

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

7:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Harold Farrington, Chair
Alex Henkel, Vice Chair
Cody Morrison
Joshua Meehan
Emily Lavigne-Bernier
Alexander Von Plinsky, IV
Joe Walier
Kenneth Kost, Alternate (Voting)
Councilor Philip Jones, Alternate (Voting)
Mayor Jay V. Kahn, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner
Andy Bohannon, Deputy City Manager

Members Not Present:

Councilor Michael Remy
Leatrice Oram
Elizabeth Wood
Dr. Joseph Perras
Juliana Bergeron
Councilor Catherine Workman, Alternate

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Farrington called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM.

Project consultants were present remotely on MS Teams: Heather Branigin (Future IQ), Leslie Gray (JS&A), and Andrew Cozier (WGI).

2) Update on Strategic Pillar Task Forces

Keene Senior Planner, Mari Brunner, noted that at this time, each of the Task Forces were in the midst of their third and final meetings. Chair Farrington welcomed project consultant and urban designer from WGI, Andrew Cozier, for an update on the Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP). Mr. Cozier showed an infographic to demonstrate where the City was in the complex CMP process: Step 4, Testing & Confirmation, with the survey & prioritization setting process. The community had gone through a process of defining the parameters of the six Strategic Pillars,

establishing the goals and aspirations that reflect onto each Pillar and identifying specific projects and action items to realize each Pillar's goals. Next, the consultants would launch the StoryMap, which would begin public input on prioritization of the action items. As the consultants start receiving the full public vetting of the CMP elements, they would start looking at changes to the Future Land Use (FLU) Map. Mr. Cozier mentioned how the Overarching Themes based on previous Steering Committee feedback would be incorporated throughout the CMP and each Pillar: Sustainability, Education, Accessibility, Public Health, Collaboration, Region, & Leadership. He showed a complex chart to demonstrate the synergy and coordination between the goals and themes in all the Pillars.

3) Draft Outline for Strategic Pillar Chapter

Next, Mr. Cozier described the outline of how the consultants planned to build the chapters for each Pillar:

- Section 1: Importance of the Pillar
 - What this means to Keene and its relation to the seven Overarching Themes
 - Connection to other Pillars
 - Data insights
- Section 2: Community Aspirations
 - What people said, bold ideas
 - Data insights
- Section 3: Emerging Trends, Challenges and Opportunities, Trade-Offs
 - Implications and potential solutions
 - Examples and case studies (e.g., how other communities in nation have overcome problems)
 - Future insights
- Section 4: Planning Goals and Action Areas
 - Overarching goals with action areas
 - Including objectives, aspirations, and action items (initiatives and programmatic elements) that help with prioritization.
 - Prioritization data
 - Planning insights

Mr. Cozier stepped back to show the Committee an outline of how the entire CMP would be organized, which he called the CMP Build-Out:

- Community Vision:
 - Process
 - Overarching Themes
 - Strategic Pillar Diagram
- Strategic Pillar Chapters:
 - Livable Housing
 - Thriving Economy
 - Connected Mobility

- Vibrant Neighborhoods
- Adaptable Workforce
- Flourishing Environment
- Future Land Use (FLU) Map
- Implementation
 - Matrix (action items and time frames for implementation)

Mr. Cozier listed the next steps in the CMP project:

1. Task Force Meetings #3 in March
 - a. Review the draft Pillar document and refine.
2. Prioritization Survey (April Launch)
3. Implementation Matrix & FLU Map
4. Comprehensive Master Plan Draft (planned mid-May for Committee review)
5. StoryMaps
6. Future Summit (June 3, 2025, 5:00 PM, Heberton Hall, Keene Public Library)
 - a. Ms. Brunner provided other details in advance of the Future Summit:
 - i. Draft Pillar newsletters planned to be ready for review on:
 1. Pillar 1: March 31
 2. Pillar 2: April 7
 3. Pillar 3 (& promoting StoryMap): April 14
 4. Pillar 4 (& promoting StoryMap): April 21
 5. Pillar 5: April 26
 6. Pillar 6: May 5

Discussion ensued.

