

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, April 1, 2025

6:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Harold Farrington, Chair
Alex Henkel, Vice Chair
Leatrice Oram
Joshua Meehan
Emily Lavigne-Bernier
Dr. Joseph Perras (left at ~ 8:00 PM)
Alexander Von Plinsky, IV
Joe Walier
Kenneth Kost, Alternate (Voting)
Councilor Catherine Workman, Alternate (Voting)
Councilor Philip Jones, Alternate (Voting)
Mayor Jay V. Kahn, Alternate (arrived at 6:06 PM)

Staff Present:

Mari Brunner, Senior Planner
Megan Fortson, Planner
Paul Andrus, Community Development
Director (Remote)

Members Not Present:

Councilor Michael Remy
Cody Morrison
Elizabeth Wood
Juliana Bergeron

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Farrington called the meeting to order at 6:03 PM.

Project consultants were present remotely on MS Teams: Heather Branigin (Future IQ) & Courtney Powell (WGI).

II. Adoption of Meeting Minutes – March 4, 2025

Chair Farrington confirmed that the Committee would adopt the March 18 meeting minutes along with the April 1 minutes at the May 6 meeting.

A motion by Councilor Jones was duly seconded by Mr. Von Plinsky to adopt the March 4, 2025 minutes and the motion carried unanimously.

III. Transportation Planning in Southwest NH: J.B. Mack, Assistant Director of Southwest Region Planning Commission, will provide an overview of recent transportation planning initiatives including the region's long-range transportation plan, corridor planning, transit planning, and rail trail planning.

Chair Farrington welcomed JB Mack, Assistant Director at Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC). Mr. Mack was invited by the Committee's City Staff Liaison, Senior Planner, Mari Brunner, to provide a presentation about transportation planning in southwest New Hampshire. In preparation, Mr. Mack reviewed the Steering Committee's materials and goals, as well as the transportation trends the Committee had analyzed in thinking about Keene as a regional hub. He also brought Jeremy Evans of the Monadnock Regional Rail Trail Collaborative (MRRTC) because of the Steering Committee's interest in rail trails in case of questions.

Mr. Mack began by explaining what the SWRPC is:

- One of the nine Regional Planning Commissions in New Hampshire that were established by State law. He showed the Commission's Region on a map, including all of the Cheshire County towns, 10 communities in western Hillsborough County, Langdon, and Sullivan County.
- In the State statute, Regional Planning Commissions are recognized as political subdivisions. However, Mr. Mack emphasized that the main function of SWRPC is advisory: providing information, promoting coordination between entities, and helping others to implement their plans and programs.
 - For example, SWRPC might help to coordinate representatives of NH Department of Transportation (DOT), the Bureau of Trails, and various municipalities in developing plans or implementing steps on a regional rail trail planning committee.
 - SWRPC also encourages a lot of public-nonprofit-private coordination in transportation. For example, working with a monthly committee in the region focused on providing rides to people in need, which is a mix of private and nonprofit sector transportation services.
 - Another instance was SWRPC facilitating the implementation of the NH DOT 10-Year Transportation Improvement Plan—the State's capital improvement plan for all transportation projects—by helping develop the regional priorities that should be introduced into that Plan every two years (a scoring process). SWRPC has also helped the City of Keene to develop local street policies, for example.
- The mission of SWRPC is to help local governments promote coordinated planning, orderly growth, efficient land use, and environmental protection.
- The Commissioners are representatives of all the towns in the region. They vote on a volunteer board of directors that helps run the organization.
- Paid staff do most of the work for the Regional Planning Commission and some of the things they work on in addition to transportation are technical assistance on zoning and land use issues, housing issues, economic and community development, public health, and environmental planning.

Next, Mr. Mack explained the SWRPC structure of operations, guided by the Unified Planning Work Program FY 2026–2027, which has four main activities:

1. Planning & Policy (e.g., with municipalities on transportation goals)
2. Public Involvement & Coordination (e.g., trying to hear from vulnerable populations with transportation needs, like those without a driver's license)
3. Plan Support (Data Collection) (e.g., collecting traffic or poverty demographic data to help municipalities develop plans)
4. Technical Assistance & Support (e.g., making calls on behalf of towns to help deal with a number of issues and develop a better public transit system for their constituents)

Mr. Mack explained how SWRPC tries to be a problem solver, listening to the needs of member towns and considering the different avenues by which to connect to try to get a project done. For example, if it is important for a town to get a project completed it would be important to have the project recognized in the town's transportation plan, so a funder would understand the need. SWRPC seeks funding opportunities as well to help municipalities implement projects.

Mr. Mack described the Southwest Connects: Long Range Transportation Plan, 2025–2050. SWRPC must redevelop its Long-Range Transportation Plan every five years. As an advisory organization that identifies the needs of the region and does not implement things, this Plan is a policy guidance document that also informs SWRPC's approach. Mr. Mack thought the Plan Vision connected to language in the City of Keene's Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP) documents, so he read it:

“Looking at a map of the southwest region in the future, its network of major highways, rail rights of way, airports, and other transportation features will look much the same as they do today. New infrastructure will not displace or disturb the special places, cultural resources, and natural features that comprise our rural landscape. That which will change will happen in the context of our existing infrastructure and rights of way. New modes of transport will utilize the regional transportation network and public rights of way to make way for passenger transportation services, broadband fiberoptic cable, safe bike routes, and the reintroduction of some rail. Technological and travel demand management solutions will use our existing infrastructure more efficiently as well as reduce energy demands, curb greenhouse gas emissions, and save households and government money. All transportation will have stable, reliable revenue sources and will provide individuals of all ages and abilities affordable access to basic needs such as healthcare, employment, shopping, and community interaction. Infrastructure will be sufficiently managed to avoid costly repairs or upgrades due to poor asset management, nearsighted land use decisions, or climate induced severe storm events. Villages and downtowns will serve as intermodal transportation hubs, helping to connect and move people and goods between places, both local and far away. Transportation decision making will rely on an active participatory and well-informed public that weighs in on transportation alternatives thoughtfully and carefully by accounting for long term as well as short term costs and benefits.”

