersect with previously flooded areas, a map of housing properties in census block groups with high concentrations of senior households, and a map of housing properties built prior to 1960. There were many more maps available online in the Housing Needs Assessment.

Ms. Brunner explained that the consultants layered all these maps to arrive at the Housing Vulnerability Index map and table. At this time, 6.4% of the existing housing in Keene was ranked high vulnerability, 15.9% was moderate vulnerability, and 77.8% was low vulnerability. She wanted to provide the Committee with this information before the next presentation to highlight that a lot of highly vulnerable properties in Keene tended to be clustered in similar areas and neighborhoods; subsequently, this information suggested that neighborhood-focused interventions or programs could be highly effective. Additionally, while most housing that ranked highest in vulnerability were single-family properties, many small multi-family properties were also found to be highly vulnerable. Also, a lot of the highly vulnerable houses were older than houses that ranked lower in vulnerability, suggesting that there would need to be strategies to account for both rental properties and homeowner-occupied properties.

Ms. Brunner concluded that overall, the Housing Needs Assessment found that between 4,230–4,560 households would need new, improved, or alternate living arrangements over the upcoming 10 years. A part of that would be an estimated need for 1,400 new housing units. She said a bigger part of that would be better utilizing the City's existing housing stock and investing in it, so it does not become obsolete over the next 10 years, which the City was technically already a few years into; 274 housing units were estimated to become obsolete and require replacement. The Housing Needs Assessment included a strategy at the end, with the second being to improve the condition, resiliency, and utilization of the City's housing stock. The first suggested strategy being to create a Citywide housing rehabilitation and resiliency program.

Chair Farrington asked if Ms. Brunner knew where the City stood against the estimated need for 1,400 new housing units. Ms. Brunner said she could get that data, noting that to meet that goal, the City

would need to add 140 dwelling units per year and had not been meeting that goal. Though, she thought there had been some movement toward that goal recently. Chair Farrington was curious as to how steady the City's progress toward the goal was, noting his firsthand experience with a lot of larger projects. Ms. Brunner said that in terms of what had been approved, she thought the City was doing okay, but in terms of what was being built, she thought it was a different story.

D) 21 in 21 Home Upgrade Program – Keith Thibault, Southwestern Community Services

Chair Farrington welcomed Keith Thibault, Chief Development Officer at Southwestern Community Services (SCS), to talk about the 21 in 21 program that SCS had been operating collaboratively with the City since 2021. He said the program had exceeded its goal of fully weatherizing and rehabilitating 21 homes, and that resources remained to continue doing so because not as much money was being spent on rehabilitation. The money was raised through the Community Development Finance Authority's (CDFA) Tax Credit Program, and Mr. Thibault said that SCS was greatly assisted by former Mayor George Hansel to raise those funds and turn those Tax Credits into cash for the 21 in 21 program. For context, Mr. Thibault said this was the result of him, Med Kopczynski (former City Manager and Economic Development Director), and Rhett Lamb (former Community Development Director), talking about the importance of the middle neighborhoods for the City, and how those neighborhoods had been sort of co-opted by Keene State College (KSC). In a larger sense, Mr. Thibault said this was a collaboration that had never happened before with this small social service agency, SCS, which had been running a very small weatherization program since the 1970s. The weatherizing program had assisted approximately 100 homes (low-to-moderate income) in Cheshire and Sullivan Counties. SCS is the local Community Action Agency.

Mr. Thibault said those middle neighborhoods in Keene are sometimes overlooked for new development but are a very important asset in the community and house a lot of diverse people. He said it would be important to identify those neighborhoods and what to do with them as assets in the Master Plan. Can the City find collaborators like SCS in those neighborhoods? He said SCS would ultimately work on approximately 35 homes and 20 properties throughout some of those neighborhoods in Keene that were the most difficult. He said that importantly, the City helped SCS to identify the proper neighborhoods to go to. City Planning and Code Enforcement together put SCS into neighborhoods of 50–75 properties and 50 homeowners. To date, SCS had gone through four neighborhoods. He said these would not be improvements someone would notice when driving down the street; weatherization is insulation underneath roofs or new heating systems that are energy efficient moving forward. This was a strategic approach to identify and invest in Keene's middle neighborhoods. Keene is unique, with over 5,000 homes within walking distance of downtown. So, Mr. Thibault stated that is a unique opportunity and statistics that should be invested in moving forward; for example, more than 5,000 people in single- and multi-family homes are in Keene who can walk downtown on any given day—festivals aside—and keep the shops employed. Mr. Thibault noted that an important ongoing focus in these diverse neighborhoods had been flood mitigation. For example, he said Water Street, River Street, and Brook Street had all been made more resilient over the years by various entities, which he thought was critical to the City of Keene. He said the City wanted to protect these neighborhoods and allow them to grow, as evidenced by

the planned Robin Hood Park Renovations, the Marlboro Street Corridor, and more. There had been a concerted effort to invest in these neighborhoods because they are vital economic drivers of the community. However, they are vulnerable as time goes on, too.

Mr. Thibault continued, stating that he thought 21 in 21 was a good attempt at a public-private partnership to put a positive light on the neighborhoods and show that the City truly wanted these neighborhoods to grow, thrive, survive, and continue to be an asset to the community moving forward. He added that his favorite things were Pat Russell Park at the center of the neighborhood and the recent demolition of the Findings (Wright silver polish) building. He also cited an example of weatherizing and rehabilitating the roof of a home on Carroll Street that would be impactful for the individual and make the home resilient in the future. Mr. Thibault spoke of there needing to be a larger climate of collaboration, stating that it could not only be the City, and citing the potential for involvement of KSC and private business, etc., to help ensure that neighborhoods are not overlooked (e.g., the Marlboro St. corridor). He wanted to ensure that Mr. Lamb and Mr. Kopczynski's effort—not forgetting about what is right here, right now—would be carried on. Mr. Thibault did not think the City had forgotten, but he encouraged even more private-public partnerships in the City's Master Planning for its middle neighborhoods. He thought it would pay off long-term. Mr. Thibault provided a little more history. In the beginning of the CDFA Tax Credit Program, 10 local businesses contributed immediately, anything from \$10 to \$100,000. He said the City of Keene had fleshed out and used this Tax Credit Program well over the years. C&S Wholesale Grocers had been a major investor in the Tax Credit Program.

Mr. Thibault also noted that there was an Eastside Neighborhood Association and suggested promoting other active neighborhood groups, so the City does not try to accomplish everything alone. He thought that more broad neighborhood coalitions would benefit the community at large. As a sidenote on climate resiliency, Mr. Thibault mentioned that statistically, the safest place in the United States is Storrs, CT, because it is not prone to natural disasters like floods, landslides, and earthquakes. He did not envy the Steering Committee in considering how to prepare for something largely unpredictable that it had been discussing, like solar storms. Mr. Thibault concluded by reminding the Committee that SCS was available to explore further collaborations with the City, as the agency supports all the communities it serves.

Mayor Kahn asked if Mr. Thibault was participating in the Eastside Neighborhood Association. Mr. Thibault said he was not at this time, but SCS would like to participate more formally in the neighborhoods it works in because it owns properties in so many of them. The Mayor noted that promotion and understanding of the 21 in 21 (2021) program was slow to evolve, with the program continuing into 2025. The program was still in the same neighborhoods and more than five years later, so the Mayor thought Mr. Thibault/SCS could add value to the Eastside Neighborhood Association and its direction into the future. Mr. Thibault said he would like to contribute to the Neighborhood Association. He thanked the Steering Committee for welcoming him.

5) New Business

Mr. Von Plinsky said the Steering Committee had talked about the dangers of building in floodplains. He wanted to drive home the fact that all the Steering Committee's decisions would have an impact, one way or the other. Developing upland is not in a vacuum; for example, houses on slopes or further up the hill, while they may not be in floodplains, will make future flooding events worse. So, as the Steering Committee moved forward with discussing areas to promote development, Mr. Von Plinsky wanted to ensure that it was not just considering how to keep everyone out of floods, but how to do that in a way that does not make the flooding events worse in the future. Chair Farrington said it was a good perspective and a reason Mr. Von Plinsky was on the Steering Committee.

Mayor Kahn said he and the Chairman had discussed the importance of incorporating more data in this process. The Mayor was pleased to see that the two Task Forces he was participating in were both bringing in data, such as the Housing Study from 2023. However, since this Master Plan would be viewed in 2027, he requested that staff convey to the consultants that all involved would benefit from receiving the most up-to-date data they could acquire. Chair Farrington agreed.

- 6) **Next Meeting: Tuesday, March 4 at 6:00 PM**
- 7) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Farrington adjourned the meeting at 7:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker
February 11, 2025

Reviewed and edited by,
Emily Duseau, Planning Technician