Mayor Kahn noticed that the review of the CMP and the Future Summit were planned close in time. He asked what the expectation would be of the participants at the Future Summit to have reviewed the CMP. Leslie Gray, Vice President at JS&A, replied that the June 3 Future Summit would be the key CMP project touch point with the broader community, starting to transition from the Plan process to the actual CMP. She anticipated having a draft of the CMP around June 3 and said the Future Summit would be an opportunity to receive some public input and start to test the document with the broader community and work toward finalizing it.

Mayor Kahn asked for more perspective about that timeframe; would the expectation be that participants at the Future Summit would have already read the available CMP? Ms. Gray said that similar to the Future Summit in October 2024, she expected that some participants would arrive having been fully engaged in the CMP process. However, the Summit would be accessible and participatory for all, regardless of their expert familiarity or detailed perspective into the CMP. Ms. Brunner added that the June 3 Future Summit would be the first opportunity to present the CMP to the community. Then, the intention would be to submit the final version of the CMP to begin the formal adoption process in July; the Steering Committee would vote to recommend that the Planning Board adopt the CMP and then the Planning Board would recommend that the

Council endorse the Plan through its normal process. As a final step, the CMP would go through a Planning Board public hearing before the Planning Board officially adopts it, according to NH law. Ms. Brunner anticipated that full process taking up to three months, so she thought the CMP would be finally adopted around mid-fall, depending on any revisions needed during that process.

Ms. Brunner added that during this timeframe, there would be two surveys. First, there would be a survey of the broad public associated with the StoryMap—that the public could eventually view online—which would include geospatial background information and context. For example, it would hopefully include a lot of the input being gathered from all of the various youth engaged. The StoryMap would also help the public to better visualize “jargony” terms from the CMP that might not make sense to them initially like “neighborhood node,” “smart growth,” or “infill development.” The StoryMap will be accompanied by a short Prioritization Survey launching early April. Second, there will be a more in-depth prioritization survey or “decision-making tool” launching in late April or early May. The consultants have gathered the goals, strategies, and action items for each Pillar and will create a more detailed survey to be sent to specific groups in the community (task force members), senior leadership of the City staff, and all City board and committee membership (200+ individuals). The Prioritization Survey would help to prioritize the aspects for the final section of the CMP, the Implementation Plan.

Councilor Jones and Ms. Brunner discussed the timeline, agreeing that if the process starts in July, the CMP could be adopted by the Planning Board by October, depending on various factors. Councilor Jones recalled that during the Council endorsement process, the CMP would have to be referred to a Council Standing Committee, which adds time to the process. Ms. Brunner agreed.

Ms. Lavigne-Bernier asked if the Pillar chapter drafts that Ms. Brunner mentioned would only be sent to the Committee or also be made public. Ms. Brunner said the Pillar updates would be newsletters sent to everyone who signed up to receive project updates. Simultaneously, the consultants and City staff would be working on the drafts of the Pillar chapters, and non-initial drafts would be shared with the Steering Committee before the June 3 event.

Mr. Kost referred to the most recent Flourishing Environment Task Force meeting he attended and a discussion about understanding the more environmentally sensitive (e.g., wetlands, steep slopes) parts of the City to not encourage development in. The Task Force also discussed the need to talk about areas of the City that are suitable for more intense development (e.g., previously developed). Mr. Kost asked if the FLU Map would be an underlying piece of information that would help drive development to areas that make more sense. Ms. Brunner said the FLU Map is not meant to be regulatory (like a zoning map), it is meant to be the basis for zoning and a guide for future land use decisions. She said the initial StoryMap would tell the overall story of the project, input received, and the different goals and strategies to provide context so that people can complete the public survey. Ms. Gray expanded on the StoryMap, explaining that the consultants would use Esri ArcGIS to create an interactive web page that

walks the public through a lot of great content in an approachable, easy to understand way. Because the StoryMap is produced with the go-to mapping software, it allows users to zoom in on certain areas. For example, key priority environmental areas are identified on the FLU Map to preserve and retain; the StoryMap would zoom in and discuss how the key priority came from the Flourishing Environment Task Force. Ms. Gray said that StoryMaps are intended to be a community engagement tool, help raise awareness of what is discussed in the CMP, and provide another avenue of helping the broader community follow along through the CMP process.