Mr. Mack asked the Steering Committee whether the Long-Range Transportation Plan Vision he read resonated with how the Committee imagined Keene in the region; a network of nodal centers and village centers with good walkability within them and good connectivity—including better transit or facilitation of some bike connections—between those. Mr. Mack noted the overlap between the Steering Committee’s mobility goals for the CMP and the Transportation Plan Goals focusing on things like economic benefit, safety, accessibility, mobility, and environmental sustainability.

Next, he described the eight SWRPC Corridors: NH 9 East, NH 9 West, NH 10 South, NH 12 North, NH 12 South, US 202 North, US 202 South, and NH 101 East. These were identified based on a system wide analysis of the transportation needs in the region. While there are similarities between towns, it was difficult to work with communities to develop strategic planning on the basis of a 1,000 square mile region. So, considering the region as corridors helped. He noted that Keene is a hub for a lot of corridors. He recalled the hub-and-spoke model discussed in the past, with Keene as sort a regional center for employment and services (e.g., human services, government). For example, understanding where people shop is an important indicator for understanding transportation, like visitors all the way from Springfield, VT.

Mr. Mack showed a Challenges & Opportunities Map from the Long-Range Transportation Plan for one of the corridors as an example of how the municipal needs are visualized in connection to the region. He thought these could be good resources for the Steering Committee to understand larger issues identified through the regional planning process. Mr. Mack summarized that SWRPC had learned that Keene’s relationship with the region was as a hub for employment, shopping, and services (commercial, government, social, educational, cultural). Mr. Mack also thought something important that was often overlooked about Keene was its source of a labor population, noting that a lot of people were moving to work in Keene. At the same time, a lot of people were leaving Keene. He cited the very large labor pool in the City, so he said it would be important to consider both current commuters and enhancing future commuting opportunities (e.g., rail trail crossroads) to enhance Keene as that hub for things like tourism as well. He mentioned the Dillant Hopkins Airport. He added that the population density and density of businesses and services make Keene a good candidate for some transit, bike, and pedestrian improvements in the community.

Mr. Mack continued, explaining that in the Regional Transportation Plan, there was also a Regional Transportation Improvement Program & Database, listing projects scheduled in the region. This could be a resource for projects happening in the Keene area. He presented four that were relevant:

1. Reconstruct NH 10 from NH 101 to Market Basket & Replace Ash Swamp Brook Bridge: Will involve several more roundabouts and some improved bike and pedestrian access, the latter of which he thought was related to Keene’s focus on walkability and complete streets. Mr. Mack called this an important corridor where people were not protected when mobile.

2. Reconstruct NH 101 from .4-mile east of Optical Ave. to Branch Road, Replace Branch Bridge, & Move Swanzey Factory Road: This is a Red Listed bridge. This would potentially move the intersection of Swanzey Factory Rd. with NH 101 to a safer position with better sight distance, as well as widening the roadway and adding shoulders for pedestrians.
3. Improve Operational Performance at NH 9/10/12/101: Proposed roundabout at the T- intersection of NH 9/10/12/101 to optimize mobility in that area.
4. Corridor Improvement from NH 9/10/12 to School Street: A Complete Street retrofit on West St., from School St. to the NH 9/10/12 interchange. Involves improving walking and biking conditions but also addressing some of the access management (e.g., trying to restrict too many left turns).
5. Road Safety Audit at NH 9 and Whitcomb's Mill Road

Mr. Mack described current regional bike and pedestrian projects:

1. Cheshire Rail Trail, Transportation Heritage Corridor Improvements: Connecting the Industrial Heritage Trail behind the Kingsbury property to the Transportation Heritage Trail to the east of Eastern Ave. Eventual goal to build a bridge to connect walkers and bikers over NH 101 and make a safer environment for them.
2. Ashuelot Rail Trail Improvements: Ongoing at this time for west Swanzey.
3. Crossing to Bellows Falls, VT: Groups like the MRRTC were working to connect this region with other states. MRRTC was actively pursuing opportunities to connect the northern part of the Cheshire Rail Trail or the Fort Hill Rail Trail (Hinsdale) across the Connecticut River to Brattleboro and eventually to the West River Trail. Someday, they hope to connect even further to a trail in Westminster, MA.
4. Crossing to Brattleboro, VT
5. Crossing to Winchendon, MA
6. Extensive Continual Maintenance and Improvement of the Rail Trail System
7. Other Complete Street Communities in the Region Connecting to Keene by Road and Rail Trail: Swanzey, Marlborough, Troy, Walpole, Winchester, and Hinsdale

Mr. Mack proceeded to describe the meager regional transit services that existed at this time, showing a map. In the region at this time, there was Greyhound, MOOver!, Community Volunteer Transportation Company (CVTC), and Home Healthcare Hospice Community Service (HCS), which operated the Friendly Bus and Para Express, as well as several shopping shuttles over the years. Outside of Keene, there were not many transit options in this rural region. SWRPC's demographic analysis showed a strong interest in a more direct intercity bus route to Boston from Keene. At this time, the only option was to go through Springfield, MA, which Mr. Mack called painful. He thought there was potential opportunity—with strong promotion from the City of Keene—to get the State of New Hampshire to consider providing a subsidy to create a more direct route to Boston.

