

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HERITAGE COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 11, 2025

4:30 PM

**2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Molly Ellis, Chair
Rose Carey, Vice Chair
Louise Zerba
Acacia Johnston
Cauley Powell, Alternate

Staff Present:

Megan Fortson, Planner
Will Schoefmann, Mapping Coordinator

Members Not Present:

Marilyn Huston

Jay V. Kahn, Mayor

1) Call to Order – Roll Call

Chair Ellis called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM. Roll call was conducted. Chair Ellis stated that Ms. Powell is a voting member today.

2) Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes – May 14, 2025

Ms. Carey made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of May 14, 2025. Ms. Zerba seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Italian Neighborhood Project Update

Mr. Schoefmann stated that there has been some progress with the Italian Neighborhood Story Map, with material that Ms. Carey, Chair Ellis, and Ms. Powell all sent him. He continued that he has the link to share with the group. He showed where the differences are, such as where he added more photos and narratives, and videos of interviews. Heritage Commission members thanked Mr. Schoefmann and spoke positively about the additions and Mr. Schoefmann's work. Discussion continued. Mr. Schoefmann showed and spoke about additions to the various sections and work still in progress, such as river fishing, the floods, and baseball. Discussion ensued about where the field was off Pearl St. Heritage Commission members again thanked Mr. Schoefmann, and discussion ensued about how long they have been working on this project, funded by a 2021 CLG Grant from the New Hampshire Division of Historic Resources (DHR).

Mr. Schoefmann stated that although there is more work they could do, for all intents and purposes, this is a closed grant with DHR.

Ms. Powell stated that she feels like there are two open things for it. She continued that one is the need for a hard drive, which she thinks the Heritage Commission did approve in a previous meeting. Mr. Schoefmann replied yes, that was approved and talked about years ago, for the raw video files. Ms. Powell replied yes, and they were going to use that to get them to the Historical Society. Mr. Schoefmann stated that he should be able to look through previous minutes to find the motion. Discussion continued.

Ms. Powell continued that the second one is, as things wind down, figuring out how they want to share it. Maybe at the end of the summer. Discussion ensued. Chair Ellis asked when the group wants to circle back on this, and suggested August. Mr. Schoefmann replied that he could give an update in July, too, if the group is meeting then.

4) Discussion -Projects and Goalsetting

A) US Sesqui-Centennial 2026 – 250th signing of the US Declaration of Independence Celebration – Michelle Walker, HSCC

Chair Ellis stated that she and Ms. Carey met a week or two ago and got to chatting, because she had been asked to submit a communication to the City Council about next year's Semiquincentennial, requesting the City allocate funds to a special celebration for the date. She and Ms. Carey got to chatting about what would be historical and interesting, and they thought of a parade. She began writing a rather vague request to the City Council but was told that she needed to create a proposal with more specifics. She did not want to do that until she was able to discuss it with the rest of the Heritage Commission, but she also needed to submit the letter in time for the Council's budget meeting. Thus, she wrote and submitted a letter, saying the Heritage Commission would love to do a parade, historical interpreters, movies at the Colonial Theater, and other spectacular ideas that she and Ms. Carey had brainstormed. She wrote that although they would love to see these things happen, it does not have to be these things, and if others have other ideas, they (the Heritage Commission) would be glad to throw their weight behind it. However, she would especially love it if they could do a parade, which would be a great project for the Commission to take on.

Discussion ensued. Ms. Powell spoke about how the construction happening with the Downtown Infrastructure Project next year probably means the parade could not be on Main St. Chair Ellis spoke about how she checked and made sure the Four on the Fourth road race, also happening (on the 4th of July) would not conflict (with a parade). She continued that the request was referred to the Finance, Organization, and Personnel (FOP) Committee, and she and Ms. Carey will be attending that meeting tomorrow night. Others are welcome to show up in support of the request, too. Discussion ensued about funding, and what the Heritage Commission's budget is. Ms. Powell stated that she thinks the City or an outside organization should plan the event, and the Commission could support it. She continued that she does not think the Heritage

Commission should be responsible for planning a full event. She asked the Mayor what he was hoping for, and what he sees the Commission's role as.

Mayor Kahn replied that he is not sure what the picture is, but the funding request is an easier question to answer. He continued that if the event is, say, \$10,000, that is an allocation the City could make. Because it is a FY 27 budget item, not FY 26, it is a matter of requesting support. They need to know if there is support. The question is whether there can be a pledge by the City to support the infrastructure costs for the event. He thinks that it is part of the discussion tomorrow night, how the FOP could recommend that kind of support, but not make the allocation until the next fiscal year. Or whether they can make the allocation now and set the dollars aside.

Mayor Kahn asked to hear from Michelle (Walker) from the Historical Society of Cheshire County. He continued that there might be a request for the Historical Society to be the fiscal agent so that there is a not-for-profit organization and the City could make that contribution to the Historical Society at some point. If Ms. Walker is available tomorrow night to attend the FOP Committee meeting, that would be great. Ms. Walker replied that she will check her schedule and let them know.

Mayor Kahn stated that regarding Ms. Powell's question, he does not think the structure is well thought out at this point. He continued that if the group could be the organizer, that would be great, but clearly the committee is probably something other than just this body. The Historical Society probably wants a seat, as they will have a day's worth of events. Ms. Walker replied yes, but she cannot make the decision about whether the Historical Society can be the fiscal agent and would have to talk with Jenna (Carroll, Executive Director) about that. She continued that the Historical Society has some things planned for this fall through March of next year and are still developing ideas and programs, and they are interested in seeing where they could partner with the Heritage Commission on those things and how to complement each other's programming. They are open to collaboration. She gave more information about her previous work with the Rhode Island 250th Commission and how that funding was approved. She continued that she is not sure what details the FOP Committee is looking for. Discussion continued.

Mayor Kahn stated that at some point, somebody is going to be making funding requests beyond the City, and at that point, there needs to be some budget put together. Right now, it is just a series of requests. For example, when they asked if the Colonial Theater could be open, the immediate answer was "yes." They have asked the County if they want to participate. A concern that came up as a result of Chair Ellis's letter is to avoid having competing events around the county. Ms. Walker stated that the Monadnock Historical Society's roundtable is tomorrow, and they plan to talk about activities for the 250th and will try and see what various towns around the county are planning. She can gather that information and communicate it to Mayor Kahn.

Chair Ellis stated that she just looked at the DAR website, which Marilyn Huston is very involved with. She continued that one of their leaders is part of a Commission the US Senate created several years ago to figure out how to celebrate nationally. She wonders if they (Keene) could do something like that on a small scale, maybe create a small commission to figure out how to celebrate. It could include the Heritage Commission and others in the City, the Historical Society, people from the County, maybe the Chamber, and whatever other stakeholders are out there. Discussion ensued. Others spoke about the need for the Heritage Commission to be realistic about their role.

Ms. Walker asked if the Commission envisions a one-day event, or events over a longer period of time. Chair Ellis replied that she just envisioned one day, but she is open to other ideas, if someone comes up with another proposal. Ms. Walker spoke about how the Historical Society, because they are the Historical Society, are looking further back than just the day and doing a series of things as the day approaches. They do not have concrete plans yet for the day itself. They are open to collaborating with the Heritage Commission on that day. For example, she and Ms. Carroll could research the rates and availability of professional historical reenactors in the area. Discussion continued. Ms. Powell spoke of how it is easy to come up with ideas, but the (focus should be) being aware of competing events, and determining who is actually organizing the event. In many cases, a separate organization creates something like a fair or festival. The Heritage Commission is more like a group that would have a booth at such an event, versus throwing the full event. They could support and collaborate with the Historical Society and other stakeholders. It is about Keene, and should be branded as being about the community, the region, and prosperity and growth.

Chair Ellis stated that she was hoping it would be something that would draw people to Keene to celebrate the 4th of July. She spoke about feeling like Keene does not do enough on the 4th of July. Discussion ensued, and other Commission members spoke about the possibility of involving the Lions Club, the Boy Scouts, other clubs, and Keene schools.

Chair Ellis stated that Ms. Walker said the Historical Society is developing things from the fall to March, and she wonders if Ms. Walker and Ms. Carroll would discuss the possibility of developing something for the day of, that the Commission can support. Ms. Walker replied that she will talk with Ms. Carroll at their staff meeting on Tuesday, if that is not too late. Chair Ellis replied that she is still scheduled to speak to the FOP Committee tomorrow (with a request), and needs the Commission's input on what to say. Discussion continued. Ms. Walker suggested she tell the FOP Committee they are looking for a single-day event and are working on a plan, with maybe a parade with a truncated route due to the construction that will be happening then.

Mayor Kahn stated that relative to that, the City has a Protocol Committee, for whenever there is an event being planned. He continued that whoever is organizing such an event attends those protocol meetings to work through those issues with City staff. For the time being, the Heritage Commission is the organizer, or at least the group bringing the idea forward. Brief discussion ensued about the construction on Main St. next summer and how a parade could happen.

Ms. Powell stated that she is not sure she is keen on the parade idea, because of the (construction) that will be downtown, and because the parade becomes the full event, versus having a gathering with different speakers, music, or some sort of festival. Discussion ensued. Chair Ellis spoke about how she put the festival in her letter, along with many other ideas, throwing in everything she could think of because maybe it would spark something. She spoke positively about having a parade, even a short one, as a draw to a gathering with other activities. Discussion continued with ideas, and about other potential event/gathering spaces if Main St. is not feasible, such as Keene State College, Railroad Square, Robin Hood Park, Ashuelot River Park, or somewhere else.

Mayor Kahn gave location ideas. Ms. Powell stated that it sounds like Mayor Kahn is reaching out to different people. She asked if there is a point at which everyone is going to meet together. The Mayor replied yes, that will occur eventually, but there needs to be an outline of what the day looks like and then people can come (together). Ms. Powell stated that someone needs to be in charge, to create that, to host that meeting of different stakeholders. She asked if the Mayor is thinking the Heritage Commission could be that host. The Mayor replied that he does not know; that is one possibility. He continued that it could be an independent commission, with no connection back to the City, unless the City decides to create a short-term commission like that, but he thinks the City Manager is trying to avoid creating new commissions. He thinks the Heritage Commission can advance the idea forward and he appreciates all of their brainstorming. Ms. Powell replied that if the Heritage Commission takes on that role, it would be very helpful if a City Councilor could join the Commission, as a vote of confidence that the City supports this. The Mayor agreed and stated that he might know one who would join.

Ms. Powell stated that if they can get a handle on competing events, then they can see if people want to converge. Ms. Walker replied that she can get the Heritage Commission notes on that tomorrow, so they know what is going on, and that can guide what they might be thinking of and talking to the FOP Committee about. Mayor Kahn added that Chair Ellis should mention to the FOP Committee, too, that the Heritage Commission would like a Councilor to join them. Ms. Powell stated that they should talk with Ms. Huston about what the DAR is planning. Brief discussion ensued. Ms. Walker spoke about a project the DAR is doing and someone whom she could connect the Commission with, if they want to talk with her. Commission members replied that Heritage Commission member Marilyn Huston is very involved with the DAR, so she would be the one.

Ms. Powell stated that a brainstorm she had, which might be more in the Commission's wheelhouse, is to do research on what has been done in Keene to celebrate the 4th of July, historically over the years, and create (something to share about that). Discussion ensued. Commission members spoke about reflecting on how people viewed and dealt with the state of our nation at different times over the years, and acknowledging that for the 250th many people are feeling conflicted about the country and it that for many people, it will not be a fully celebratory day. Discussion continued about standing on the shoulders of others, and looking at

the legwork other communities have done. Mayor Kahn suggested the Keene Sentinel's historical record, as a resource. Others suggested Alan (Rumrill, former Historical Society executive director). Ms. Walker replied that she will talk with him about what he has done for the 4th of July in the past. Commission members stated that if there is going to be a Commission planning the event, it would be great to have Mr. Rumrill join. Discussion continued. Mayor Kahn spoke positively about the actors involved with Keene Comes Alive, and their portrayal of various historical characters.

Ms. Carey asked if the Heritage Commission is thinking, in general, that they can continue this, bring it to the Council, and see if they can gather more community members and stakeholders to work on this idea. Ms. Powell stated that it sounds like the best approach to receive financial support from the City would be for a City body like this one to request the funds, which they can then allocate to a different organization to do the heavy lifting. The Mayor replied that that would be one structure. Ms. Walker asked if the meeting tomorrow is the right time to ask the FOP Committee to sort out the funding timing, regarding what the Mayor said about FY 26 versus FY 27. The Mayor replied that he thinks the question is how the City can assure its commitment and support, and they should just read the question like that. Discussion continued about the logistics of the FOP Committee meeting.

Ms. Zerba stated that they have not spent any time in this meeting talking about their plan to film some footage of the downtown before all the construction happens. Ms. Carey replied that she has started filming. She continued that this is in process; it has not been dropped. It will take time to complete. They are starting with Central Square first, then moving down Main St. Ms. Zerba asked how she can help. Ms. Carey replied that even helping to determine what should be filmed would be a great help. Discussion ensued about the possibility of doing the filming and then creating a voiceover, with a narrative that the Commission develops, to go with the film. Ms. Zerba stated that she will call Ms. Carey so they can talk about it. Ms. Carey stated that they would like to have segments shown at the Colonial. Discussion continued about the 12-hour-long film, American Revolution, the Historical Society is looking to do with the Colonial this fall. Ms. Walker gave information about it, and discussion continued with ideas for the showing.

Ms. Powell stated that they do not want to get the ball rolling on things until there is a plan, or people who are interested. She continued that she does not think it will be hard to find community sponsors and partners. Discussion ensued. Mayor Kahn stated that he thinks that if this group at least has a commitment to put together the framework for the day, the next step is determining which organization has the bandwidth to lead it. They cannot miss this opportunity a year ahead of time to begin to enlist people and get their commitments to it. Also, they have the ability to pull people in from other towns.

Chair Ellis stated that to recap, she will say tomorrow (to the FOP Committee) that they (the Heritage Commission) are developing a plan to collaborate with the Historical Society and hopefully other stakeholders, and are trying to model a final budget after some other events that have happened. Commission members encouraged her to instead ask the FOP Committee what

the Commission needs to do to get City support, and then get a firm list of objectives from them, so the Commission is not giving information they do not need. As the Mayor said, the Commission should be asking what the Commission needs to do to in order to get the City's support for the 250th that will help defray the infrastructure costs. The Mayor agreed. Discussion continued about what else Chair Ellis should say to or ask the FOP Committee, with the suggestion that she say that they are working on bringing in other community stakeholders to collaborate on the framework for the project. Commitment or interest from the Council will help guide the decisions about the framework. The Commission is "leading the framework development" or "facilitating bring in stakeholders to start organizing" this. Chair Ellis stated that if anyone wants to come to the FOP Committee meeting to help her answer their questions, that would be great. Others spoke in support of Chair Ellis and of how there is going to be huge community enthusiasm for this celebration/event.

B) Downtown Video Project – Project Planning and Next Steps

Chair Ellis stated that they talked a bit about the Downtown Video Project already. Ms. Carey stated that she and Ms. Zerba will talk and meet to work on this.

5) Annual Report to City Council

Ms. Fortson stated that the annual report to City Council is technically optional, but the idea is that the Council is trying to get more engaged with/more knowledge about the committees, boards, and commissions that they do not often have direct involvement with. She continued that the Council is looking for a one-page update, nothing too crazy. Discussion ensued about what update the Heritage Commission could give to the Council. Ms. Fortson stated that Chair Ellis, or Chair Ellis in collaboration with other members, can write the letter and send it to her and Evan Clements to submit to the Council. The other option would be give a verbal, in-person presentation at a Council committee meeting. Chair Ellis replied that she would rather do an in-person presentation. Discussion continued. Ms. Fortson stated that she will look into this, regarding which Council committee they would want the Commission to present to, and when, and then she will let the Commission know.

6) Staff Updates

Ms. Fortson stated that there are no staff updates, but she wants to thank everyone who came to the Future Summit last week, (regarding the Master Plan Update). She continued that it went really well. Discussion ensued.

7) New Business

8) Next Meeting – July 9

Chair Ellis stated that the next Heritage Commission meeting is July 9.

9) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Ellis adjourned the meeting at 5:43 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Evan J. Clements, AICP
Planner / Deputy Zoning Administrator