Chair Farrington was surprised to see the CMP Build-Out as essentially the Table of Contents of the CMP, though he did not have a problem with it. He noted that the Build-Out list did have all of the required sections from the NH RSA in addition to the Strategic Pillars; the Chapters did not exactly match the possibilities listed in the RSA, but he said the 2010 CMP did not either. He wondered if any other Committee members saw anything missing from the Build-Out before it was finalized. Mr. Kost asked if the Build-Out was the official Table of Contents of the CMP. Ms. Gray said that the Build-Out was an abbreviated version of the Table of Contents. The Build-Out included the key sections the consultants had started to draft in the CMP and their recommendations for how the CMP should start to flow as a document. The intent was to flow from the community vision (set-the-stage; expectations) at the beginning of the document to the individual Pillar chapters in the middle and ending with the Implementation Plan and specific action items.

Mr. Von Plinsky asked about the starting point for the FLU Map (e.g., existing condition). Chair Farrington replied that it was based on the FLU Map from the 2010 CMP. Ms. Brunner said that was correct. She added that ahead of the April meeting, the Committee would receive a packet with background information that may be helpful, including the 2010 FLU Map and the current Zoning Map. Ms. Brunner was working with the City's GIS Coordinator, Will Schoefmann, to get an existing Land Use Map because the existing land uses did not necessarily match the 2010 Map or Zoning Map. Additionally, at the April meeting, the Committee would get Ms. Branigin's input and feedback on the new FLU Map before presenting something to the public.

To the Chair's question about the Build-Out/Table of Contents, Mayor Kahn said the connection to the Overarching Themes was not entirely clear to him. He said the Committee had been very focused on trying to define the Pillars to pursue and develop them with strategies and priorities. Chair Farrington referred to the seven Overarching Themes mentioned earlier in the meeting that interconnect with the Pillars. Mayor Kahn said some of them did. He felt that public health was getting folded into everything else, for example. He did not feel that the Leadership theme had been fully fleshed out. He asked for the consultants' vision for how the overarching themes would set up a review of the Pillars. Ms. Gray replied, recalling the visioning process of the CMP in 2024, dating back to the Think Tank Summit in May to develop the framework for the Pillars around the essential node of Regional Magnetism. Ms. Gray said that provided context, explaining that throughout all of the Task Force meetings, conversations with City Staff, and insights from the broader community, it became clear that there were other overarching aspects about Keene not captured in the six Pillars, like Accessibility (i.e., mobility, education, job

training, or whether Keene is accessible to the broader region). She said the vision for the CMP is to set the stage with these Themes before getting into the Pillar chapters. The regional approach to Keene and some of the initiatives proposed would be interwoven in the CMP as the space to boldly call attention to that vision. The consultants were still working on how to best portray those Themes in the CMP narrative. Mayor Kahn and Ms. Gray agreed that it would be an effort to illustrate the unique attributes of the community.

Ms. Lavigne-Bernier said that during the first Task Force meeting she participated in, she found these Overarching Themes to be reminders of the Pillar she was working on (e.g., Thriving Economy). The words kept bringing her back to Keene in the region and the community, so she thought the Themes were helpful and would continue to be useful in moving toward the City's goals.

Ms. Brunner provided more context about the Accessibility Theme. She said a lot of the Themes came up through this Committee or the Future Summit. For example, at the Future Summit, someone brought up Education repeatedly and it resonated with everyone in the room and developed into an Overarching Theme. For Accessibility specifically, staff and consultants were contacted by constituents throughout the CMP project, expressing it as a priority. For example, Ms. Branigin received a long email from a resident concerned about Accessibility, sharing comments and suggestions for ways Keene could improve, so the resident was encouraged to participate in the online Discussion Boards. Another resident reached out very passionately who ultimately participated in the Connected Mobility Task Force. She said Accessibility was a regular topic on the Discussion Boards. So, while discussed less by this Committee, Ms. Brunner said Accessibility was a major Theme throughout the project. Mr. Meehan said that it was aligned with the discussion of housing from the beginning and the Livable Housing Task Force, particularly related to being able to age in one's home. The Mayor supported highlighting the unique attributes of the community.

