

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

**FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Thursday, April 10, 2025**

**6:00 PM**

**Council Chambers,  
City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Thomas F. Powers, Chair  
Michael J. Remy, Vice Chair (arrived at 6:06 PM)  
Bettina A. Chadbourne  
Bryan J. Lake  
Kris E. Roberts

**Staff Present:**

Elizabeth A. Ferland, City Manager  
Amanda Palmeira, City Attorney  
Rebecca Landry, Deputy City Manager  
Beth Fox, ACM/Human Resources Director  
Aaron Costa, Assistant Public Works  
Director/Operations Manager  
Jason Martin, Fire Chief  
Gregory Seymour, Deputy Fire Chief

**Members Not Present:**

*All Present*

Chair Powers called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. Councilor Remy was not present at that time (he arrived later at 6:06 PM).

**1) Acceptance of 2025 Wellness Grant - Human Resources Director, Elizabeth Fox, ACM/Human Resources Director**

Assistant City Manager/Human Resources Director Elizabeth Fox addressed the Committee first regarding the Wellness Grant from Health Trust in an amount of up to \$2,500. She stated the wellness coordinators organize activities for employees that focus on a variety of things to benefit employees.

Ms. Fox stated that the Fire Department was also fortunate this year and received a grant from Health Trust. They have a group that works on their activities independently.

Councilor Chadbourne made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Lake.

On a 4-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept the 2025 Wellness Grant from HealthTrust of up to \$2,500 to be used for employee wellness activities.

**2) Life Insurance and Long Term Disability Insurance - Human Resources Director Elizabeth Fox, ACM/Human Resources Director**

Ms. Fox stated that the next item concerns renewal of the City's life insurance and long-term disability insurance. The City is coming to the end of a two-year cycle with its current vendor Symetra. Richards Group, the broker for these products, put out an RFP proposal and received

two competitive responses from Symetra and Mutual of Omaha. Because the City is satisfied with the current vendor and the prices were the same, staff is recommending that the Manager be authorized to move forward with renewal through Symetra. This will be another two-year agreement, which will give the City some stability in the budget process for the next two cycles.

The Chairman asked whether this program was available for retirees. Ms. Fox stated that the City is not able to offer this coverage to retirees. She explained that when employees leave the City, they have the opportunity to convert their policy to an individual policy for the life component. However, the long-term disability is only available to current employees.

Councilor Lake made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Roberts.

On a 4-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to execute a new multi-year contract renewing coverage with Symetra to administer the City's Life and Long-Term Disability Insurance program.

**3) Acceptance of Local Source Water Protection Grant - Assistant Public Works Director Aaron Costa, Assistant Public Works Director/Operations Manager**

Assistant Public Works Director/Operations Manager, Aaron Costa stated the Court Street and West Street well fields are a valuable source for the City. He noted the City has three groundwater wells at Court Street and one at West Street. They produce approximately 2,000,000 gallons a day of drinking water for the City of Keene. They are located on City-owned property, but no property boundaries are defined at Court Street.

Mr. Costa stated the City did some surveying work at West Street in 2023 with Source Water Protection grant funds. Still, the City does not own the 400-foot sanitary protective radius at either location.

The City is going to use these funds to hire a qualified surveyor to perform a detailed property survey at both locations. Once that is complete, staff will have a better idea of where those property boundaries are and where that 400-foot sanitary radius is.

Councilor Remy joined the session at 6:06 PM.

Councilor Lake stated he noticed in the notes about pursuing the purchase of property or easements and installing fencing along the property borders to be in compliance. He stated he did not see that anywhere in Section 302.1 and asked if this was the procedure the City wanted to pursue or whether it was somewhere else in the 302 section that he might have missed. Mr. Costa stated he wasn't sure what that regulation indicates, but it is Best Management Practice to install fencing along the 400-foot sanitary protective radius. The Councilor asked whether there was a specific rationale for this. Mr. Costa stated that this is to keep abutters and others out of the protective radius and retain it in its natural state.

Councilor Roberts made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Chadbourne.

On a 5-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept, execute, and expend a Local Source Water Protection Grant from the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) in the amount of \$12,800.00.

**4) Relating to the Appropriation of Funds from the General Fund Unassigned Fund Balance - Fire Department Staffing Resolution R-2025-11, Elizabeth Ferland, City Manager**

City Manager Elizabeth Fernald addressed the Committee next. The Manager stated the call volume at the Fire Department has risen significantly from 5,025 calls in 2019 to over 6,300 calls in 2024. During the same period, the department had nearly doubled its overlapping calls. She stated that these figures underscore the need to increase staffing capacity within the department. Tonight, the staff is asking the Committee to support a Resolution that would authorize the hiring of four additional firefighters or one per shift. The Resolution anticipates that these positions will be filled by the end of May. As such, the current appropriation request is just over \$70,000 and covers one month of wages and the necessary gear and equipment to bring on these four firefighters. This would increase staffing from 11 to 12 firefighters per shift. 12 is the minimum number required to operate a third ambulance.

The Manager went on to say that last week, the Council approved a Resolution to increase overtime funding so that the Chief could use existing staff to maintain this twelve-person staffing level. Currently, the department is calling in two people per shift due to one new member on each shift as the 11th member is still in training mode. Once that individual is fully counted towards the minimum staffing, only one call-in per shift will be required unless there are additional absences, vacation, FMLA, or sick leave. She stated that, unfortunately, this week, the department learned that one of the 11 members has resigned and is going back to the department he came from. This puts the department further behind on that shift. For FY26, the City anticipates an annual wage cost increase of approximately \$529,000 to fully fund these four positions. This would be included in the base budget. In addition to the wages, there will be an increased operational expense for training and remaining equipment needs.

In January, the City Council authorized applying for a Safer Grant to fund four firefighters per shift (16 in total). If tonight's request is approved, the City will reduce the Safer Grant request of three per shift for a total of 12.

The Manager went on to say if the grant is not available, staff anticipates returning to the Council in FY26 with a request to again hire one additional firefighter per shift, bringing the total to 13. She indicated it is important to have more than 12 on a shift otherwise you are always filling with overtime when somebody is out. The Manager gave the presentation to the Fire Chief and the Deputy Chief.

Chief Martin expressed his appreciation to the Committee and all of City Council for their support. He indicated that the Manager had worked hard to fill a third ambulance, and the members felt relief immediately.

The Deputy stated that last year at this time, there were 1,638 calls per day, which is an average of 16 calls per day. Currently, they are at 1,898 calls for service, putting them at an average of 19 daily calls. Last year, they finished at 6,481 calls for service, and this year, they are projected for over 7,200, which he felt was a significant increase and adding the staff is important. He noted that they did lose one member to a resignation but are fortunate to have a good pool of applicants.

County Administrator Chris Coates addressed the Committee and stated he was here to speak in support of the City Manager's recommendation. He stated that New Hampshire is an aging state; we are in the top three in the state, and county-wise, we are in the top two in aging counties. Mr. Coates stated that when he was on the Council, there were 3,500 runs with nine individuals in the department, and that number has doubled. He felt this was the right direction for the City and appreciated the added funding. He felt overtime was a band-aid fix and risks burnout. He stated that Cheshire County's EMS service is here to support the City and has the highest regard and highest respect for the men and women of the Keene Fire Department. He noted they have been in the City 74 times, answering calls for the City and ready to support whenever needed.

Mr. Coates went on to say they have a great working relationship with the Keene Fire Department, and the two chiefs meet regularly to discuss how they can collaborate.

He noted that they have contractual agreements on some level with 19 communities in Cheshire County, but they deal with every community in Cheshire County either through 911, inter-facility transfer, or partnership with smart ride-around wheelchair services in the community. He felt this was money well spent.

Mr. Rob Skrocki, President Professional Fire Fighters of Keene expressed his appreciation to the Committee.

The Manager thanked the Committee, the Fire Department, and Mr. Coates. She noted that the editorial in the recent Keene Sentinel was inaccurate and stressed that the City is working with the county to address this issue and plans to set the record straight.

Councilor Remy made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Roberts.

On a 5-0 vote, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends adoption of Resolution R-2025-11.

There being no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 6:22 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

Edits submitted by,  
Kathleen Richards, Deputy City Clerk