Mr. Mack concluded his presentation by describing SWRPC's "Next Generation" Transit Project to examine the political will of municipalities and institutions (e.g., Keene State College [KSC]

and Cheshire Medical Center [CMC]) in the region to invest more in a better transit system. The goal would be to increase transit ridership by over 100%, with a transit system in which one does not have to schedule a ride with a transportation provider up to one week in advance. The goal would be to get a ride with the touch of a button on a smartphone or a quick call to a call center. SWRPC was presenting the concept of a Greater Keene Microtransit Zone within this project, with a fleet of small buses that would roam within a zone and be accessible like Lyft or Uber service. This system, software, and algorithm would all be focused on decreasing wait times from over 15–20 minutes and helping people get where they are going. With the use of technology, SWRPC thought there was a lot of promise. Mr. Mack demonstrated how the app would work. He welcomed questions on the overall presentation.

Mr. Von Plinsky asked for a high-level description of the Complete Streets Program. Mr. Mack recalled that Keene was already a Complete Streets City, with associated policy and design standards—though perhaps due for an update. Essentially, Mr. Mack said the Complete Streets Program is meant to recognize that people need to get from point-A to point-B, but that not everyone drives. Complete Streets recognizes that the street is a public space that could be used for a host of travel modes. Historically in this country, transportation engineers had focused on moving vehicles from place-to-place, when in fact he said that if there was infrastructure to promote safe walking, biking, or other transit, people would use it too. With a Complete Streets Program, a municipality determines the likely travel modes on a street. For example, a mixed-use zone with a lot of commercial activity and housing might need unique options. Mr. Mack said that with the history of underdeveloped streets mostly focused on vehicles, Complete Streets helps to open imaginations to what streets could be (e.g., health benefits from exercise or financial benefits from families not needing two cars).

Mr. Walier asked about a transportation corridor around I-91. Mr. Mack replied that I-91 was one of the greatest challenges. This region did not have its own interstate highway, so mobility was important for the economy. In its Regional Plan, Mr. Mack said SWRPC talked about making sure to not overly congest arterials like Rt-9 to I-91, as well as being careful about too many driveways and entrances/exits to I-91 that create friction on that route.

Dr. Perras appreciated the great presentation, noting that he had lived in a few rural communities that did not have Keene's infrastructure but were far more bikeable. He noted Keene's richness of rail trails but said that biking to CMC, for example, seemed like a near impossibility. He added that while the roundabouts were great for flow of traffic, they were horrifying for cyclists to navigate through. Dr. Perras thought it would be important to look at whole communities that are seemingly cut off from either box stores, hospitals, or larger employers. He was also glad Mr. Mack mentioned the MOOVer! program in Windsor; the prior hospital Dr. Perras ran in VT helped write the grant that funded the program. They called it "medical Uber" and he said it was very effective, but Dr. Perras was unsure the State of NH would open its pockets the way VT did. Lastly, Dr. Perras noted that especially with KSC here, the City should have a version of the Dartmouth Coach that was used heavily between New York and Boston from the Upper Valley.

He agreed with how challenging it was to get to Boston from Keene. Mr. Mack agreed that it had been a main topic over the years.

Dr. Perras also said that at this time, CMC was paying heavy subsidies just to stabilize emergency transport in the area, and he was unsure how much was left in the budget to subsidize other things. Mr. Mack said that SWRPC worked a lot with the Monadnock Region Coordinating Council to look for opportunities. He thought there were some redundancies in specific institutions having their own transportation systems when some could be blended to help finance each other. Within SWRPC's Microtransit Project, it had identified enough State and Federal funding already that would fund more than 50% of the service that SWRPC was proposing. However, Mr. Mack said it would require bringing in \$200,000–\$300,000 more from local sources to make it work. Dr. Perras noted that Dartmouth Health—the largest healthcare provider in NH—was working on a plan to station advanced cardiac life support rigs and other ambulances around the state but was struggling to secure State of NH and Federal funding. He reiterated that emergency transport was tenuous, at best. To this point, Mr. Mack mentioned that a lot of medical transportation at this time was not Medicaid eligible and was being serviced by volunteer driver programs. He said volunteer driver programs are great because they are very inexpensive and fortunately, there were many generous, charitable people in the region willing to offer rides. However, those rides are not guaranteed, they are based on people's personal schedules. In SWRPC's 7.5 years of data on these systems, it found that 10%–15% of the volunteer rides would go unmet, which is problematic if someone had a serious medical need.

Mr. Kost asked the reality of the Greater Keene Microtransit Zone project and when it might happen; the idea of using an app to quickly get on a bus sounded great to him. Mr. Mack replied that there was enough density around Keene to make it a reality and potentially reaching into downtown Marlborough or northern and western Swanzey, where there is more density and it is close enough for trips to be fairly rapid. Funding was the issue and so SWRPC was trying to find parties interested in being a part of the solution. While it was not asking for any commitments at this time, SWRPC was seeking a sense of whether the City agreed that this was a need and wanted to be a part of planning for it. SWRPC was also trying to identify a "Sponsor" that would run the Microtransit System or be the local face of it, governing how it works, expands, or changes over time. SWRPC had spoken about this with Cheshire County, Southwestern Community Services, and HCS; they would be talking with staff from the City of Keene, the Towns of Swanzey and Marlborough, and even Senator Fenton about a possible Transit Authority framework with towns added over time.