Mayor Kahn recalled the Committee discussing a growth objective and said that if it still wanted that to emerge clearly in this CMP structure that was presented, it might be a challenge, so he suggested discussing it. Chair Farrington agreed, stating that perhaps the Community Vision could discuss goals around population or economic growth. He recalled making this point a few times. Mr. Kost asked the consultants if the FLU Map could be one tool that suggests potential growth. He went on to suggest that there could be a way to calculate—capacity (infrastructure, school district, etc.) aside—the amount of people who could move to Keene and directly infuse tax dollars before it starts costing money to accommodate them.

4) Keene Solid Waste, Composting and Recycling Program

Chair Farrington referred to the memorandum in the agenda packet, calling it a great in-house resource.

Mr. Von Plinsky said that at the Flourishing Environment Task Force meeting, the Assistant Public Works Director, Duncan Watson, came to speak. Mr. Von Plinsky said that a consistent topic at those meetings had been people wanting Keene to be a leader on solutions like waste disposal; there was energy and excitement around the issue. Chair Farrington said it was good to hear, citing some difficult challenges (e.g., capital). Mr. Von Plinsky said being open to solutions would be important, because the City gets rid of a lot of trash. He said the City had the chance to stand out as a leader.

Regarding being a leader in waste disposal recycling management, Mr. Morrison thought back to an instance he experienced approximately one year prior at a Statewide forum led by an environmental engineer. The presenter's first comment to the diverse audience of 40+ members was that he saw someone from Keene in the audience. The presenter called Keene's recycling center and transfer station a shining example within NH of a community that does very well with waste disposal and recycling; in particular, plastic bottles that go to a plant in Michigan. Mr. Morrison shared that positive reputation with the City Manager. Ms. Lavigne-Bernier thought that was a good example of openness in the community and she suggested trying to do even better; she said it seemed like there were some people to potentially back the City.

Ms. Brunner said Mr. Watson, who wrote the memo, was unable to attend this meeting. She said that waste disposal is different in every community, and she hoped this provided the Committee with a clearer understanding of the process in Keene to help when considering strategies, goals, or actions for the CMP. For example, she cited a question from the Task Forces about why the City does not provide everyone with a recycling bin for free. Ms. Brunner said people can actually bring recycling to the Transfer Station for free, but the recycling bins themselves are provided by private companies. She said it was encouraging to hear Keene being held up as an example.

Mr. Morrison said someone else in the audience that he cited was from Peterborough and announced using Keene's Transfer Station and Recycling Center on Saturdays, which Mr. Morrison did not know was possible for non-residents and called it a great asset. Mayor Kahn thought it aligned with Keene's unique character and the statement of values, and he was glad to hear the connection to the Flourishing Environment Pillar; with prioritization and a strategy for how to move towards sustainability goals the City is not acting on currently. Brief discussion ensued between the Chair and Councilor Jones about the various larger volume items the City's Transfer Station might not accept but that the Chamber of Commerce might promote, and mention of a Styrofoam collection program at Keene State College. Councilor Jones also noted how at this time, Keene's Recycling Center could only accept plastics Numbers 1–2 (of 7). Not accepting these various products could pose challenges for the City over time.

5) **Next Steps:**

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

6) **New Business**

Mayor Kahn returned to Councilor Jones' comments about checks-and-balances on the Committee's ambitions. The Mayor wanted to ensure that the Committee wrestled with those ambitions. Chair Farrington recalled the first Committee meeting, when he said he wanted to make sure the key trade-offs—growth vs. green space, aspirations vs. budget, etc.—would be addressed, and he did not think that had happened in a formal enough way yet. So, he turned to the consultants to have some of those key questions answered moving forward. Mr. Meehan thought some of that might be happening naturally in the Task Force conversations—at least the one he was a part of. Ms. Brunner said the decision tool she mentioned (prioritization survey) would hopefully be the opportunity to dive into the question of trade-offs and determine which action items should be the top priorities for the City to invest its limited resources (i.e., staff time, volunteer time, and money). With that input, the Implementation Plan could set the City up for success, with clear direction. Mr. Meehan said the Committee would also be looking for staff's expertise to indicate whether or not things like a \$250 million bond would not be feasible, for example. Mr. Kost hoped that if there were visions like a very sophisticated recycling process that the City could not afford now that they might be included in the CMP as important trends that would require additional study after the CMP. He does not want those creative ideas lost.

7) **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**

8) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Farrington adjourned the meeting at 8:14 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker
March 25, 2025

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner