

City of Keene
New Hampshire

FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
SPECIAL BUDGET MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, May 6, 2025

5:30 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Thomas F. Powers, Chair
Michael J. Remy, Vice Chair, (Remote)
Bettina A. Chadbourne
Bryan J. Lake
Kris E. Roberts

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Ferland, City Manager
Beth Fox, ACM/Human Resources Director
Kari Chamberlain, Finance Director
Rebecca Landry, Asst. City Manager
Terri Hood, City Clerk
William Dow, Deputy City Clerk

Members Not Present:

All Present

Chair Powers called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM.

Overview - Pages 6-10

City Manager Elizabeth Ferland addressed the committee first and stated the City Council's fiscal policy limits, which limit property tax increases based on a rolling three-year average. She stated that a couple of years ago, the City changed from the Boston Cambridge CPIU to the Northeast Region CPIU, net expenditures required by law, debt service payments, and capital leases. This year, the CPIU was 4.1% (broken down on page 6). She went on to indicate that the budget book is available on the website.

The Manager stated that this proposed budget is \$468,506.00, below the City's fiscal policy limit. This results in an expected increase in the City's portion of the tax rate of 2.06% - she noted it is actually \$0.28 instead of \$0.27, which was in her original memo. This budget does include the four firefighters, one per shift, recently approved by the City Council. It does not include expenses associated with a Safer Grant award for the Fire Department. If a Safer Grant is awarded later this year, additional appropriations will be requested to cover gear, training, and other equipment, which is not funded by the grant. If a Safer Grant is not awarded in FY26, staff will be back before Council to request the addition of one more firefighter per shift to bring the City above the minimum of 12 per shift that is required to run the City's third ambulance.

The Manager stated that wage adjustments are tied to contracted bargaining union agreements. The City has six unions and non-union wage adjustments, which include a 3% cost of living adjustment. The second year of the City's Capital Program has been updated for FY26.

Overall tax rate estimates are based on a conservative projection, which includes no increase in the City-wide assessed value. This budget also conservatively estimates City revenues associated with State Municipal Aid. The State Budget and some of those revenues are in flux – hence, those have been level-funded.

Significant revenue increases are included in several categories. The interest earnings category increased by \$600,000, which has helped offset the increased bonding expenses. An increase in motor vehicle revenues of \$165,000 is estimated. An increase in ambulance billing of \$200,000 will offset some of the additional expenses associated with the additional firefighters.

Ms. Ferland went on to say that she has heard from the County Manager that the County may begin charging the City for backup ambulance services. The City has been in an MOU (memorandum of understanding) with the County for a couple of years. Right now, there has been no charge for that backup service, so County charges have not been included in the budget. There was also no request from the Chamber of Commerce for additional funding this year. Last year, there was a request for \$10,000 that the City did fund separately. Overall, it is a difficult balancing act with lots of moving parts.

The Manager stated that staff has constructed a budget that meets Council fiscal policy limitations while continuing to provide services at the levels expected.

With that, the Manager turned the presentation over to the Finance Director.

Kari Chamberlain Finance Director. Ms. Chamberlain began by expressing her appreciation to the Bob Constable, Asst. Finance Director for supporting the department on the day-to-day processes, HR Director Beth Fox for her assistance, the City Manager, and other Department Heads for their continued support.

Ms. Chamberlain stated pages 6-10 have an overview and summary of the FY26 budget, which includes the review of the Fiscal Policy impact, changes in Revenue and Expenditures from the FY25 budget to the FY26 proposed budget, and provides key highlights regarding the drivers of the year-over-year increase. She stated that, as the City Manager pointed out, the Fiscal Policy allowed a rise using the three-year rolling average of the Northeast New England Region CPIU, which was 4.1%. The increase allowed for a \$1.2 million increase, but with staff calculations for the General Fund budget, they arrived at an increase of \$764,000, which was \$469,000 below Fiscal Policy limits. The Fiscal Policy further recommends an Unassigned Fund Balance of between 7% and 17% of the Total Operating Budget plus Property Tax Commitments. Both School and County are estimated to have an Unassigned Fund Balance at the end of FY 25 of 15.33%.

She noted that of the \$1.6 million of change in General Fund Operations, \$1.5 million is due to Personnel Changes, \$934,000 is for accounts for Salaries and Wages (which includes four additional firefighter positions as well as some staffing to accommodate a new staffing model at the library). The remaining \$103,000 relates to Non-Personnel Operating Expenses. The key drivers of this increase include increased Shelter Expense of \$50,000 and increased Professional Services; specifically with regard to the City's audit of \$30,000. Tax Expense decreased by

\$156,000 due to the Library Transfer to the City as part of the TIF Project Conclusion of the New Markets Tax Credit. Revenue changes include a reduction in TIF taxes as a result of the Library Transfer and a significant increase in interest income, an increase in ambulance fees, and an increase in motor vehicle-related transactions.

