

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, March 4, 2025

6:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Harold Farrington, Chair
Alex Henkel, Vice Chair
Cody Morrison
Alexander Von Plinsky, IV
Kenneth Kost, Alternate (Voting)
Councilor Catherine Workman, Alternate (Voting)
Councilor Philip Jones, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner
Paul Andrus, Community Development
Director
Andy Bohannon, Deputy City Manager

Members Not Present:

Councilor Michael Remy
Leatrice Oram
Joshua Meehan
Elizabeth Wood
Emily Lavigne-Bernier
Dr. Joseph Perras
Joe Walier
Juliana Bergeron
Mayor Jay V. Kahn, Alternate

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Farrington called the meeting to order at 6:07 PM.

Guests were present on MS Teams: Heather Branigin (Future IQ), Leslie Gray (JS&A), and Courtney Powell (WGI).

II. Minutes of the Previous Meeting – February 4, 2025

A motion by Vice Chair Jones to adopt the February 4, 2025, minutes was duly seconded by Mr. Von Plinsky. The motion carried unanimously.

III. Presentation:

- A) Magnify Monadnock: Recruiting and Retaining a Modern Workforce – Julie Schoelzel, the Director of Regional Marketing for the Greater Monadnock Collaborative, will discuss trends affecting the region’s workforce. The mission of Magnify Monadnock is to foster economic vitality throughout the Monadnock Region by attracting the next generation of students, residents and workers who seek meaningful careers, strong communities, and an extraordinary quality of life.**

Chair Farrington welcomed Julie Schoelzel, Director of Regional Marketing for the Greater Monadnock Collaborative (GMC) Regional Chamber of Commerce, to discuss the “Magnifying Monadnock” official division of the GMC. This initiative promoting the Monadnock Region began with an EDA (Economic Development Administration) Grant as a one-time project within the GMC. Now, Magnify Monadnock has been fully incorporated within the GMC as an initiative into the future. The mission of Magnify Monadnock is to recruit and retain a modern workforce. At this time in Cheshire County (within a 35-mile radius of Keene, via Indeed.com):

- Open positions:
 - 1,000+ healthcare jobs
 - 130+ open positions at Cheshire Medical Center (CMC), 81 nursing positions alone.
 - 400+ education jobs (125 at SAU 29, ~ 20 full-time teachers)
 - 300+ manufacturing jobs
 - Often one job post is for many positions
 - 1,700+ jobs just in healthcare, education, and manufacturing
 - 6,000+ jobs available within a 35-mile radius of Keene (was 4,000 one month prior)
- Cheshire County Employment Security Stats ([NHES](#))
 - Unemployment rate in December 2024: 2.7%
 - 1,045 people were looking for work, which Ms. Schoelzel said was not enough people to fill the open jobs in the community.

Next, Ms. Schoelzel reviewed age demographics, noting that 35% of Cheshire County’s workforce would retire in the upcoming 8–10 years (comparable regionally, though probably a little worse). Over the past 10 years, K–12 enrollment had been in serious decline, as much as 25% in some districts; so, there would not be enough young people to replenish the local workforce. As a State, NH had 6,600 more deaths than births for the past three years and the State’s population was aging. So, the GMC used the tagline: “*We’re sitting on a demographic time bomb,*” coined by Jamie Trowbridge, CEO/President of Yankee Publishing and Committee Chair of GMC, who spearheaded Magnify Monadnock for a decade.

With Covid funding, the Chamber was able to hire Ms. Schoelzel and a marketing firm to launch this initiative intended to help diffuse the demographic time bomb. She said the Chamber saw

two key elements to building a thriving workforce: (1) to grow and retain local talent and (2) to attract new talent from outside the region.

- Phase 1: Turn Weekenders into Workers
 - Create a regional brand:
 - “*New Hampshire’s Monadnock Region: Within Thriving Distance*”
 - Modern, dynamic, fall colors, and visually represents the region (i.e., mountain and lake).
 - Signifies energy and opportunity.
 - Within two hours the life you want to have.
 - For example, a photo of someone on the T in Boston and a beautiful road in the Monadnock Region that says, “Why take the T when you could thrive? You’re within thriving distance.” Countless other examples.
 - The brand in action:
 - Launched www.monadnocknh.com in January 2023, which Ms. Schoelzel encouraged everyone to use as a great resource that tells the story of the region.
 - Focused on four pillars: Visit Here, Live Here, Learn Here, Work Here.
 - Interactive map of the region: skiing, lakes, kids’ activities, rail trails, mountain biking, colleges, arts and culture, and more.
 - Fun ways to search based on interests.
 - Themed landing pages per season.

Next, Ms. Schoelzel showed samples of ads the GMC had run to date, emphasizing that the region is a great getaway within four hours’ driving distance of major destinations including Canada, breweries, arts and entertainment, amazing views, trails, and more. For example, she showed a customized page listing all nearby breweries and trails that was successful. She shared coasters the GMC created that were distributed in breweries with codes patrons could scan to sign-up for the GMC’s e-mail to stay in-touch.

Ms. Schoelzel discussed why tourism is important for the Monadnock Region. The GMC works closely with the NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs (BEA). In 2023, every dollar the BEA spent on tourism marketing generated a return of \$17.00. This money goes to NH restaurants, hotels, and shops. So, Ms. Schoelzel said it is really important for the economy. The BEA gave the GMC a tool to see that there was \$11 million more spent in tourism dollars in the region in 2023 vs. 2022, largely as a result of the GMC’s work with the State to bring people here who had never heard of this region before. In 2023, the Meals and Lodging Tax brought \$448 million into the NH budget. Ms. Schoelzel noted that the NH budget is unique, so every dollar is important, and she said this was a smart way to bring in dollars that would not tax residents. That was the reason for focusing on tourism.

Ms. Schoelzel shared copies of the Thrive Guide, which the GMC was using to cross-message this great quality of life and ability to work. The GMC published this magazine with Yankee and

distributed it through welcome centers, airports, in Boston, and local hotels and restaurants. The Thrive Guide includes all the places to eat and hike, and is a great reference for anyone who does not know the area. It includes stories of businesses doing innovative things, which she suggested that local companies should advertise more like in other states (e.g., NY).

To effectively advertise the region, Ms. Schoelzel also recommended working with influencers—individuals with many followers on social media. For example, she showed a reel (video) from an influencer that was viewed 1.5 million times. Others had gone viral, and one was shared by the United States Department of Tourism. These posts generate comments by their followers that are like, “I went to College in Keene. It is awesome.” She said it is a natural way to highlight what is here without it being like an ad. They had been successful. She had worked with many influencers who were talented photographers, which was helpful (despite added cost) because she could use those photos in perpetuity.

Next, Ms. Schoelzel shared some success stories of the GMC:

- Consistent growth per season in total spending (2022 vs. 2023 and 2023 vs. 2024) since launching.
- Confirmed hotel bookings as a result of influencer campaigns (an entire hotel booked for a writing retreat and then promoted to their 10,000 members).
- CMC, RiverMead, MilliporeSigma, and Monadnock Community Hospital all use the Magnify Monadnock materials to help with recruiting.
- Support for Events: Increased attendance at Peak into Peterborough, Keene Ice Festival (many hotels sold out early February), The Thing in the Spring (Keene) music festival, and Taste of Keene.
- Press: Yankee, AAA Magazine featuring Taste of Keene, Thrillist featuring Peterborough and many more with help of the State, booked Radically Rural Director on Pathways to Rural Prosperity Podcast.
- Recognized by BEA as “Collaborator of the Year.”

As an example, Ms. Schoelzel described the case of the Nashoba Valley Medical Center (NVMC; western, MA), which closed August 2024, leaving 490 people without jobs:

- 34 miles from Monadnock Community Hospital (MCH) in Peterborough, which had more than 80 open positions at the time of this meeting.
- Due to working with the same marketing Agency and because the NVMC workers would not have to relocate, in August 2024, MCH and GMC partnered on a geo-targeted job advertising campaign in the northern area surrounding NVMC.
 - The campaign sent 6,000 people to the careers page.
 - For the two months this campaign ran, there were 35% more applications submitted than were submitted in all of 2023.
 - Month 1 of the campaign: applications increased by 65% compared to the previous month.
 - Month 2 of the campaign: applications increased by 60% compared to the month before the campaign started.

Ms. Schoelzel continued, describing Phase 2:

- Tourism:
 - Cheshire County Grant:
 - Awarded to the GMC for the Promoting Monadnock Region Initiative. This funding will be used on marketing tourism for the region.
 - Current Grant award: \$75,000 (match requirement: \$75,000)
 - Used for tourism-focused marketing, for opportunistic marketing, and for launch of potential new pillar: “Build Here.”
 - Ms. Schoelzel’s said her goal in 2025 was for the “Build Here” Pillar to potentially support housing, whether building or renovation. She would like to build a webpage to support the ongoing housing needs. She cited the regional housing targets of 1,873 by 2025 and 4,659 by 2040.
 - Opportunity:
 - Norther Border Regional Commission (NBRC) Grant:
 - A two year highly targeted (ages 16–29) marketing campaign for manufacturing, healthcare, and education opportunities as well as world class outdoor recreation and cultural offerings that make this a great area for young adults.
 - Current Grant award: \$290,190 (match requirement: \$58,038)
 - \$240,000 to put toward marketing agency/marketing campaigns, (including a Regional Career Fair focused on opportunities available for college-bound and career-bound high school grads).
 - \$10,000 to put toward field trips for K–12 to visit local employers, including manufacturers.
 - \$5,000 to host professional workshops:
 - Middle and high school guidance counselors to hear from the Cheshire Career Center, regional colleges, and employers.
 - Parents of middle and high school students for information on options beyond just college.
 - Events for college students to meet local employers.

Ms. Schoelzel described the Monadnock Region’s customers:

- College-bound:
 - 62% of high school seniors in the United States enroll in college ([NCES](#)).
 - The Monadnock Region is home to four higher education institutions, bringing roughly 4,000 students to the area. All these institutions feed the workforce pipeline, which the GMC is trying to promote.
 - The NBRC Grant would fund advertising featuring the Monadnock Region as a great place to study, access rewarding paid internships, and to then start a successful career. All advertising would target a mix of audiences: kids, parents, guidance counselors.

- Target area: New England and New York (in 2020, 56% of New Hampshire high school graduates seeking four-year degrees left the state for their education, the second highest percentage in the country; [NHFPI](#)).
- Not attending college:
 - 38% of high school graduates will not attend college ([NCES](#)). Of the 62% that do attend college, 32% of them drop out (www.educationdata.org).
 - Ms. Schoelzel wanted to reach this group of people with marketing that emphasizes the exciting opportunities that lie ahead for them in this region. They deserve the same enthusiasm in advertising as kids going to college.
 - The GMC was testing an “Incentives” webpage, which would show different companies that help pay for their workers’ educations to advance their careers.
 - The NBRC Grant would fund advertising featuring the many ways the businesses of the Monadnock Region offer pathways of prosperity for these groups, including the possibility of enrolling in college school at a significantly reduced cost.
 - All advertising will target a mix of audiences: kids, parents, guidance counselors.
 - There is substantial information targeting parents that can be overwhelming, for example, and Ms. Schoelzel would like to streamline it for them.

Ms. Schoelzel provided the example of Maine, which she said was growing quickly with young people. She said one smart thing Maine did was create Live + Work in Maine, including a Student Loan Repayment Program. She said they promote that anyone who moves there could receive up to \$2,500 back per year as a refundable tax credit for up to 10 years (\$25,000 over one’s lifetime). Ms. Schoelzel thought NH could do something better because the State does not have income tax, so she said it would be a better deal without paperwork. She then demonstrated how the GMC created a widget on its website to help users compare how much someone could save with an average annual salary in different states. She presented it to high schoolers who were blown away by it and had never thought about the savings on income tax. Ms. Schoelzel closed her presentation with a reminder of all the wonderful things there are for young people to do in the Monadnock Region, including the natural scenery.

Chair Farrington thanked Ms. Schoelzel for the educational presentation. The Chair asked if there was a limiting factor for the GMC; was it money? Ms. Schoelzel said yes, money. She said the Chamber was in the process of re-evaluating its structure, which would require planning. The GMC was working with memberships, donors, and grants. Having come from the for-profit sector, she said this had been more of a challenge to determine what to spend on marketing for the next year. Still, she had been working with a solid grant matching program for tourism dollars from the State of NH that had been helpful. She said the GMC had been taking advantage of everything possible, but money had been the biggest hurdle. Chair Farrington asked if anyone had adopted a business model using the GMC’s materials to attract X number of employees and then compensate the GMC in some way. Ms. Schoelzel said the GMC would be open to

something like that but would need to determine how to align it with the Chamber's membership supporting the initiative.

Chair Farrington noted that the GMC was doing more regional vs. widespread marketing. One of the things the Steering Committee had been talking about was Keene being prepared for and perhaps trying to attract climate refugees from the southern states, for example. Ms. Schoelzel said the GMC had not done any paid advertising outside of New England, Montreal, or New York but she did think it was a viable option. NH was gaining a lot of residents from CA at this time, for example. So, she said it was a real angle to consider, though she said it could be bleak to focus on climate change, so she and Chair Farrington agreed it would be key to have an angle to make it attractive.

Mr. Morrison commented off-mic. He wondered how flexible the program and region would be to large closures or layoffs, citing the recent large-scale layoffs of Federal workers as an example. He wondered how the region and community were ready to capitalize on those opportunities. Ms. Schoelzel said she did not have an agency on contract at this time, but she felt like she was close; she was near to signing one, but it was impacted by the Federal funding pause. She does not create the ads herself; she had worked with a few different local agencies who had been great.

Mr. Kost congratulated Ms. Schoelzel on all of the impressive things the GMC had going on. Mr. Kost noted how much the Steering Committee talked about housing. He heard Ms. Schoelzel talk about good investments to get tourists, manufacturing, or job applicants here. Mr. Kost was unsure enough was being done to attract the developer community, who were building a lot on the Seacoast, for example. He found it interesting that there were 6,000 people living in the Monadnock Region applying for jobs, but we would still be attracting people from states outside New England where they might be losing their jobs. He wondered how the Chamber could campaign to show developers that there are a lot of places to build here and there might be local incentives the City could offer. Thousands of people need houses and there are all of these jobs available, so he said developers should come build here.

Ms. Schoelzel agreed with Mr. Kost, stating that the GMC wanted to add "Build Here" as its next pillar in addition to Live Here, Visit Here, Learn Here, and Work Here. She was in the process of engaging with Mr. Morrison to talk about developing the Build Here webpage for the GMC to make it easy for a developer to reach the appropriate people and processes with the City of Keene. Ms. Schoelzel hoped for scalability, stating that a developer could have a central hub in Keene, for example, and spread their work across the 34 towns in the Monadnock Region vs. not being able to do much in one small town. She said a late-summer launch of the Build Here pillar would be realistic.

Mr. Kost asked—when the GMC advertised these campaigns to attract people for all these open jobs—why local employers were reporting that they could not fill the positions; was it housing? Ms. Schoelzel said yes, always housing. Mr. Kost and Ms. Schoelzel agreed that housing was

critical. Ms. Schoelzel said that was why with the next round of funding she would be focused on young people and college because it buys time if they are on campus or can commute. She said it is important to be thoughtful about the needs of employers and she thought the NVMC case really proved that. She also talked about those opportunities to collect (non-personal) data on commuters (e.g., Greenfield, MA) to run more targeted ads. Ideally, there would be a hybrid model long-term of tourism to get people here but also regional and local efforts.

Community Development Director, Paul Andrus, noted that he had just moved to Keene from a different region of the United States. He had also worked in this field in a region that was hard pressed for housing. He thought Ms. Schoelzel's idea to build the Build Here pillar as a regional approach was interesting and more powerful because there would be different assets in different communities, with different types of housing possible geographically. In Keene, for example, he spoke about many potential infill opportunities, which would be a particular scale or range of product (i.e., denser) that might be for certain aspects of the population the City is trying to recruit. Other areas might be more suitable for single-family homes. Mr. Andrus said that the City's senior management had just met and discussed economic development in general and this topic came up. He thought this idea of recruiting and finding markets for people that would want to come here to find work would be something the City would be interested in partnering on as Ms. Schoelzel described it. He liked the idea of using data for people who are interested in this region of the country.

Ms. Schoelzel agreed, noting that in the case of ME, for example, they were focusing on recruiting people with ties to ME to start. She recommended that the Committee peruse the ME example. Mr. Andrus added that the income widget on the GMC website was very interesting, and he thought it would speak to people, helping to illuminate the differences between states. Ms. Schoelzel agreed, recalling how vast the differences were when she moved from NY, for example.

Mr. Morrison discussed when he works with businesses that are interested in relocating either within or to this region. He said certain things could sometimes detract from communities, like a school system, which could impact a livability score. He asked if the GMC could look into those methodologies to work with school districts to improve those scores, for example. Ms. Schoelzel said they were not at this time. She said she looked at it from a marketing perspective. She said that NH is politically and economically diverse, which could be manipulated in the scores on Zillow.com. When she tries to market the region, it is based on meeting a diverse mix of people of all backgrounds and jobs. So, she said that with the next Thrive Guide, the GMC would include profiles of younger kids to share their experiences as another angle of what is unique and special about this region.

Councilor Workman complimented the excellent presentation. She referred to the Shared Housing Model Initiative and noted her background in social services. She asked if the GMC had thought about collaborating with groups to market through shared housing platforms and working with higher education institutions, especially regarding healthcare and the aging

population. Councilor Workman had worked with a lot of in-home service agencies, and she thought there would be a great way to market to the up-and-coming healthcare workers who may want additional housing opportunities and aging people who need services; room-and-board in exchange for personal care services. She asked where the 35-mile radius mentioned in the presentation came from.

Ms. Schoelzel said the 35 miles came from her search on Indeed.com—the largest job search website. To the Councilor’s first question, Ms. Schoelzel said that she was not actively working with any of those groups, but she was aware of the work. Ms. Schoelzel explained one of her ideas to develop a campaign around grandparents (i.e., the aging population) and to incentivize grandchildren moving here as a shared housing initiative. She said younger people are looking to start their lives differently than 30 years ago, more conscious of trying to avoid the debt they have seen elder Millennials accumulate. Councilor Workman said that with her background in social services, she knows the importance of having vetted, safe, and appropriate caregivers coming into an aging person’s home; a lot goes into coordinating that. Ms. Schoelzel cited the case of Singapore, which created a proximity grant for those who move close to their aging parents. She thought of something similar for Keene’s accessory dwelling units. Ultimately, she thought such ideas would help to get people here to fill jobs.

Councilor Jones asked about the Chamber’s broad representation of businesses in the Monadnock Region. Ms. Schoelzel said that at this time, the GMC had more than 500 members and was growing quickly, including businesses from more than 70 towns. From entrepreneurs to companies of over 1,000 employees, a wide sector was represented. She said the GMC was reevaluating how it works with those businesses to help meet their different needs (e.g., a store on Main Street Keene vs. a factory) to support both tourism and local workforces. Refining how the GMC serves the various sectors has become a top priority. Chair Farrington asked if there were any sectors they had not reached yet. Ms. Schoelzel replied that the representation was vast. However, she hoped to focus on more local food producers and farmers; she was unsure why there was less representation.

Councilor Jones thanked Ms. Schoelzel for the great presentation, noting that a lot of marketing could turn negatives into positives. For example, Councilor Jones cited how people would complain that Keene does not have an airport, but he would spin it to say that Keene is conveniently located within 90 minutes of airports in both Manchester, NH, and Hartford, CT; in addition to four big mountains within 90 minutes and 10 mountains within two hours. All while not paying touristy prices. Councilor Jones noted that unfortunately, Keene had a lot of empty commercial spaces at this time (with more coming) and asked if the GMC had any plans/projects to refill or repurpose such spaces. Ms. Schoelzel said part of the GMC’s Build Here pillar—once initiated—could be an opportunity to advertise such conversions or renovations.

Chair Farrington thanked Ms. Schoelzel for presenting the GMC’s great work.

IV. Update on Strategic Pillar Task Forces

Due to technical difficulties, the presentation could not occur, and quorum was lost when Mr. Morrison left the meeting at approximately 7:20 PM. The presentation and remainder of the agenda was rescheduled for March 18 at 7:00 PM.

V. Draft Outline for Strategic Pillar Chapter

VI. Next Steps:

- A) **Prioritization Survey**
- B) **Future Land Use Map**
- C) **Story Maps**
- D) **June 3 Future Summit, 5:00 PM, Heberton Hall**

VII. New Business

VIII. Next Meeting: Tuesday, April 1, 6:00 PM

- A) **April Agenda preview: Review of draft prioritization survey, overview and feedback on the future land use map, update on youth engagement, presentation from SWRPC regarding regional transportation issues.**

IX. Adjournment

Having lost quorum, Chair Farrington adjourned the meeting at approximately 7:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker
March 10, 2025

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner