

City of Keene
New Hampshire

FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
SPECIAL BUDGET MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, May 20, 2025

6:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

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

Members Not Present:

Bettina A. Chadbourne

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Ferland, City Manager
Amanda Palmeira, City Attorney
David Hickling, Airport Director
Marti Fiske, Library Director
Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Parks and Recreation
Director
Andy Bohannon, Deputy City Manager

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

Airport (Pages 146–151)

Airport Director, David Hickling, addressed the committee first. Mr. Hickling stated that the airport's goal is to provide safe, secure, and efficient aeronautical facilities in the area. He stated that there are varied uses of Airport activities that happen at the Airport. This requires maintaining 60 acres of pavement, keeping 400 runway and taxiway lights lit, maintaining a 2,400-gallon aviation fuel facility, maintaining five buildings, and keeping up with various federal and state regulatory requirements. He stated that this work is done by a very small and dedicated team.

Mr. Hickling stated in 2024 that there were nearly 20,000 operations. The Airport maintains around 50 based aircraft and has created about 50 jobs between the restaurant, Monadnock Aviation, and Monadnock Choppers. He noted that the restaurant served nearly 56,000 meals last year.

With reference to the budget, Mr. Hickling stated the Airport is trying to minimize its reliance on the general fund.

Revenue: 3% increase.

Expenditures: Trying to reduce operating costs wherever possible. 3.2% increase in expenses in the Operating Budget. Overall Expenditure increase is nearly 5%.

Councilor Haas asked for an update on the T Hangar and the status of the lease. Mr. Hickling stated that this item is on an upcoming agenda.

Mayor Kahn noted that the 5K event drew 199 participants to the Airport last week. He stated that the Airport is a well-maintained space and commended the Director for being a community-minded employee.

Library (Pages 110–114)

Jane Pitts, Trustee of the Keene Public Library. She indicated that President William Stroup sends his regrets this evening. Ms. Pitts noted that the Library is always full of activity and is a welcoming space. Its services are free and available to patrons from all walks of life. In times of economic uncertainty, Library usage tends to increase directly. Hence, maintaining collection, program offerings, and other key patron services is a necessary concern. She stated that in just this past year, there has been elevated demand for Wi-Fi access, public computer usage has risen, and reservations of the Library's public and private meeting spaces have increased. For collection, circulation has increased for downloadable/streaming items and equipment borrowing. Program attendance has been robust, with waitlists needed for some offerings. In recognition of these needs, the Library staff has responded in kind by strengthening existing services, pooling our community resources, and widening outreach.

Ms. Pitts stated that the Library is well-positioned to support the community, and she will speak to four areas as to why this is. The Library has cultivated a diverse collection and service offerings, with some needs becoming more immediate beyond the borrowing of books. Patrons have been turning to the Library to access resources that they can't afford, such as remote printing and digital entertainment (movies, audiobooks, video games) in lieu of holding their own personal streaming subscriptions. They use the State Law Library (Westlaw) database to file court documents, and they have been attending workshops to strengthen their financial literacy, including financial planning for elders. The Library also affords its users opportunities to try out new technologies or skills before investing in them further themselves. Using Makerspace equipment, patrons can fabricate their own replacement parts instead of buying them, and the Library's garden tool and seed Library can provide all the pieces needed to cultivate their own garden. The Gear Library in the Library of Things includes many items that can be borrowed which enable local camping, hiking, and staycations.

Ms. Pitts went on to say that this is a unique offering that they are proud of. Its creation was at no cost to taxpayers due to community partnerships, and it was the subject of a recent presentation to the New Hampshire Library Association Conference by staff.

The Library has formed creative community partnerships. The Library continues to broaden its offerings by forging numerous partnerships within the community. These creative partnerships maximize everyone's resources and eliminate duplication of services, thus allowing for more new offerings. This year alone, programming has been offered in conjunction with the Harris Center, Stonewall Farm, Keene State, Keene High, and Antioch University. AARP funded a series of workshops for seniors on how to use artificial intelligence, and the Library also hosts social service agencies in our lobby to connect interested patrons to community resources.

Ms. Pitts stated that the Library's programming is diverse and well-attended, with some events such as the annual "Trick or Treat for Books" and "Noon-Year's Eve," each drawing in excess of 225 attendees. She stated that last year, the Friends of the Library and the Library Trustees provided 100% of the funding for Library programs. She thanked the Friends of the Library for their continued and generous support. This year, their overall financial support was in excess of \$61,000, which is in addition to their other activities that support and enrich the Library's mission. Their two annual book sales being the most notable among these. She added the Library could not sustain the number and quality of our programmatic offerings without The Friends' continued assistance towards items that fall beyond the City budget.

The Library has expanded its outreach. The increased need for Library services also demands broader outreach efforts to educate the public about free resources and how to utilize them. Library staff work resource booths at City festivals, make school visits to encourage new Library card sign-up, amongst many other community activities. Ms. Pitts commended the Library staff and its volunteers who consistently create a professional, safe, and trusted space for seeking information. Conference and meeting bookings in both Heberton and Cohen Halls have facilitated civic engagement, community conversations, and introduce out-of-town attendees to both the Library offerings and to those of the City.

Looking ahead to the new fiscal year, the Keene Public Library will continue to respond to the shifting needs of its patrons and greater community. As Jennifer Howard states in her 2019 article on libraries for the National Endowment for the Humanities magazine: There aren't many truly public places left in America. Most of our shared spaces require money or a certain social status to access. One place, though, remains open to everybody, the public Library. Our Library is an indispensable resource for learning and community connection in the heart of this City. In closing, Ms. Pitts stated that the Trustees thank the City of Keene for its continued support.

Library Director, Marty Fiske addressed the committee next.

Rental Library – Reduction of about \$900. She explained this is not a reduction in the total income and added that they have the Heberton Fund and most rentals are happening in the Heberton Annex and rental income go into that fund which maintains that portion of the building. Rental income is increasing but is not seen on this line.

Library Non-Resident – Reduced slightly to align with the last two years.

Public Printer Copier Fee – The line is being reduced – there is still income being made from this line item.

Fines-Library Overdue – Continues to decrease as people take advantage of online renewal.

Lost Library Materials – This is always an estimate. Small losses spread over but at times there could be large losses.

Personnel – Council approved in March a transfer of funds to adjust for numbers that were not sufficient for the approved staffing levels. The amount requested for FY26 will maintain the existing staffing levels, while correcting the hourly and part-time lines.

Printer Lease/Copies Maintenance – Is being reduced by \$500 to correct the lower-than-estimated cost.

Meeting and Dues – Reflects the transfer of OCLC Membership Fees from the software supply line. This is a required membership to maintain interlibrary loan services. An additional \$60 was added for fees.

Communications & Phone – There has been an increase in costs, particularly for the lines used for the three elevators and the building's alarm system.

Postage – Increase due to changes in postage meter lease, which was implemented after the budget was put in place last year, as well as an increase to postage rates. Ms. Fiske noted that over the last three years, postal rates have increased by 8% each year.

Supplies-Software – Increase of \$4,300. All software subscriptions have increased by about 5% across the industry. The base was also increased by \$3,408 to reflect the removal of the interlibrary loan membership and the addition of marketing software and ordering cataloging software, which was taken out of the collection line. The savings of \$500 from the printer lease line was used to offset this increase in cost.

Books & Collections – Request of \$4,498 – this is a lower amount than what is needed based on inflation. Once software is removed from this line, it is only an increase of \$2,680.

This concluded Ms. Fiske's presentation.

Councilor Roberts asked whether the Library has been pressured to limit what the Library provides to the public. Ms. Fiske answered in the negative.

Councilor Favolise noted the Maker a Space Intern Program provides an opportunity for students who are interested in Arts Management and Arts Education, and then asked for added information as to how the Library not only provides physical opportunities but also provides learning opportunities. Ms. Fiske stated they are fortunate that The Friends are the ones who are funding the Make a Space Program; they pay 100% of the internship wages. The Library has had three interns this year—one from Keene State College, and two from the High School, all of whom are interested in getting into a Library environment. There are also individuals who come into the Library to learn software programs and obtain certifications for different programs through online programs. There are also people picking up new hobbies through Library program offerings.

Parks and Recreation (Pages 115–125)

Parks and Recreation Director, Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, was the next speaker. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that her department is proud to be able to offer varied programs for all ages.

Ms. Fisk Hennessey stated that they have 14 full-time and two part-time staff, as well as seasonal staffing, which ranges from 60-70 individuals, as well as volunteers. She stated that the Parks and Recreation budget is approximately 2.2 million dollars and is unchanged from years past.

The supplemental request for FY26 focuses on maintaining levels of service in two distinct functions: Maintenance and Development.

Maintenance –

Standby On Call Service – Increase of \$5,250

Rubbish Removal – Increase of \$5,000

Tree Maintenance and Care – Increase of \$4,000

Electricity – Increase of \$2,500

Pool Electricity – Increase of \$2,766

Pool Chemicals – Increase of \$4,000

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that they have seen the need to identify maintenance of the Sumner Night Chapel as a future CIP Plan. This item is included as a supplemental request, but they will be withdrawing the \$17,000 supplemental request.

Sport Equipment – Increase of \$500

National Conference Attendance – \$4,500 for managers to attend the National Recreation and Parks Association Conference.

Training – \$3,400 to attend the National Recreation and Parks Association Director School (2-year commitment).

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that, in terms of recreation, there is robust community participation with over 2,092 youth and 900 adults in a variety of programs. For community events there are over 3,000 community members who participated.

In terms of Youth Services, which is also supported by County and grant funding, 80 juvenile cases were managed. Youth Services Intervention and Prevention Outreach has 817 participants. Youth Wellness Education has 320 participants.

The Department is responsible for 18 parks and nine cemeteries. The Department received a \$44,000 pavilion donation for the youth ballfield. The Department has participated in the relocation of the community garden. The Department is in the finishing stages of the Russell Park project, with the Skate Park completed. There is contract obtained for Cemetery Expansion Master Planning.

Community Engagement – The Department has garnered 731,000 Facebook views and added 6,800 new Facebook followers this year. There have also been 120,000 Instagram posts and 1,622 Instagram followers so far this year.

This concluded the Director's comments.

Councilor Lake referred to the adult recreation programming and noted that this programming has seen a lot of growth. He asked what programs are seeing growth and whether any facilities need improvement to support this growth. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that two of their courts are going to be enhanced with pickleball lines this summer. She further stated that flag football has grown, Zumba gold, and basketball all have increased participation. There are also partner programs that offer programming.

Councilor Lake commended the pavilion at Wheelock Park and asked about replacing the red pines that were taken down. The Director stated that about 70 trees were taken down and they are working with Bike Path Group to grind stumps to avoid tripping hazards. The Assistant Public Works Director, Duncan Watson, has been able to acquire funding to plant replacement trees in the area that lost trees. She added that this area will not be as heavily wooded and some of the pines are at the end of their lives, which will need to be removed.

Councilor Roberts asked what type of programming is available for individuals with disabilities. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that Kids to Parks Day is an event that is intergenerational and offers people of all abilities to participate. All public places are handicap accessible and they continue to solicit feedback from the community. The Councilor stated that he would like the trail system to be more accessible.

Councilor Favolise asked about the Red Pines that were taken down. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated they did use the trees that were taken down to repurpose the bike park. Going forward they are looking at other ways to harvest these trees for other uses. The Councilor noted the City is coming up on a full year operation of the Dog Park and asked how it is being utilized. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated that the Large Dog Park has grown but the Small Dog Park has not been used as much and is being utilized as a Senior Dog Park.

Mayor Kahn noted that as the Master Plan moves forward, neighborhoods have become more involved. He stated that when you look at park maintenance, there are certain parks that are underutilized and don't have facilities to draw more people. He stated that he was looking for suggestions for neighborhood groups to rejuvenate those parks. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated in the budget that there is focus on deferred maintenance items and agreed that there is always opportunity to make spaces more robust and it is something that could be taken back to their team.

The City Manager stated that the City needs to talk more about updating the Active Passive Recreation Plan which will set the future of how the City invests and prioritizes projects.

Ms. Slack stated one of the reasons Boci Courts are going into Russell Park is because the family requested it and this is also because of Special Olympics that happen in Keene and one of their sports is Bocci.

Facilities (Pages 126–135)

Deputy City Manager, Andy Bohannon, addressed the committee. Mr. Bohannon stated that when he presented this year's budget for facilities, they looked at sustainability, efficiency, and innovative ways to meet Council goals.

The purpose of facilities management is to support the working environment for the City of Keene employees. The team ensures the functionality, safety, sustainability, and efficiency of the built environment.

What is facilities? Facilities is an organizational function which integrates people, process, and place within the built environment to improve the quality of life of people and the productivity of core business.

Mr. Bohannon talked about the custodian who takes care of City Hall and the amazing work he does for this building.

Mr. Bohannon went on to say that Scott Martin Facilities Manager does a good job monitoring the budget and tries to meet the department's financial goals.

Supplement Requests:

Trash Removal – Increased across all facilities.

Maintenance Equipment – \$5,000 increase to upgrade control systems which enables staff to control heating and cooling systems.

City Hall – \$10,000 to replace 2nd floor lobby which is used a lot by City Hall visitors.

Library – \$7,795 to address continued mechanical system issues.

Recreation Center – \$1,904 to work with IT to address phone line issues.

Central Fire Station – \$4,000 for aging equipment which gets a lot of wear and tear. \$4,500 for electricity. \$1,015 for janitorial supplies (custodial staff work ten hours a work at Central Fire Station).

Airport – \$10,000 to replace stairs at the front entrance. That site is drawing a lot of visitors lately.

Chair Powers stated that this is the first time in 37 years the most important function of the City is in one place and in one system. He felt it is costing the City a lot less money to maintain City facilities.

Police (Pages 136–144)

Police Chief Stewart, stated that not a lot has changed in his budget this year. He stated that the only item he wanted to discuss was the supplemental request for \$16,000. This is the first year of a five-year contract with Axon who manufacture tasers. He stated that this is not an item that command staff have given much thought to and added that the ones that are available now are a superior product to what has been available in the past. This version fires multiple darts to achieve incapacitation. The prior models had the functionality to remove the probes and press it into a person which did not cause incapacitation rather just caused pain.

The Chief added that this device reduces an officer's need from having to use lethal force. This model also comes with data tracking and an evidence module; it downloads what the taser did.

Fire (Pages 102–109)

Fire Chief Martin, addressed the committee next. The Chief stated that his department is considered an all hazard Department; they perform EMS, medical transport, hazardous material, technical rescue, fire suppression, confine space, and swift water.

In FY25, the Department dealt with 6,400 incidents. In an effort to reduce these calls, the Department meets monthly with Smart Ride, Cheshire County EMS, and Greatbrook Ambulance (this is mostly to address nursing home calls).

The Chief referred to the increase in staffing which was unanimously supported by Council. He stated that his supplemental request for FY26 is associated with this staffing increase.

\$6,500 increase in training for both in suppression and ambulance sections.

The Chief referred to Page 108 – Supplies and Uniforms: The amount should be corrected to \$31,420 instead of \$16,400.

The Chief went on to say that with recruitment being a challenge the Department has had to hire individuals with less certifications and training. Until the new recruits have completed their training, the shortfall needs to be filled with overtime. As a result, the next supplemental item is for \$60,325 for overtime supplemental staffing.

For tuition of these additional certifications, the Department is also requesting a supplemental of \$30,000.

Last year, through the CIP, the Department purchased additional life support equipment (cardiac monitor and ventilator). The request of \$5,064 is for preventative maintenance.

The Chief stated that the Department looks at augmenting its budget with grant funds. This year, the Department has applied for the FY24 AFG grant in the amount of \$569,126. The required match for the grant is the next supplemental request in the amount of \$78,217 (page 109).

Professional Services – Supplemental request is for \$20,000 – to hire an outside firm to develop a strategic plan for the Department to follow in the future.

Councilor Roberts asked whether drug-related calls have increased or decreased. The Chief stated that without having exact numbers he would guess that it has remained relatively the same.

Councilor Favolise asked for an update on the Safer Grant. Chief Martin stated that they were informed today that the grant would open on May 23 and close on July 13.

The City Manager addressed the committee next. She explained that the reduction of \$17,271 in Cemeteries and the correction from the Fire Department for \$12,620 was already added by the Finance Director on the committee's corrected sheet. She explained that these numbers have been added and the net amount is zero to the bottom line.

There being no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 6:43 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

Edits submitted by,
Kathleen Richards, Deputy City Clerk