General Fund Revenues and Expenditures - Pages 11-34

Ms. Chamberlain noted that in the FY25 Budget Book, there are both Revenue and Expenditure Budget charts on pages 11 and 12, which provide insight into the key components of the Revenue Budget as well as the respective departmental portions of the Overall General Fund Expenditure Budget. Page 13 provides a look into the departmental allocation of the Proposed Property Tax.

Pages 14 and 15 are a summarized Profit and Loss Statement detailing revenue sources, including the use of surplus, as well as expenditures by department grouping and the capital program, which includes overall Debt Service. It was discovered that the Debt Service calculation per the Budget Book was understated by bonds issued in August 2024. The overall impact of this change is an addition to Debt Service of \$284,000, due to required principal and interest payments.

Ms. Chamberlain noted she has provided a General Fund Debt Schedule for the Committee's reference, as well as an additional Recommended Budget Revision Sheet including the updated General Fund Debt Service total and net impact calculation, which does not have an impact on the overall proposed tax increase.

Page 16 of the Budget Book details the Proposed Budget Fiscal Policy Compliance including the Proposed Municipal Tax Rate calculation of \$13.59, an increase of \$0.28 or 2.1%. Approval of all departmental requests would result in a proposed property tax rate increase of \$0.49. The overall tax rate is estimated to increase by approximately \$1.87, largely due to an increase of \$1.48 for Local and State Combined Education requests.

Pages 17-21 provide reports for General Fund Revenues beginning with high-level revenue groupings. Pages 22-24 provide a detailed listing of departmental Supplemental Requests and include the City Manager's recommendations. Pages 25-34 provide expenditure details for the General Fund, including total expenditures by department. Pages 26-32 provide General Fund Summary by expenditure category. Pages 33 and 34 provide Department totals by Personnel and Operating expenses. Pages 35 and 36 relate to Long-Term Debt. As mentioned previously, there is a change due to bonds issued in August 2024.

Debt Service - Pages 35-37

FY 26 will include not only interest but principal payments, which increase overall Debt Service. Pages 36 and 37 are the Long-Term Debt schedule before the correction.

Outside Agencies - Pages 44-48

Human Services Manager, Natalie Darcy addressed the Committee and stated each year, Human Services is asked to take the lead on Outside Agency Funding. This year, the Outside Agency Committee consisted of individuals from Human Services, Finance, and the Keene Police Department. A public notice was placed in the Keene Sentinel in December with a deadline of January 29, 2025. 13 organizations applied for funding. Recommendations for the funding are based in part on each agency's response under the following established criteria:

- The impact on the City if the agency was not in operation.
- The agency provides a service with a direct financial impact on expenditures of City departments.
- The number and percentage of Keene residents served by the agencies.
- Are other local service agencies providing similar services.
- Financial impact in terms of prevention and intervention services that potentially saves future City spending.
- Demonstrated efforts to cooperate and avoid duplication with other agencies.

The committee met with agencies in February via Zoom to discuss the agency requests. The committee then met and made recommendations which were forwarded to the City Manager for budget review. All agencies were notified of tonight's meeting, and some of them are here to address the Finance committee.

Community Volunteer Transportation Company (CVTC)

Mr. Alan Gillis Director of Community Volunteer Transportation. Mr. Gillis stated last year they had 42 different riders from Keene. This year they are already at 64 riders.

The next issue is how many people they bring into Keene for doctor visits, grocery stores, pharmacies etc. Last year, that number was 348. This year, the number is already at 400 (in the first four months). Mr. Gillis stated that they work closely with Keene organizations to see where they can work together.

Federal funding has already been cut by a little over 20% for next year, so they are looking at what they can do for fundraising and hope they can count on the communities that have supported them in the past.

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of New Hampshire (BBBSNH)

Ms. Kimberly Diamond addressed the Committee on behalf of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of New Hampshire. Ms. Diamond stated that pre-pandemic, they used to have an office and program in Keene that served about 30 to 50 youth annually.

Since about 2019, they have lost most of their funding, which was United Way funding. They are trying to rebuild programming in this area. Their office is now right outside of Keene and has one individual in Keene assisting with volunteer recruitment and outreach. Ms. Diamond stated that for every youth they serve, they also serve the family. Currently, two youths are being

served in an active match right now. They currently have about 18 youths waiting for a mentor in the greater Keene area. Five of those are Keene residents.

The plan for 2026 is to increase mentorship so they can have about 8 to 10 matches in Keene. The long-term plan over the next two years is to get back into the school systems. Ms. Diamond stated they are also planning to meet with the Keene YMCA to see if they can collaborate with them. They have made connections with New Hampshire Connected Families and have applied for Congressionally-directed funding, specifically for the Monadnock area.

In terms of the benefits of the program, there was a recent economic impact study that showed Big Brothers/Big Sisters mentored youth over a course of a 30-year span, between the ages of 20 and 25 have increased income of 15%. They are 20% more likely to graduate college compared to their non-mentored peers, and they are also less likely to have truancy issues or substance-use dependencies as they become older. They have improved behaviors and stronger social bonds, which tends to keep them out of needing social services in the future. Ms. Diamond stated that currently 94% of the youth they serve have suffered some form of significant trauma of anything from homelessness to mental/physical/sexual abuse or live with family members who have mental health concerns or substance-use disorders.

The Community Kitchen

Ms. Barb Wiseman Executive Director of the Community Kitchen stated that they run a hot meals program five nights a week and are serving about 50 folks. She stated that in the dining room last week, they saw a record number 91 individuals. They also send 50 meals a night to The Hundred Nights Shelter. They run a pantry program two days a week, Wednesday and Thursday. Guests are able to choose one day or the other to pick up. The goal is nine meals of provisions per household. In 2024, they moved about 400,000 meals through the pantry program and about 32,500 through the hot meals program.

Ms. Wiseman stated they are serving the entire Monadnock region, but are very careful with data and counting where people are coming from through the Pantry program. In the hot meals program, there is no barrier to access. On the pantry side, demographic information is collected so that municipalities can be approached and asked directly. Of the 400,000 meals that went out of the pantry program last year, it represented 3,400 individuals - 64.2% of those were from Keene - 256,000 meals to residents of Keene. Ms. Wiseman stated they seek funding for about 20% of their expense budget from municipalities, and they do that in direct correlation to the percentage of residents served.

She stated they are seeing a change in the landscape and how funding is affecting them. They don't receive any state or federal funding, and it is essential to see where their assistance is coming from. Demand is going up, supply is going down, which leaves them with a critical mission. Ms. Wiseman stated they are also seeing more and more people who are losing social services such as SNAP and WIC. Because donations are decreasing, it is causing the need to purchase more of those food resources.

Ms. Wiseman stated her main purpose tonight is to thank the City for the resources they share with the Kitchen.

Home Health Care Meals On Wheels

Katie Hart, Director of Operations at Home, Healthcare, Hospice, and Community Services addressed the committee next. Meals on Wheels is one of their programs. Ms. Hart stated that this program provides vital nutrition and safety support to seniors over 60 years of age, as well as under 60 years old who are disabled and have an income less than \$1,600. They provide over 90,000 meals a year, and over 43,000 of those are right here in the City of Keene. Ms. Hart stated they are asking for this funding to help defray their costs. They receive about 66% of their funding from State and Federal sources, but that leaves the rest as fundraising.

Ms. Hart went on to say that seniors need more than nutrition; they need a safety check. Drivers are required to look at the client and have a conversation. She stated HCS's mission is to keep people in their homes independently as long as they choose to be there.

94% of clients indicate they are in better health due to the nutritious meals that they receive. 97% say they feel safe at home due to the daily safety checks. 68% say that this program is vital to their ability to stay at home to be able to get this nutritional support. 59% are looking at Meals on Wheels as their primary source of nutrition. Many of these folks are stretching the meal they receive between two meals a day to support their nutrition because they simply don't have the money for food.

In closing, Ms. Hart thanked the City for their support with this program.

Southwestern Community Services (SCS)

Mr. Keith Thibodeau addressed the committee on behalf of SCS. Mr. Thibeault stated SCS provided just under 4.5 million dollars directly to Keene residents through its programs last year.

They served 4,800 families in Keene. He noted they don't just come to the City of Keene for assistance. The agency gathers information about how they assist each City and Town, then they request from the communities they serve, 1% up to \$10,000 of that direct assistance that City or Town was provided. He noted that Keene has surpassed the \$10,000 limit but their request is perennially for \$10,000. They ask all Cheshire County cities and towns for this money and raise about \$150,000 of their needs each year in this way.

Mr. Thibeault stated that they have a broad set of programs that can assist people with their basic needs. He indicated they have a program that brought about \$1,000,000 worth of services through the Head Start program to Keene residents last year. The Fuel Assistance Program brought in just under \$950,000 to Keene residents last year. The Senior Assistance Program, which is an Electrical Systems Program brought in \$320,000 to Keene residents and completed about \$110,000 of weatherization to Keene homes last year.

Mr. Thibeault stated they own a fair amount of real estate in town, which they use for homeless shelters, administrative offices, housing for seniors or low-income families, or Head Start centers. They paid just under \$180,000 in property taxes to the City of Keene last year.

He thanked the City for its support.

Home Health Care City Express (Transporting)

Ms. Hart addressed the Committee again and stated the City Express has two buses that operate on a fixed route; Monday through Friday, 8 am to 4:30 pm with stops at medical facilities, grocery stores, and social services. There is a third bus that provides door-to-door service for those with transit needs, about 3% of riders use this specific service. This year, they are projecting to surpass 21,000 rides on the City Express Bus. They also operate the Friendly Bus for older adults and the Medical Express that goes to White River Junction to the VA and Dartmouth-Hitchcock in Lebanon, which adds another 7,700.

Ms. Hart stated they have made some changes in the past few years and are now going more frequently to Market Basket. They have also added the Primary Care at Maple Avenue. They have made 3,800 trips to medical facilities in just the first six months of this year.

Ms. Hart stated that they are anticipating receiving three buses from the Department of Transportation (DOT) to replace some of their aging fleet between now and July 1st. Ms. Hart stated that they continue to work with community partners such as Southwestern Regional Planning Commission, the Next Generation Transit Project, and others in the region to continue mobility not just in the City of Keene, but also in Cheshire County.

Ms. Hart thanked the City for their support.

Keene Housing Kids Collaborative

Ms. Sally Mallay Executive Director of Keene Housing Kids Collaborative stated they are deeply grateful for the Committee's recommendation of \$12,500 in funding for this fiscal year. In these economic times, the City's support sends a powerful message that the City of Keene is committed to acting locally to address systemic issues that affect the most vulnerable children.

She stated that their ask was \$15,000, and while the difference may seem modest for their organization, every dollar matters and every dollar directly translates to a child in Keene gaining access to out-of-school and learning opportunities they would otherwise miss. She stated that the 267 Keene kids they anticipate serving in the upcoming year live in households with a median annual income of just \$23,000. Three-quarters of these homes are headed by single mothers. Nearly half of the kids have an IEP or receive special education services, which is more than double the district average.

Ms. Mallay stated that when financial and bureaucratic barriers to participation are removed, we open the doors to after-school and summer programs. This not only keeps kids busy, but also prepares them for adulthood. They build academic confidence, social-emotional skills, and career

readiness. It closes the 6,000-hour opportunity gap between low-income children and their more affluent peers by the time they get to 6th grade, which equals five full years of classroom instruction.

Ms. Mallay went on to say that this year, State funding for summer programming, through the Rekindling Curiosity Initiative came to an end, which is a major blow for families who rely on these programs not just for enrichment but as a lifeline. She stated the City's investment is now more vital than ever. City funding is used entirely for direct program costs, registration fees, tuition, keeping kids in local programs, and channeling more than \$263,000 back into the Keene economy through payments to youth-serving organizations. There is clear evidence that every dollar in after-school funding that is spent saves at least \$3 in future social costs in the end.

Ms. Mallay thanked the committee for their consideration.

COMMUNITY-FUNDED EVENTS

Independence Eve - Keene SwampBats

Mr. Kevin Watterson representing the Keene Swamp Bats addressed the committee. He began by thanking the City for their support with the Independence Eve event to host the City's fireworks and asked the City to consider the same amount as it has for the past few years. He noted that this is a family fun entertainment. Individuals are not charged for the fireworks and look forward to another good event.

4 on the 4th Road Race

Ms. Janelle Santori President of Pathways for Keene stated that this organization sponsors the four on the 4th road race, which is a four mile run walk event. This will be the 23rd year of this event. The goal is twofold, to bring exposure to downtown Keene and the trail systems, as well as raise funds to deploy back into the trail systems for Keene.

Ms. Santori stated they bring in over 500 participants for the race each year, not including spectators and net approximately \$30,000 which is deployed back into the trail systems. Their current fundraising mission is to help the Transportation Heritage Trail, the trail system that will connect the current Eastern Avenue, down Marlborough Street over 101. She thanked the committee for their consideration.

Clarence Demar Marathan/Half Marathon

Mr. Alan Stroshine member of the Keene Elm City Rotary Club and race director for the Clarence Damar Marathon addressed the committee next. He began by thanking the long relationship with the City. He stated they had their first protocol meeting for the next event this morning. Mr. Stroshine stated 100% of all proceeds from this event go to the Keene Elm City Rotary Club which is a 100% volunteer operation and only have to fund things like caterers, tents etc.

Mr. Stroshine stated a good example of the proceeds is that they are in the second of three weeks of delivering sneakers to every single second grader in Cheshire County, encouraging them to move every day, be active and healthy. This is just a small part of what the proceeds of this event go towards. Earlier this year they were recognized by the Monadnock Collaborative for the impact they have had on the community. Mr. Stroshine extended his appreciation to the City for its support. This is the 47th running of the marathon

Kiwanis Keene Tree Lighting Event

Ms. Peg Bruce Secretary and a Co-Treasurer of the Keene Kiwanis Club of Keene and the Keene Kiwanis Foundation stated that she has been involved in tree lighting since they started managing this event in 2013. She stated that the event seems to draw more and more people each year. She stated that the club is grateful for the portion that the City helps with. Ms. Bruce stated they are not making any plans to change anything this coming year.

Councilor Remy stated the feedback he has received from local businesses in the area is that this event happens on a day where downtown generally is busy and when the roads are shut down it creates some confusion for shoppers about whether the streets are still open and how they can get down to those businesses and asked that some sort of marketing effort be put into this.

Keene Pumpkin Festival

Councilor Remy stated he is on the Board for Pumpkin Festival/Let it Shine and For the Taste of Keene and would abstain from making any comments on this issue.

Mr. Mike Giacomo representing the Let it Shine Organization that hosts the Keene Pumpkin Festival began by thanking the City for its many years of support. He stated this has been a really good three years with this event. He stated they surveyed downtown businesses to get gain their input on the event and received about 20 responses and about 2/3rds indicated they had double or better sales the day of the event. He stated they estimate about \$200,000 to \$300,000 of revenue impact to downtown businesses. This does not take into account the \$20,000 raised by nonprofit organizations. They are a 100% volunteer board. Mr. Giacomo stated they expect to have some challenges with the 2026 event, as it is being held later in the year as well as the downtown infrastructure project.

The Taste of Keene - Keene Young Professionals Network

Ms. Alana Fiero President of the Keene Young Professionals Network addressed the committee next. She stated this is the fifth year for this festival. They are a volunteer board. The goal for 2026 is to help downtown businesses bring in people in to enjoy the food and beverages that are offered in the region. She thanked the City for this support.

Keene Pride Festival

Mr. Adam Teopfer Board President of Keene Pride stated they are a volunteer run organization and produce around 30 events a year with the biggest one being the Keene Pride Festival. Mr. Teopfer stated this would be their 4th year running this event. He indicated the event brings thousands of people into downtown Keene. He stated it was a different this year in the sense that due to the size it could not fit in Central Square and hence will be extending down Main Street to Railroad Square. Around 120 vendors participate in the event. He extended his appreciation to the City which has funded the event for the past two years and are excited about providing events for the LGBTQ community.

Councilor Roberts felt each event was important to the community.

Mayor & City Council - Pages 40-43

City Clerk Terri Hood addressed the Committee and stated her department does not create this entire budget, but there are a few items she wanted to review with the Committee. The line items the department focuses on are the Minute-Taker Wage lines, the Council Official Expense, Supplies, and Software.

Ms. Hood went on to point out a few supplementals. One is under Operating - Other Services. There has been a slight increase to the Municipal Code software of \$700, which represents their annual escalator. There is also a request for \$3,500 in the PC replacement fund, which pays for more than just the City Council's computer equipment, but it also covers equipment in the Mayor's office. This request of \$3,500 would go into the PC Replacement fund for two years to allow replacement of the Chromebooks in FY27. The current equipment will have been in use for seven years by the time they are replaced. Thereafter, these devices would be on a five-year replacement schedule.

Another supplemental item is Council Official Expense line item – this relates to some additional costs for the Municipal Election and for costs related to photography to cover Council photographs (as Councilors leave office and new Councilors are onboarded). Ms. Hood added the cost of food is going up, and a slight increase in that line item is for those increases.

In the Supplies-Software line, there is a \$280 increase, which has to do with the purchase of Grammarly for one of the new staff members in the department. Ms. Hood stated that the training budget has increased at the request of the Mayor to allow Councilors to attend some trainings. Mayor Kahn stated the request Ms. Hood referred to was for \$3,500. These funds would allow us to participate in the National League of Cities, which is a conference appropriate for a City of our size to have an affiliation with.

Councilor Haas asked if staff are using or had any plans to leverage the use of AI for things like minute taking, etc. Assistant City Manager Rebecca Landry stated what is being seen are applications incorporating AI features. She indicated she will leave this up to the IT Department to weigh in further.

Capital Appropriations - Pages 49-53

The Manager stated this is the second year of the Capital Plan and noted that the only adjustments that she made was pushing out the public bathroom by another year. This is because the City has been carrying funds in that line for a public bathroom on Gilbo Avenue for a couple of years, and they are debt-funded and currently do not have a revenue source. The Manager stated that the other item she adjusted was related to the West Keene Fire station, which has been in the CIP for a few years as a grant-funded project.

City Manager – Page 54-59

The City Manager explained that the budget includes the City Manager, the two deputy City Managers, and the Emergency Manager. The Emergency Manager is Kurt Blomquist, which is a contracted position. The adjustment is for the wages for the role he is in, as well as an additional \$500.00 for operating supplies. The Manager explained that Mr. Blomquist has accomplished some of the projects that have been on his list this year. One of the big projects was moving the Emergency Operations Center into the training room. He is currently working on the Hazard Mitigation Plan. The Manager stated that the City is working on hiring a Deputy Emergency Management Director.

The adjustment is an additional \$16,899 being allocated to Emergency Management. There are no supplemental requests.

City Clerk - Pages 64-71

City Clerk Terri Hood and Deputy City Clerk Bill Dow were the next two speakers. Ms. Hood noted revenues have generally remained static for the department, but they did project an increase in Records Center Revenue. Mr. Dow added that although the Records Center client base has not increased, the services being provided has increased, and is generating approximately \$30,000 annually.

Ms. Hood stated that the goals the department is planning for this Fiscal Year include conducting the Municipal Elections in the fall and Implementing New Voting Technology. The new Voting Works Vote Tabulation system will be unveiled during those elections. This equipment would add some funds to the budget for programming fees for those devices. She indicated staff is also looking at doing some Record Center improvements and assessing what the future storage capacity needs might be.

The department has started moving the Minute-Taker Program to Office 365 for document management. This will save money in the future, as laptops won't be necessary for personnel and work can be done in the Cloud.

Staff will also continue to verify completeness of the Permanent Record Series, which is a project the former City Clerk started. She was able to get through Charter Amendments and Rules of Order Amendments. In the future, the department will be focusing on Site Plan and

Subdivision Regulations, Master Plan Updates, and the Planning Board Development Standards documentation.

Ms. Hood next reviewed the department requests. One item is Overtime Hours for permanent part-time employees. Regarding Communications and Phone, there is a supplemental of \$160. Regarding Elections, there is a supplement of \$1,175. Maintenance-Office Equipment supplemental is \$5,700. Ms. Hood explained that the State is requiring cities to start using the Accessible Voting Systems at their own expense. The State will be providing these systems, but the City will be required to maintain the equipment. In the printing budget, a supplement of \$3,100 is being requested for the new tabulator. \$700 supplement is for cost of additional Supervisor of the Checklist sessions. She explained a bill went into law recently requiring Supervisor Sessions be held at least once every 90 days. Software supply supplemental of \$1,200 is for a new piece of equipment to schedule workers on Election days. There is a \$10,000 Maintenance – Building supplemental for the records center maintenance to update with some new flooring needs.

Human Services

Ms. Darcy addressed the Committee and stated that Human Services provides short-term emergency financial assistance with housing, electric home heating, fuel, homeless assistance, prescription medications and cremation when necessary. She stated that the department works to instill an empathetic and empowering approach to helping those in need and the needs of those requesting assistance shall be met in the most beneficial and cost-efficient manner possible, while respecting the confidentiality of the applicants – keeping in mind the application of the law and City Council approved guidelines. Ms. Darcy stated last Fiscal Year, Human Services dealt with a large surge in homelessness with the rise in rents becoming unaffordable to many clients. She stated she is happy to report that this year the people seeking hotel assistance has reduced and indicated that the outreach worker on staff has done a phenomenal job moving people out of hotels and lowering costs of accommodations.

Ms. Darcy stated the housing shortage is still alive and well. Many landlords are requiring applications with good credit scores and references. Many of the clients do not qualify for these apartments. Rental amounts keep going up. The department has clients that have been priced out of their apartments because landlords have sold the apartment and the rent is increased, which causes the City to have to cover the differences between what they were paying and the new higher rental prices.

48% of individuals in homeless shelters right now are Keene residents. 13.3% are from out of State and the remaining 38.7% are from other parts of New Hampshire. 28 individuals residing in both shelters in Keene have been in the shelter between one and five years. 37 individuals have been in the shelters for up to six months, and the remaining six months to a year. The long-term shelter stay inhibits newly homeless individuals from utilizing the shelter system. However, the Human Services rental line item is on track to stay within the FY25 budget.

Ms. Darcy stated this year, the need for home heating, fuel and electric assistance was reduced largely in part because of the fuel assistance program. The department has utilized 36.2% of the

utilities and 9.5% of the prescription line items. However, because of anticipated cuts at the federal level for fuel assistance and expanded Medicaid – she stated she has asked for the line items to remain the same. If LIHEAP funding is drastically reduced (fuel assistance) or eliminated, the City's costs could potentially increase for both home heating fuel and electric for this upcoming heating season. If expanded Medicaid is reduced or discontinued, the cost to assist with prescription needs will greatly increase as well.

As for reimbursements, to date, Human Services has received about \$18,343.93. This is less than last year. Last year, the City received around 50,000 in reimbursements from clients who were staying in hotels, and they were reimbursing for their fair share of the hotel cost. These were individuals who had income through various ways in addition to cash reimbursements for people who simply wanted to pay back their benefits. Ms. Darcy stated this year they didn't have the volume in the hotels - for the most part those who stay in motels do not have income. The \$18,343.93 received to date is for the following: Cash \$938.39; motel reimbursement 10,884; welfare lien payoff \$5,379.82, and SSI interim reimbursement assistance of \$1,141.72.

Ms. Darcy went on to say Human Services staff continue to provide case management, participate in meetings to end homelessness and work closely with the shelters. In Keene, staff continue to collaborate with community partners in the area to provide many services that the clients need, and finally, Human Services continues to coordinate the holiday sponsorship program that assists between 280 and 300 individuals each holiday season.

Councilor Roberts noted that Ms. Darcy had indicated there are people who have been in the shelter program for nearly five years and asked if these were individuals or families. Ms. Darcy stated that most are individuals, but there is one family that has been in the shelter for a long time.

Councilor Favolise referred to the City Manager and indicated he is aware the City has worked out a billing scheme and partnership with Southwest Community Services, and was interested in learning how this recuperation effort was going. The Manager stated that the last time this issue was discussed, the City had mixed success. The City has had some pushback. The City has worked with Senator Fenton this year to put forward some language that would help the City fill in some of the gaps that communities are using to avoid having to pay their share.

The Manager explained in the Human Services budget there are Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Hundred Nights Shelter and SCS Shelter Services. The Hundred Nights Shelter was listed under outside agencies until they entered into an MOU a year or two ago. When the City worked with Senator Fenton to get the bill passed for billing for reimbursement for clients who are outside of Keene. The City first started just billing for clients who come into Human Services and have been pretty successful with that. In conversations with the shelters, the City learned that the shelters were not getting reimbursement for outside communities that were sending people to Keene, which directly impacts the City. If the City can't access shelter beds because other communities are sending them to shelters in Keene, this is a direct financial impact to Keene. The Manager stated she created an arrangement with SCS to bill for people who are coming in from outside of the Keene area. This has been done for about a year and a half and this has created a lot of concern in area communities who provide welfare services and why the City of

Keene was getting involved with this. It was explained that it is about paying for their residents; whether they are coming here or they are coming to a shelter it impacts the City of Keene.

The Manager stated it was somewhat successful but staff will be meeting again with SCS to discuss what we have for outstanding billing. She added there is no liability for the community. The City is just assisting with the billing so SCS could utilize the residency requirement that was changed in the law a couple of years ago and try to get more communities to pay their fair share.

She stated one of the arguments has been that if someone from Swanzey comes in and if Swanzey is going to have to support that person financially, they want him/her to fill out their welfare application. SCS has everyone's welfare applications. There has been argument as to whether someone qualifies or not and hence, the reason staff is working with Senator Fenton to standardize some of those items. One of the challenges is how much different communities are allowing for housing cost. Housing costs are rising but not every community updates their welfare regulations to keep with those escalating costs. People are getting denied based on lower numbers. Under the state law, every community has the right to set those limits in their welfare guidelines. The Manager stated this is a very complicated situation.

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Ms. Chamberlain addressed the committee and stated she would like to talk about some of the FY26 initiatives. The department is still experiencing some software transition issues with the Munis platform. Now that the system is operationalized, staff is looking for opportunities to improve the use of the platform to ensure that they are utilizing it to the full extent to meet the needs and to improve efficiency. One area that staff would like to investigate further is self-service. For example give people the opportunity to complete their own W4, access their pay stub - provide an ease of access for employees and efficiencies for processes.

Ms. Chamberlain stated as mentioned the department has had some staffing transitions. They are currently fully staffed in both finance accounting areas, human services and purchasing. They are working on some positions in revenue collection and have extended an offer for the deputy revenue collector position which happened today. She stated another initiative they are looking at is a dashboard implementation to provide financial data to department City officials, potentially including some project balances that has been a concern with the software.

Ms. Chamberlain noted they have two supplemental requests. One is for audit services. There was a substantial increase from FY25 to FY26 - it was a \$30,000 increase. The City has some additional requirements as part of the audit now. There are some standalone audits that need to be done as well as for the library. Historically the library audit has been handled by the City providing a statement saying that the City has audited the financials of the library. This is a service that the City's auditors will be undertaking.

The other supplemental request is in printing - \$5,000 increase. There was a shifting done as there was a higher amount in the postage line. The department is looking to outsource the printing and mailing of tax bills and utility billing. Ms. Chamberlain explained the machine

downstairs in revenue collection causes delays in processing. There are certain inserts the City wants to be able to include as part of these mailings and the machine is creating issues with that. It also takes a substantial amount of time for one of the clerks to be stuffing and printing. As a result, finance has worked with the purchasing department and have found a couple of vendors for assistance with this process.

Communications

Asst. City Manager Rebecca Landry addressed the committee and stated with Communication they are targeting every platform, both online and offline communications. She stated one of the key communication methods has been utility bill inserts. There are people who do not care to be on social media, there are people who do not have access to social media. There are people who are online but are not necessarily on the City website, following e-mail, or watching the meetings on the cable channel. Hence, the utility bill inserts have been a key way for the City to get information out to the public like parking bans, the state requirements regarding the lead line service inventory for the water system. The Public Works Department is also looking to use the utility bill inserts to get information out to the public.

Ms. Landry stated for social media they now have 6,164 followers and that has grown well over 20% in the last year. For a community of 25,000 this is a big number. Where others are seeing their followers drop, the City is seeing its followers increase drastically. The City had close to 400 new followers just in the last month. The City has 2,273 followers on Instagram. Instagram is the feel good platform. However, the City only has 183 subscribers to its YouTube channel. However, the City has had 717 video views in the past 28 days and those are City meetings.

As far as the website, Ms. Landry stated the City has recently migrated to its new website. The website now has a tool to improve searches. Staff had a discussion with the web developer today about actually improving the search functionality. Staff is working on drastically improving the filtering options for our search. The City has about 44 website visitors every half hour. The majority of users, particularly the first-time users come from an organic search, such as Google. The City has over 3,400 e-mail and text subscribers. Open rate for the emails that are sent out is only 51%, which doesn't sound great. However, that far surpasses the industry standard and in the last 30 days, the City has had over 15,000 e-mail opens, which means people are getting those emails and are looking at them.

Offline Communications – Ms. Landry stated she is very happy with what Public Works did last year with the word optimization weeks. The City, county communications and marketing association will be holding their annual conference in Keene this year.

She stated most people expect the City to be in their neighborhood - word optimization weeks will be done this year, but there will also be table presentations and in person style meetings. There will be other listening sessions. Community Development is going to each ward twice a year and talking to people and listening to their concerns.

Parks and Rec is looking at more community events this summer.

The City is also doing more radio interviews and press releases.

Finally, there is podcast development. The City started podcasting last November – it started with covering what goes on at the council meeting to see if there was an interest. Ms. Landry stated the biggest objective with the podcast was to reach tech savvy people who don't care about social media don't attend City meetings but are listening to the podcast on their way to work or on their drive to pick up their kids. The podcasts are now around 20 minutes. Staff is trying to learn how to title them to draw more people in. Each time there is a new podcast, listeners are doubling. The Manager talked about her experience with podcast – how it started slow but has now picked up in steam.

Ms. Landry in closing referred to the various surveys the City is doing. Email and online surveys seems to be the preference.

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

Respectfully submitted by,
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

Edits submitted by,
Terri Hood, City Clerk and Kathleen Richards, Deputy City Clerk