Mr. Kost said that when he is around the City, like at CMC, he sees license plates from VT, for example. He knew there was a lot of traffic from other big population centers in Brattleboro and Bellows Falls, VT, and thought it seemed important to facilitate getting those people to Keene more easily to shop, etc. Mr. Mack agreed that SWRPC had heard about goals for a commuter route between Keene and Brattleboro for many years and even explored it with partners in Vermont, but funding continued to be the challenge. He explained that an additional challenge with transit is to make it as competitive as possible with the personal automobile, which is hard

when there is a lot of easy parking, for example. It involves coordinating trips and pick-up/drop-off, etc. SWRPC was looking at the Keene–Brattleboro connection, and Mr. Mack said there was interest in a Keene–Peterborough connection too.

Mayor Kahn connected this presentation to the September 2024 Radically Rural Summit’s focus on microtransit, which he called an important way for the community to coalesce around the topic. He hoped it would not be the only opportunity to talk about regional transportation. Mayor Kahn also noted that Mr. Mack did not discuss the Keene Dillant Hopkins Airport much, but the Mayor said that roadway intersection at Rt. 12 & NH 32 had failed, and he hoped it would be a priority for SWRPC in the coming years. He also hoped the CMP would recognize the Airport as an important asset of the City and the Mayor said it is obviously a regional asset, but stated that it had very poor connectivity to the City at this time; there was no bike program or auto rental, etc. Yet, Mayor Kahn thought the Airport was a major contributor to the number of Keene visitors, thought it should be recognized as a greater asset, and thought resources should be put in place for it.

Councilor Jones thanked Mr. Mack for mentioning the nodes, which were very important to the Councilor. Councilor Jones had mentioned addressing the nodes in the CMP to the Steering Committee. He also asked the City Council and Joint Committee of the Planning Board & Planning, Licenses, and Development Committee to start protecting the nodes within the City’s Zoning. He said they are important to Keene being a walkable City (i.e., Complete Streets) and would help the City grow. Councilor Jones added that in March 2025, the Steering Committee heard from the Greater Monadnock Collaborative Chamber of Commerce, whose goals were very similar to SWRPC, and he was glad to see that.

Though not germane to the Keene CMP, Chair Farrington was surprised that Route 119 was not a corridor, especially with the new bridge in the area creating connectivity to I-91. Mr. Mack said it was a good point, noting that the SWRPC Corridor Systems are a way to divide the region and focus and prioritize projects. He said Route 119 was on SWRPC’s radar; it was considered as a part of the NH 9 West Corridor, noting some really interesting opportunities in that Corridor, like working with Hinsdale and Brattleboro to repurpose an unused rail trestle bridge and an island for bicycles and pedestrians. He cited Hinsdale being a pro-growth and economic development community, seeing opportunities in the Corridor to draw in new commercial businesses and employers to address some of their housing issues. Chair Farrington thanked Mr. Mack for his presentation.

IV. Flourishing Environment Pillar Recommendations: Eighth Grade Students from Keene Middle School will Present their Recommendations for the “Flourishing Environment” Pillar of the Keene Master Plan.

Chair Farrington welcomed Teachers Ritu Budakoti and Sarah Ference and their eighth-grade students from Keene Middle School: Whitman Conboy, Devin Boeker, Gabriel Hall, Audric Olson, Liam Green, Nora Mucha, Colette Roentsch, Ryan Brambilla-Botting, Joyce Smith, Seth

Wichland, Michael Prince, Avery Washburn, and Zoya Blackmore. The students were visited by City staff who gave a presentation on the Keene Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP) Environmental Pillar. Ms. Washburn explained that after the inspiring visit, which taught them about the importance of protecting and improving the City, every eighth-grade student at Keene Middle School took their ideas back to their science class and worked on projects focused on sustainable land use, waste management, sustainable energy use, and eco-friendly transportation. Mr. Green said that from these projects, a dedicated group of students formed a team, meeting multiple times to review every proposal, brainstorm solutions, and create well researched plans for a better, more sustainable community. They had carefully organized their ideas into a presentation showcasing their visions for a greener, safer, and more efficient City. Groups of students came forward and presented their recommendations to the Steering Committee.

Mr. Prince, Mr. Hall, & Mr. Boeker presented on Transportation:

- The City of Keene has some challenges that, while difficult, could be overcome, such as:
 - Reliance on gas cars
 - A lack of awareness on public transportation
 - Too dependent on highway
 - Few electric vehicle chargers
 - Limited or dangerous bike lanes
- These obstacles for Keene may be many, but given the proper treatment, they can be resolved permanently:
 - They learned that the City was already consistently trying to fix these issues, including:
 - Consistently fixing and improving roads.
 - Having newsletters written in the Sentinel about public transport to help people access it.
 - The City Express lets people travel cheaply.
- The students shared ideas they thought would help and make the work more effective:
 - Environmental:
 - **Improve EV infrastructure** by building more EV chargers and improving the EV infrastructure to promote electric vehicles, which are significantly better for the environment than gas cars.
 - **Build/improve sidewalks** to promote walking, which will decrease the amount of gas cars on the road. As transportation makes up 47% of Keene's carbon emissions, it would be environmentally wise to promote nonmotorized transportation.
 - Economical:
 - Public transportation:
 - **Buses, shuttles, and a trolley system** could provide citizens with a means to get around while also generating income. These systems have seen success in cities comparable to Keene.
 - **Bike sharing** has seen success in small cities would also have a good chance to turn a profit.

- Safe:
 - **Create more dedicated and safer bike lanes** to promote more usage of them, which makes it a better alternative for citizens.
 - **Rail trails and other trails are cleaned and put together.** Taming these paths will help citizens be more prone to use them and prevent them from being hurt by tripping on branches or other obstacles.
 - **More light posts** can be a great way to make people feel safe when walking at night and could also lower the crime rate.
- The students listed some remaining questions they had:
 - Has there already been a conversation about these topics?
 - What is the budget for transportation?
 - What can citizens do to support the effort for better transportation?
 - How much does the bus/bus system cost?

Ms. Washburn, Ms. Blackmore, Ms. Mucha, & Ms. Smith presented on Littering in Public Places:

- Current challenges noticed and discussed:
 - Littering—specifically in public places—and people not caring
 - Large landfills
 - Use of too much energy
 - Waste all over the City
 - No incentive program
 - Lack of awareness
 - Mass production of non-decomposable materials
 - Overusing single-use plastics
- The City of Keene was already doing curbside trash pickup and recycling, but this can get messy and can pollute. So instead, the students recommended fewer garbage trucks in the area and throwing trash on the side of the road.
- Some other examples of what Keene was already doing:
 - Dumps and landfills, curbside collection, using and creating plastic alternatives, composting and recycling, categorizing disposal bins, and trash cans in main areas.
- The students shared their ideas to make this work more effective:
 - Environmental:
 - Robot trash cans that are powered by solar panels
 - Reuse trash and waste products
 - Turning the waste into energy (e.g., incineration)
 - Produce more eco-friendly plastic
 - Attract attention to safer waste disposal
 - Reduce anti-decomposing materials
 - Having easily accessible and categorized waste bins
 - Donating extra, unused food to animals or to shelters
 - Economical:
 - More trash cans in the City
 - Make recycling more accessible
 - Earn money from throwing away certain trash

- People working to keep the trash off the ground
- Reimburse citizens if possible
- Create new job opportunities
- Less plastic use in businesses
- Creating an opportunity for teens to work for a cleanup crew and possibly getting paid for it
- Community/school composting
- Safe:
 - Electric dump trucks
 - Making the trash into fun art
 - Show videos/tutorials on how to throw away the right trash
 - Keeping trash out of large landfills
 - Make sure water sources stay clean
 - Having education on what happens with our trash
 - Using and creating more plastic alternatives
- The students listed some remaining questions they had:
 - How can we use more solar energy in Keene?
 - What is the City's current plan on waste disposal?
 - How can we get the community more aware/willing to help?
 - What are problems that continue to increase?
 - What does the future hold if we do or don't change our waste disposal methods?
 - Do we have any facts on the percentages of waste ending up in the wrong place or how much excessive waste we have?

Ms. Blackmore, Ms. Washburn, Mr. Brambilla-Botting, & Mr. Olson talked about Sustainable Land Use:

- Current challenges they noticed and discussed:
 - Not enough public parking (particularly in the Center)
 - Little to no areas for safe child play
 - Industrial places in residential areas
 - Homelessness
 - Not efficient use of land—we should build UP and not out!
 - Some buildings are not accessible
- What the students learned the City was already doing:
 - Parks, trails, gardens/green houses, more housing, making access to roads to build connectivity and better access to living in commercial areas.
- The students' ideas for solutions:
 - Environmental:
 - Replenishing/fixing up buildings for homeless people (or other uses like small businesses)
 - More quality parks/make them better
 - Maintain land better & possibly having cleanup crews
 - Economical:
 - Adding diverse types of housing (e.g., apartments, family homes, and single-occupant houses)

- More public bathrooms
- Replace unnecessary/chain businesses (fast food) with useful local businesses
- Offering paying cleanup jobs for teens
- Safe:
 - Adding ramps for bikes, wheelchairs, scooters, etc.
 - Use of guardrails where elderly and children walk
- The students' remaining questions on this topic:
 - Is there a way to advertise/encourage local businesses?
 - Mr. Brambilla-Botting said, as a resident of Keene, he had noticed that small and local businesses were not getting as much advertising as they should be. He noticed that some radio stations were giving small businesses a chance to compete with the larger ones.
 - How can we preserve wildlife, land and habitats?
 - Can we encourage or find a way to have backyard space and more gardens?
 - How can we make downtown more accessible with parking—because all the space is pretty occupied?

Mr. Wichland, Mr. Green, and Mr. Conboy talked about Sustainable Energy Use:

- The current challenges they noticed and discussed:
 - High oil prices
 - Mostly non-renewable sources
 - Citizens not fully informed or aware of renewable vs. non-renewable sources
- What they learned the City of Keene was already doing:
 - Using 48% natural gas, but produce 57% nuclear energy* (*in NH)
 - Using more of a variety of energy than we produce* (*in NH)
 - Over half of what City producing and using = non-renewable sources
- Solutions the students developed for these challenges:
 - Environmental:
 - **Solar Paint:**
 - This is an ingenious idea, due to the fact the solar paint is portable, can be applied multiple times, and you won't have to worry about it weighing 40–50 pounds moving it.
 - If we apply this to roads and sidewalks, then e-bikes and electric cars will charge without the concern of using electricity the City will use when people are charging their vehicles.
 - Economical:
 - **Windmill Investments:**
 - The City could profit in three years maximum from buying a \$2 million commercial windmill.
 - An average commercial windmill produces 6 million Kw, which costs \$2–\$4 million dollars. Per year, 6 million kw makes \$720,000.

Therefore, the City could profit in three years maximum from buying a \$2 million commercial windmill.

- Safe:
 - **Bioluminescent Algae:**
 - To capitalize on the amount of electricity the downtown area produces, if we install bioluminescent algae on the sidewalks, it could produce light inexpensively.
 - It would get rid of the need for streetlights entirely and would produce enough light for people to see.
- The students listed their remaining questions about this topic:
 - What renewable energy source do we already use the most?
 - What releases the most emissions in Keene?
 - How much can we rely on solar power?
 - Why do we use type-2 (fuel oil) energy for our main source (of heating energy)?
 - Can we use the Ashuelot River for energy production?
 - Does the City of Keene use bordering hills for any purpose, if so, can we use them for energy use?
 - How much fossil fuel does Keene approximately combust per year?
 - Why don't we use renewable energy for our main source, and, how can we use more?
 - Can we purchase fields separately for solar panels? How can we balance that with housing needs?

Mr. Brambilla-Botting concluded the presentation, welcoming questions from the Steering Committee. Chair Farrington led the Committee in applauding the students. Chair Farrington clarified that chain restaurants are not unnecessary, and Mr. Brambilla-Botting agreed, stating that they just take some shine from some local businesses.

Mr. Kost expressed thanks for the well-thought-out presentation. He found some technologies the students mentioned interesting, like solar paint and bioluminescent algae. He said it would be nice to have conversations about those more with the people who could actually implement them. Mr. Wichland explained the bioluminescent algae idea as applied to roads where cars and people go, and then a generator could be connected to the roadway, causing a chemical reaction that makes it light up when someone is on it vs. using lights. Mr. Conboy said companies turn bioluminescent algae into paint already, so the City would not have to complete that process. Mr. Wichland added that solar paint could be applied to the tops of buildings for thermal energy to heat homes and store energy for the community, noting that it would be more affordable than solar panels. Mr. Green agreed that the paint acts the same as a solar panel but is more portable and cheaper.

Mayor Kahn was intrigued by this project-based learning model. He encouraged the school and families to participate in Green Up Keene on April 26. Regarding parking, the Mayor compared it to the former President of University of California Berkeley some 60 years prior who described the University as a group of cats unified by a common goal to increase parking on campus. The

Mayor called parking a constant perceived need. The Mayor also promoted the Keene Community Power Plan, which was introducing up to 50% as the default rate produced by non-fossil fuels. He called that a really aggressive plan by the City to try to get to 100% renewable energy.

Mayor Kahn asked the students if they could reflect on their project-based learning experience, their skills, and any additional areas in which middle schoolers could help the City address problems. Mr. Brambilla-Botting mentioned an inspiring Neil de Grasse Tyson quote and how Friday science labs helped him to understand things. Projects in other classes helped him to understand things instead of just going through textbooks; he got to be interactive and learn how he understood the subject. To the Mayor's point, Mr. Brambilla-Botting thought there were a lot of ways the middle schoolers could help the City address problems but said to not take their ideas too seriously because they are not that experienced. Ms. Washburn shared some other examples of project-based learning, such as the National Junior Honor Society with projects focused on making the school a better place, and other projects cleaning up rivers or other parts of the community. She said she really loved working together because they could hear and combine everyone's different ideas. Mayor Kahn mentioned the Keene High School Youth Council that was tapping into the good ideas of Keene's youths who have lived in Keene all their lives and have valuable experience in the City to contribute.

Ms. Lavigne-Bernier thanked the students for their exciting ideas, stating that she hoped to see her child in a similar role in the future. Having grown up in Keene, moved away for a while, and come back, she told the students this was cool, that they were being heard, and they were really helping. She said it was refreshing and the Steering Committee appreciated it.

Dr. Perras agreed, stating that when you get to be an adult, you are weighed down with all the reasons why you cannot do certain things, and it was clear the students did not have that. It was a great reminder to the Steering Committee to think a little bit differently about what is actually possible. He said the presentation was incredibly valuable.

V. Future Land Use Map Discussion and Activity

Senior Planner, Mari Brunner, provided the Steering Committee with three reference maps: (1) preexisting Zoning Map, (2) existing Land Use by major categories by parcel of land, and (3) 2010 Future Land Use (FLU) Map. She offered to display others on the screen if it would be helpful, like the Complete Streets Map. Then, she provided handouts of four blank maps and markers (colors corresponding to map legends) and requested high-level input, asking the Steering Committee members to individually use the markers to visually demonstrate what they saw as the future of Keene in 15 years if the CMP vision is achieved. The four maps were:

1. Citywide Land Use Map:
 - a. Citywide future land development/land use areas. Where Committee members wanted to see residential development, mixed-use, industrial, commercial, agriculture, rural, and conservation.
2. Close-Up Land Use Map of the Downtown:

- a. Same as the city-wide map but zoomed in on the downtown area.
3. Citywide Mobility Connections:
 - a. Where the Committee wanted to see trails, bike routes, and transit.
4. Close-Up Mobility Connections for the Downtown

Staff intended to scan them and share them with the project consultants after the meeting. The new FLU Map would be based on the Community Vision input received to date and this feedback. There was a question about how residential growth is defined, and Ms. Brunner defined it broadly, stating it was about increasing housing builds and not a focus on lot size. Committee members worked individually on their maps for approximately 15 minutes. The Steering Committee reconvened, and Ms. Brunner asked the Committee specific questions about how they completed the maps.

In the Land Use Section, where did Committee members place Neighborhood Nodes (activity centers)?

Councilor Jones and Ms. Lavigne-Bernier worked together and listed: (1) upper Court Street near Dunkin Donuts and 711, (2) Park Avenue at Jack's Hardware and Park Avenue Deli & Market, (3) Park Avenue and Summit Avenue near the gas station, (4) Carpenter Street, and (5) Marlboro Street.

Chair Farrington suggested the area on Optical Avenue where KSC had a past project ideal for a mixed-use three- or four-story building.

Areas for residential growth?

Mr. Kost said he did not place residential anywhere specific, mostly capturing it in mixed-use and trying to keep the residential in a core urban setting that would get the most density and number of units while protecting the hillsides. Then, he said there could be infill housing based on the City's Zoning, but he was not thinking about large tracts of development. Mr. Meehan agreed with mixed-use development, which he placed all over the center of town, and he placed red (to indicate "residential growth area") where there were already existing neighborhoods outside of the core.

Mayor Kahn approached residential differently because he thought the City needed everything, stating that some people want to live in the hillsides where the environment is more attractive, and others prefer an urban environment. He listed Summit Road, Maple Avenue to Black Brook, and Base Hill Road; he said some were hard to relocate. He agreed with there being a lot of opportunities for mixed-use infill development.

Councilor Jones asked if Ms. Brunner was looking for build-up, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), new housing, or a combination. Ms. Brunner said anywhere to add new housing units, and the type of housing would depend on the area of the City.

Ms. Oram said that, as someone with a single-family home who was eager to not have that at some point, she thought downtown Keene had limited condominiums. She referenced the repurposed factory buildings that were popular but only had a handful of units. She spoke of people who want to enjoy everything Keene has to offer and not be in a single-family home, for whom the options were limited.

As a single person not needing a lot of space, Councilor Workman agreed that it was hard to find housing that would fit her needs. On the maps, she listed extra housing further down Arch Street toward Stonehouse Lane and Hastings Avenue.

Areas for commercial growth only?

Ms. Oram thought about the highly commercial area at the Rt. 9/10/12 intersection but noted the large cornfield, which seemed perennially supposed to be something but never was. It seemed ripe for commercial, already having egresses, and would not be disturbing any residential area. She said it would be a significant commercial footprint in a City this size. Mayor Kahn said that the Ledger family owns it.

Dr. Perras struggled with the commercial aspect when thinking about small businesses vs. box stores. He thought about following the spines of the major roadways from downtown out of the City and seeing the larger commercial, industrial, and manufacturing scale. He said a larger operation would imply the need for close availability of bigger roadways. In Dr. Perras' 20 months in Keene, he felt that the City had land available along the major roadways in-and-out of town.

Mayor Kahn mentioned opportunities on Washington Street in the area of Dinkbee's Convenience Store.

Green open space, agriculture, and/or areas for preservation?

Mr. Meehan focused on preserving what the City already has and did not speculate about agriculture. Mr. Kost mentioned wetlands. He also mentioned a lot of privately owned open land in west Keene near Stonehouse Lane; he thought it could be relevant in the discussion of community gardens that would be good for the community, if not large-scale agriculture. He also encouraged a lot of urban farms and pocket parks wherever possible, even infilled with homes. Mr. Kost encouraged this over large agricultural tracts in the future.

Dr. Perras left the meeting.

Ms. Oram suggested trail expansion around the Ashuelot River as she felt the City sometimes ignored it. So, she urged more walking and biking along it. She said to take advantage of the beautiful things Keene has to offer.

Mayor Kahn thought the State of NH defined agriculture as a minimum of 12 acres, so he did not think that was a priority for the City of Keene. Ms. Oram said except for Green Wagon Farm. Mayor Kahn agreed that it was a treasure, but not 12 acres; they farmed at several locations with one being their commerce.

Ms. Lavigne-Bernier was knowledgeable about how the former Findings property would be used for green space. She knew digging was not an option there (contamination) but asked if community or urban gardening might be possible there, noting what a nice area it is with all the nearby parks. Ms. Brunner said she would have to check with the Parks and Recreation Department because part of that parcel is in the floodway and part in the floodplain. The Skatepark was the one parcel that could be built-up because it was not in the floodway. Though Ms. Brunner thought it was a great idea. Ms. Lavigne-Bernier asked if grass and trees were only planned for the Findings property. Ms. Brunner thought some parking too and possibly some constructed wetlands; there was a plan online. Ms. Lavigne-Bernier commented on it being a nicely located parcel for housing.

Councilor Workman agreed with Mr. Meehan about maintaining the existing greenspace, except the Councilor wanted to focus on the heavily underutilized pocket parks, like the one on Church Street. While beautiful, she never saw anyone using it. Similarly with the one on Sesame Street. She wished to see more kids using them. Ms. Lavigne-Bernier mentioned an idea to bring volunteerism to the parks and Councilor Workman said to bring a plan to the City Council. Councilor Workman also suggested leaving approximately Hastings Avenue to Archway Farm and to Rt. 9 for agriculture, and Hurricane Road as well.

Mr. Kost asked if smaller neighborhood gardens are incompatible with floodways and floodplains. He said that if the gardeners are aware of the risks, areas could be preserved for those uses. Ms. Brunner said that in the floodway, you cannot build raised beds and on the Findings property, raised beds would be required because digging underground would be prohibited due to contamination. There could be raised beds in the floodplain with compensatory storage. Mr. Kost thought a lot of communities might want to be able to have their own gardens and it would be worth incorporating in the CMP. He added that perhaps neighborhoods could take ownership of small parks.

Historic preservation? Size and location of existing downtown Historic District?

Councilor Jones said the Historic District was developed initially as up-and-down Main Street, with some of Washington and Court Streets. However, he did not think there was a true Historic District in the City, citing historic places throughout the community as a different perspective.

Mr. Kost agreed with Main Street, Railroad Square, and Gilbo Avenue because of the history of the railroads and Industrial Heritage Trail. He cited the critical areas up Washington and Court Streets. So, he thought the existing Historic District was capturing those.

As a resident of Main Street, Ms. Oram said that when she moved there in 2011, there was an effort underway to preserve all of Main Street as a Historic District, but it was not necessarily fully thought out and did not come to fruition. She said the properties on Main and Court Streets pay a premium property tax for the beauty of the historic homes, and she said adding all the constrictions of the Historic District (e.g., replacing slate roof \$500/slate) would require something to abate the taxes. She thought that was likely why the 2011 effort failed, stating both things could not be true.

Councilor Jones asked his fellow Committee members if they did anything with the Kingsbury property? Chair Farrington said that had been a long-term question. Ms. Oram thought that parcel could have more purpose as downtown housing because it is so central (despite the onsite issues).

Mobility connections?

Mr. Meehan suggested extending the rail trails as far as possible, connecting them with one another, and extending the bike lanes. He also advocated for safer parking on Main Street that would not be potentially deadly to cyclists. Ms. Lavigne-Bernier agreed. Mayor Kahn thought there was a defined bike path on Washington Street but not Court Street, which he had heard parents speak about. The Mayor agreed about connecting out-of-town: Rt. 10 & 12, Swanzey, and Winchester, among others.

Mr. Kost referred back to the discussion on Complete Streets and how, when they are designed as such, they would include the necessary bike lanes and sidewalks to be safe. He advocated for incorporating nice bike lanes on City streets. Mayor Kahn's concern was not wanting to have parallel bike lanes where there are already bike paths in town; for example, West Street already had the extension of the Cheshire Line/North Bridge. So, the Mayor thought the most important thing on West Street was sidewalks and pedestrian access to the commercial areas.

Ms. Lavigne-Bernier mentioned close calls when biking, like when Prime Roast started making coffee deliveries by bike during Covid. She cited scary experiences biking on West Street and Main Street. She said one of the most used pieces of infrastructure was the foot bridge between the two communities by Hastings Avenue, so connecting areas like that would be useful.

Councilor Workman said there was a lot of emphasis on pedestrian safety around downtown Keene, but further away, crosswalks were farther apart or non-existent. She thought about kids walking to school or the bus stop who might need a crosswalk at Valley Street, for example, or North/South Lincoln Streets. On biking, Councilor Workman echoed the eighth graders who presented and said they wanted bike lanes.

Ms. Oram was sad to hear the Martell Court footbridge (by Achille Agway, under Rt. 101) was closed because it linked KSC to the athletic fields on the other side of Rt. 101. She understood it was in disrepair but knew it would be missed. She knew there was an ongoing conversation between KSC and the City about who was responsible for it. Mayor Kahn said KSC worked with

NH DOT and the City to sustain that bridge after the Rail Trail was extended over Rt. 101, so the Mayor said it was unfortunate and surprising that it was closed. He understood if it was a maintenance issue but if KSC had enough interest he thought perhaps there could be a partnership.

Ms. Brunner appreciated the input on the mapping activity. She welcomed further input by email after the meeting. The Committee members' individual maps would be scanned and provided to the consultants, who were working on the online StoryMap, and the FLU Map would be added to it in early May with this helpful feedback.

Looking at the existing Land Use Map, Mr. Kost noted that he was nervous about the incredible mosaic of little lots. He wondered if there was a way to think about land use in broader categories to encourage more mixed-use, especially downtown. Ms. Brunner said the existing Land Use Map they were looking at was created in-house by the City's GIS Coordinator using the Land Use category of the City's assessing data. The new FLU Map would not be parcel-by-parcel like this. That was what Mr. Kost was hoping.

Mayor Kahn added that for the definitions of industry land, there was not a category included for mixed commercial and industrial. He said the City was desperate to fill large commercial strips and the City's definition of industry was outdated. So, he thought the City's Zoning was in need of a mixed-use category. Ms. Brunner wondered whether the Light Industrial category could be appropriate for commercial but the Mayor was unsure what that meant. Mayor Kahn provided the example of a company using two buildings that together totaled approximately 8,000 square feet and would leave Keene if it could not find another sizeable location; the City's definition prevented them from going in a space like Hannaford or Kohls plaza with more square footage. He said those situations would cost the City significantly. Ms. Oram agreed, stating that there were various places where she thought industrial or precision manufacturing could go that would require space and need to be Zoned for Industry.

Vice Chair Henkel argued against his own industrial use and the potential for noise to impact immediate neighbors Zoned in Light Industry. He thought some Light Industry might fit well in the retail category, but that the City should be careful about what exactly is defined as acceptable. Vice Chair Henkel and the Mayor agreed that certain Light Industry companies could likely tolerate each other's noise and others might tolerate each other's vibrations; so there might need to be narrower definitions of Light Industries (i.e., Optics, Biotech, etc.).

VI. Next Steps:

A) Community Survey & Story Map

Launching the week of April 7. There would be weekly newsletters moving forward for those who signed up.

B) Future Land Use Map

Ms. Brunner asked the Committee to promote the FLU Map that would launch in early May in the online StoryMap produced by the project consulting team.

C) Prioritization Survey

This narrow, non-public survey (also referred to as a “decision-making tool”) would be sent to the Steering Committee, City Council, Planning Board, and senior City staff leadership (i.e., department heads and City Manager). The intent would be to gain input on how to prioritize the different strategies under each goal in the CMP.

D) June 3 Future Summit, 5:00 PM, Heberton Hall

To encourage participation, there would be appetizers, and the City was trying to arrange for childcare.

Chair Farrington asked if the Strategic Pillar Task Forces had concluded and Ms. Brunner said yes, the week before this meeting. The Task Force membership would also receive the Prioritization Survey.

VII. New Business

None presented.

VIII. Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Farrington adjourned the meeting at 8:32 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker
April 8, 2025

Reviewed and edited by,
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner