

City of Keene
New Hampshire

PLANNING, LICENSES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, July 9, 2025

6:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Kate M. Bosley, Chair
Philip M. Jones, Vice Chair
Andrew M. Madison
Robert C. Williams
Edward J. Haas

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Ferland, City Manager
Rebecca Landry, Deputy City Manager
Amanda Palmeira, City Attorney
Terri Hood, City Clerk
Paul Andrus, Community Development
Director

Members Not Present:

All Present

Jay V. Kahn, Mayor

Chair Bosley called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM.

1) Direct Referral to Committee: Buba Street Noodle & Bar - Request for Permission to Serve Alcohol - Sidewalk Café

Chair Bosley welcomed the applicant, Truman Nguyen, Owner of Buba Street Noodle & Bar at 44 Main Street. Mr. Nguyen sought to offer outdoor seating for customers and to contribute to the vibrance of Main Street. He hoped to be approved, noting he had submitted all the necessary documents to the City.

Chair Bosley requested City staff comments. The City Manager, Elizabeth Ferland, explained that this license was before the Committee because it was the first time the applicant was requesting authority to serve alcohol on the Sidewalk Café. If approved, future Licenses would be approved administratively through the City Clerk's office. Chair Bosley asked if there had been a Sidewalk Café at this location in the past and the City Manager said yes.

There were no public comments.

Councilor Williams congratulated Mr. Nguyen on the new restaurant and said he looked forward to checking it out.

Councilor Williams made the following motion, which was duly seconded by Councilor Jones.

On a vote of 5–0, the Planning, Licenses and Development Committee recommends that Buba Street Noodle & Bar be granted permission to serve alcoholic beverages in connection with their Sidewalk Café License, subject to the customary licensing requirements of the City Council, compliance with the requirements of Sections 46-1191 through 46-1196 of the City Code, and compliance with any requirements of the NH Liquor Commission. This license shall expire on March 1, 2026.

2) Let It Shine - Request to Use City Property - 2025 Pumpkin Festival

Chair Bosley welcomed the applicant, Michael Giacomo of 615 Hurricane Road, Chairman of the Let it Shine Board. Mr. Giacomo explained that the Board was saving substantial changes for the event until next year's Downtown project, noting they were already reconfiguring what the event would look like. This year, they were keeping it simple, with a few small changes. He said that in 2024, the kids' games were less successful between Railroad and Emerald Streets, so the goal this year was to enhance the kids' games. There would be more vendors in that area this year, as well as the Downtown, and Mr. Giacomo noted the business owners on that block requested more of a crowd; there would not be pumpkins in that location. He said the pumpkins would be in the same locations as 2024. They had learned the previous two years by spot counts that turnout was completely weather dependent, with attendances varying from 3,000–12,000 with a virtually identical event. So, Mr. Giacomo predicted good weather this year and approximately 10,000–15,000 attendees over the course of the 5-hour festival. He reported that this year there would also be the same number of craft vendors (20–25) and nonprofits (up to 12 is their limit). The organizers are considering allowing booths for nonprofits who do not have the ability to organize food sales but wanted to promote their nonprofit, aligning with Let It Shine's mission to support them. Mr. Giacomo added that the organizers were engaging with The Colonial Theater, the Keene Downtown Group, The United Church of Christ, and other entities who would hopefully be helping Let It Shine with different activities on Main Street as in past years. The pumpkin carving on Central Square and trick-or-treating would both remain unchanged from 2024 as well. He reminded the Committee that the footprint of the Festival was also the same as 2024, with the bulk of the Festival between Railroad Square and Central Square; Railroad Square to Emerald Street/Eagle Court would be the pedestrian area, with some activities but no pumpkins. Mr. Giacomo said there would be some other big announcements in the near future about the Board trying to source more supplies locally. Everyone could read about the final phases in The Keene Sentinel. Chair Bosley said she was excited to have the Pumpkin Festival back.

Councilor Haas asked how Mr. Giacomo estimated the festival's crowd sizes. Mr. Giacomo explained that during the previous Festivals, he went block-by-block on each side of Main Street and created approximately 5 x 5 x 2 grids, counting the number of people in each grid. He specifically estimated that the same number of people would be entering versus exiting a grid at any time. At each given time, he counted approximately 100 people in each grid, in addition to watching the exits and observing the average flux of people from the main entrance at Emerald Street. Mr. Giacomo said that was how he arrived at the best possible estimate of 12,000 but it was probably not scientific. Councilor Haas presumed those counts were taken at a substantially crowded time. Mr. Giacomo confirmed the counts were estimated at the peaks of the prior events, noting the peak was actually during the middle and not the end vs. for the original Pumpkin

Festivals; now the event ends earlier, and people are not waiting for the pumpkin counting at the end.

Vice Chair Jones appreciated that Mr. Giacomo applied science to everything and welcomed the former Councilor back to City Hall. The Vice Chair asked if the change in kids' games/youth area would change the event footprint. Mr. Giacomo said no, explaining that the kids' games were easy to overlook down Emerald Street in 2024. They received a lot of feedback asking to make the games more visible. So, in 2025, the organizers wanted to move the games closer to the main event and diversify them for more visibility.

Chair Bosley requested City staff comments. Deputy City Manager, Rebecca Landry, began by thanking Mr. Giacomo and Let It Shine for adjusting annually based on things that went well or could go better the previous year. Ms. Landry said they had done a really good job and set a good example for how to manage, organize, and plan for a City event. The Deputy City Manager reported the plan from Protocol meetings to date: (1) multiple personnel from the Police and Fire Departments in multiple shifts throughout the event, (2) street/lane closures in the days before/after the event to allow for delivery and staging of equipment and pumpkins as well as the safety of people involved in that process, and (3) some parking restrictions to ensure safety and adequate space.

Chair Bosley opened the floor to public comments.

City Councilor Laura Tobin of Center Street said she was really excited about this Festival; she knew it was great in the past and looked forward to going every year. She offered feedback that in 2024, The Farmers' Market of Keene felt excluded and that people did not know the Market was open. Councilor Tobin hoped Let It Shine would coordinate with The Farmers' Market.

Vice Chair Jones made the following motion, which was duly seconded by Councilor Madison.

On a vote of 5–0, the Planning, Licenses and Development Committee recommends a license be granted to Let It Shine, Inc. to use Downtown City rights-of-way on Saturday, October 18, 2025, to hold the Keene Pumpkin Festival subject to the following provisions:

- This license is granted based upon the event scope presented to City staff during protocol meetings held to date, changes or additions to the license may require that an amended license be issued by the City Council and no changes to this license or the associated protocol documents will be accepted after September 1, 2025;
- The Petitioner agrees to absorb the cost of any City services over and above the amount of City funding allocated in the FY 26 Community Events Budget, and agrees to remit said payment within 30-days of the date of invoicing;
- Licensee shall furnish a certificate of liability insurance in the amount of \$1,000,000 naming the City of Keene as an additional insured;
- Licensee shall sign a standard revocable license and indemnification agreement and associated protocol documents;
- That the footprint and layout for the event shall encumber the traveled portions of Central Square, Main Street both sides from Central Square to Emerald Street and Eagle Court, and a portion of Railroad Street. Road closures may include any portions of other streets needed

to facilitate detour routes. The full extent of road closures and detour routes shall be agreed upon with City staff and will include any closures necessary to facilitate safety during pre-event setup and post-event cleanup activities;

- That the Petitioner is permitted to use the northbound inside lane of Main Street for pumpkin drop-off by area schools on Friday, October 17, 2025;
- That the actual event will be held from 2:00 PM to 7:30 PM with the times for setup and clean up to be established with City staff;
- Licensee shall submit signed letters of permission from any private property owners for the use of their property;
- That free parking be granted under the provisions of the free parking policy for City parking spaces needed for logistical purposes beginning Thursday, October 16, 2025, at 6:00 AM and extending through Monday, October 20, 2025, and spaces within the event footprint on the day of the event; and
- This license is granted subject to obtainment of any necessary licenses or permits and compliance with all laws; and compliance with any recommendations of City staff.

3) Keene Pride - Request to Designate Keene a Sanctuary City for the LGBTQIA+ Community

Chair Bosley knew there were many people present to speak on this agenda item and read a prepared statement to begin. She wanted to be very clear that as the Chair, all comments and questions were to be directed to her. She would not tolerate any disrespectful comments, whether aimed at opposing groups, City departments, City Council members, neighbors, or anyone else. Each person wishing to speak was provided three minutes to allow everyone a chance and Councilor Madison kept time, holding yellow and red cards as indications when time was running out. Chair Bosley indicated that if there were disturbances, she would provide an initial reminder, a second reminder, and if the same person disturbed the meeting a third time, she would ask them to leave the room; if someone refused to leave, she would recess the meeting, and the individual would be escorted out. Chair Bosley reminded the audience that they were all neighbors and should be treating each other as they want to be treated, which she intended to hold everyone to during this meeting. She was ready for a very good conversation.

Chair Bosley welcomed the applicant, Adam Toepfer, Founder and Board President of Keene Pride as well as a Downtown Keene businessowner. Mr. Toepfer explained that he was born and raised on Court Street and that growing up as a young gay kid in a small city definitely had its challenges. He said many in the broader LGBTQ+ community across the nation are bullied—some to the point of suicide. He said sometimes members of this community are violently attacked and on many occasions have been murdered just for being who they are. While violence against the LGBTQ+ community here in Keene had been extremely low, Mr. Toepfer said the community still walked in fear every day. He said he did what many young gay kids from a small City do once they turn 18, he got out to find his community where there were more people like him—what he called his “chosen family.” Mr. Toepfer said he chose New York City and stayed there for 16 years, where he met some of the most amazing people in his life. In the middle of the pandemic, he moved back to Keene. He noticed there were queer people literally everywhere he went—the gas station, the post office, the DMV, the library, coffee shops, restaurants—everywhere in town he met new LGBTQ+ individuals. Mr. Toepfer learned about the huge community of queer people in

Keene, but noticed there were few ways for them to come together, so he was a part of creating Keene Pride.

Mr. Toepfer explained that Keene Pride was set up to create fun, educational, community building—some family friendly and some not—programming for the LGBTQ+ community and its allies. After building Keene Pride, he met the next group of incredible people in his life and did not have to leave the City to find them. Together, he said they produced 20–30 events per year, culminating with Keene Pride Week and Festival in Downtown Keene; with upwards of 5,000 community members attending, over 120 vendors, six bands, circus acts, drag performances, magicians, children’s entertainers, and much more. The festival had grown so much that it could no longer physically fit in Central Square, and this year it was expanding down Main Street to Railroad Square, doubling the footprint. Mr. Toepfer said Keene’s was one of the few Pride festivals in America that he knew of, which was not shrinking due to fear and budget cuts but expanding due to community support and demand. He stated that this is what Keene is—a progressive City, which welcomes everyone and is not afraid to publicly and specifically say to its LGBTQ+ community members that they are safe and welcome here.

Mr. Toepfer knew there was a counterpetition coming forward requesting that the community could not say LGBTQ+ people are welcome in the community because all people are welcome in the community. He asked what that even means. Mr. Toepfer said no one was arguing that all people are not welcome in Keene but if all welcome, he asked the problem with saying LGBTQ+ people are safe and welcome here. He explained that many community members were very much afraid right now—of the President, of what would happen to them—and many no longer felt safe in the Country they call home. Mr. Toepfer asked everyone to imagine that for one second, to imagine feeling completely unsafe and unstable in their country, in their home, and in their community. Imagine needing to pack an emergency to-go bag just in case you have to flee your home in the middle of the night. Imagine having to plan your escape to a safe country just in case. He said this is America and no one should have to feel this way. He said many people thought this was hyperbole and might roll their eyes, thinking “this could never happen to me.” He said this had happened; not long-ago thousands of Japanese American citizens were taken from their homes and housed in internment camps just because of who they were, and not long-ago in Europe Jews and LGBTQ people and other minorities were thrown into camps and executed. Mr. Toepfer did not want to scare anyone but said he was stating these things because it was the truth. He said these things had happened and these atrocities can happen again. He also briefly spoke about the President substantially increasing the Budget of ICE from \$8 billion to \$170 billion recently and questioned what they would do with all that money. “If you think they’re going to stop at deporting non-U.S. citizens and not target citizens next, if they are only targeting who are in our country illegally, then why on Earth do they need \$170 billion. This is why we’re scared.”

Mr. Toepfer concluded explaining the petition with over 914 signatures from people who lived, worked, and shopped in Keene saying it was time for the City of Keene to publicly state that Keene is a safe and welcoming City for its LGBTQ+ residents and visitors, and that Keene will never use City resources to harm innocent people. Over 550 of those signatures were Keene residents. Mr. Toepfer knew that “Sanctuary” cities had now been banned by Governor Kelly Ayotte (May 22, 2025), so that original terminology was no longer possible. Instead, Keene Pride was asking the City Council to publicly declare:

- That Keene is a safe and welcoming City for the LGBTQ community,
- That being LGBTQ+ is never a crime, and
- That the City of Keene will never use its resources on their own or in conjunction with the federal or state governments in the unjust search and seizure and harassment of LGBTQ+ people.

Mr. Toepfer said the community should be striving for this and declaring this would show other young LGBTQ+ kids that their community loves, welcomes, and supports them. They would not have to run away; they could build a family here, open a business, and buy a home. Mr. Toepfer said that is what makes communities great.

Chair Bosley recognized Mayor Jay Kahn, who appreciated the turnout. In conversations with Mr. Toepfer and members of the Keene City Republican Committee. The Mayor thought Mr. Toepfer and the Keene Pride Board had the understanding that “Sanctuary City” was no longer the issue before the City Council as relative to immigration issues. The Mayor continued, restating Mr. Toepfer’s intent to declare that Keene is a safe and welcoming City, that it is never a crime to be an LGBTQ+ person, and that the City will not use resources to harass LGBTQ+ people. Mayor Kahn said that was different than the original proposal and one the Committee might want to consider if someone proposed precise wording, which the Mayor said was not before the Committee at this meeting. The Mayor hoped that was a clear expectation to the Committee and the audience. He stated that there were real lived experiences in Keene underlying the petition Mr. Toepfer brought forward, which the City and City Council should understand and deal with. For example, the Mayor cited students questioning their sexual orientation and gender identities, who had been bullied and had to leave their local schools, which left them to attend smaller charter schools in the area. He said that if those were the current lived experiences the Council was interested in bringing forward then it was worthy of understanding. He noted that losing rights is a slippery slope and cited recent legislation such as removing gender affirming healthcare from Medicaid coverage, banning books in school libraries, and allowing families to remove students from classes that mention same-sex relationships, for example. These fights were primarily in federal and state government courts, where Mayor Kahn said these rights were in fact under consideration and some would say under attack. He stated that the local government had no laws governing the behavior of one group, which did not apply to all other groups. So, it was not exactly clear what action the City might take around proposed legislation that was not on the City’s agenda. The Mayor suggested that perhaps the City should state that it, “stands against acts of bigotry and hate against any group or individual,” which was in fact what the City Council declared in their 2021 Declaration of Inclusion. Mayor Kahn was unsure the City Council could do better than reaffirming the 2021 commitment. The Mayor said he could not come to this meeting given his background without thinking of Martin Niemöller, a prominent Lutheran priest in Germany who was imprisoned during his time by Nazi rule. Niemöller regained his voice and public ability to speak when the war ended, and he said “First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist. Then they came for trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew. And then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.” Mayor Kahn said if we have local issues, we should not wait until it is too late to face them together as a Keene community.

Vice Chair Jones noted that being a straight, white, married, Christian-raised, working class, male meant he could not fathom in the same way what it was like to have that target on his back that other people do. The Vice Chair stated he had the fortunate ability to be invited to attend a Keene Pride meeting with the Mayor. Vice Chair Jones said it was a learning experience that he appreciated. They spoke with the Keene Pride members about the sanctuary city aspect and Vice Chair Jones clarified that he did not support that statement at this time, and he appreciated Keene Pride listening to his reasons why, even if they did not agree. Vice Chair Jones said he listened to Keene Pride's very good reasons for why they thought Keene should be a sanctuary city, but the Vice Chair still did not think that was the right answer to achieve their goals at this time, even if he agreed with many of the things in Keene Pride's letter.

Chair Bosley opened the floor to public comments.

Jim McConnell of North Swanzey opposed the proposed LGBTQIA+ resolution, having taken out the reference to sanctuary cities that was in his original testimony. Mr. McConnell said that during his 20 years living in Swanzey, Keene deserved the reputation of being welcoming and inclusive, which he was comfortable with and believed the overwhelming majority of people in the Keene area felt the same. However, he stated that being welcoming and inclusive means regarding everyone equally and favoring and excluding no one. Mr. McConnell noted he had also observed that when a community becomes identified as "an LGBTQIA community," that identity becomes overwhelming; he cited towns in MA, for example. Should the proposed resolution be adopted, he suspected Keene would be identified in the same way. Mr. McConnell asked how, for example, that would affect applications to Keene State College, an important economic driver for the community. He stated: "I'm certain most parents have no trouble picturing their children in a welcoming and inclusive environment, but I think an overwhelmingly LGBTQIA+ environment would give many parents pause."

Donna Ferrantello of Keene submitted a letter to the Council including the first page of the Bill of Rights in the NH Constitution; she referred to Articles 1, 2, 2-b, 4, 5, and 6 in the NH Constitution, all of which she said were relevant to the Keene Pride request. Ms. Ferrantello stated that if the City Council named the LGBTQIA group in any statement, decree, declaration, or gave them any special status/recognition and support for any reason, that affirmation/action would violate Articles 1, 2, 2-b, 5 and 6 of the NH Constitution. She said that action would be unconstitutional and thus promote illegalities in the City of Keene, specifically from Article 6 on Morality and Piety, which she quoted: "But no person shall ever be compelled to pay towards the support of the schools of any sect or denomination. And every person, denomination or sect shall be equally under the protection of the law; and no subordination of any one sect, denomination or persuasion to another shall ever be established." As concerned citizens, Ms. Ferrantello said she submitted a petition against this unconstitutional action.

Anthony Ferrantello of 84 Woodland Avenue said the City of Keene was being asked to reinforce values of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). He said it sounded like a benign non-discrimination administrative tool but stated that DEI had been found to be discriminatory, stating it was on its way out of boardrooms and universities like New Hampshire University, who were rejecting it because it undermines meritocracy. Mr. Ferrantello said those with superior skills were

being sidelined by unqualified individuals who meet an identity quota, and the results were mediocrity, mismanagement, shareholder losses, a bickering workforce, and economic downturn. He did not think this should be the future of Keene. To that end, Mr. Ferrantello felt that any effort by the City of Keene to honor/create a special category/protected class or a special safe haven/sanctuary for a special community, or other wording resulting in the same outcome would be insulting, divisive, and contradictory to the inclusivity that the City of Keene and the LGBTQ+ community claimed to promote. Mr. Ferrantello said frivolity breeds divisiveness, so it should not be rewarded and certainly not be irresponsibly sanctioned nor normalized under the aegis of a governing entity such as the City of Keene. He urged the City of Keene to refrain from creating divisions in the community and urged this Committee not to bestow special recognition, status, and privilege on one group while coercing all other residents to blindly affirm and comply with a proposed decree.

Anne Farrington of Keene submitted a petition she had been circulating for the previous two weeks with more than 360 signatures. It was also regarding the proposal for a “sanctuary city” and honoring/calling out special privileges for any individual group. Ms. Farrington noted that no one who signed the petition in any way condoned acts of bigotry or hate, that they believed Keene was a welcoming City, and would obviously be against the City Council doing any acts discriminatory or counter to the law. She read the petition language & thanked the Committee:

“In Support of Equal Respect for All Residents: We, the undersigned residents of Keene and surrounding towns who do business in Keene regularly, affirm our deep respect for all individuals regardless of their identity, background, or personal choices. We strongly support the right of every person to live freely and with dignity, so long as that freedom doesn’t infringe upon the rights of others. At the same time, we’re concerned about the proposal to designate Keene as a sanctuary city for a specific identity group. While we believe this effort is likely rooted in goodwill, we feel that such designations, by elevating one group for special recognition, risk undermining the principle of equal honor and respect for all people. True inclusivity does not require singling out one population for symbolic sanctuary. Rather, it calls us to foster a City culture that is welcoming, fair, and free of favoritism across the board. We’re also mindful of how such declarations may affect Keene’s public image. Highlighting what might be deemed a political or ideological position could unintentionally signal to families, potential residents, or businesses that Keene is no longer a place of broad civic neutrality, but one where more particular identities or beliefs are favored over others. Being a welcoming, inclusive community means favoring and excluding no one. We urge the City Council to consider these concerns carefully and to prioritize unity, fairness, and balanced representation in all civic actions and policies.”

Taylor Murray, a homeowner in Keene, was born in the City in 1979 and left NH to train to be a U.S. Army Airborne Ranger at Fort Benning at age 17. Then, he was sent to Fort Lewis with the 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment to fight for his country before leaving for Fort Riley, KS, to serve with the 1st Infantry Division. He returned to Fort Lewis to finish his tour as a member of Operational Detachment Alpha with the first Special Forces group. Mr. Murray stated that he had seen horrors no one ever wants to have to see. He had also seen hate and intolerance he never in his wildest dreams imagined he would see in the 43 years since signing out of service to his country as a combat soldier fighting with a rifle and bayonet in hand—not as a truck driver or typist. He said he fought against the fascism he had seen in other countries, and he was scared—

absolutely frightened. Mr. Murray heard all kinds of talk about the Constitution but heard nobody talking about equal access under the law. He heard a lot of people talking about fairness but said he thought back to times of separate but equal and Jim Crow. Mr. Murray stated people in this community were scared right now. He said people all over the country were coming after the LGBT community. He had been refused service at restaurants in NH. Mr. Murray asked everyone to think about this—he came home a Veteran, and this is what he met. He said all this community was asking for was to be recognized and protected by the City. Mr. Murray asked what kind of a grateful nation that would be.

David Morrill of Mechanic Street shared that he was watering flowers on his back porch the day before the meeting, with two pots of yellow flowers and two of purple. He noticed a little white flower in one of the pots with the purple flowers. Personally, Mr. Morrill said he thought it was nice to see that splash of another color, but some folks might not because it is different; he liked it, so he would do what he could to help it grow. Mr. Morrill continued, stating that there was a lot of harmful behavior against marginalized groups these days that he did not think was news to the Committee; he was not trying to debate or change minds that were not open to learning or loving their neighbors, but trying to be the best ally and support he could to the queer community. He said that group of people, after experiencing a moment of progress, was feeling backlash from a minority that wanted to impose their religious beliefs on everyone. Mr. Morrill said this backlash was harmful at a minimum, often even violent, and it was being ignored by federal and state governments right now at best and encouraged or even perpetrated by them at worst. As a result, he stated that the City's "LGBTQ+ siblings [were] rightfully afraid for their safety and well-being." Mr. Morrill repeated for emphasis that the City's "LGBTQ+ siblings were rightfully afraid for their safety and well-being." He said they were being denied a basic human need. Though not a queer person himself, Mr. Morrill said he had experienced religious abuse and known bullies who wanted to impose their will on others. As a result, he often felt more comfortable and welcomed in queer spaces and with queer people than he did in spaces designed for and by his ingroup. He said he could only imagine how much truer that was for queer people. Mr. Morrill noted that the City plows roads when it snows because it is a need, likewise firefighters and ambulances are sent when people are in crisis, and we give chemotherapy to patients with cancer because those are the people that need it. Similarly, Mr. Morrill stated that there were communities being attacked at this time who needed protection. He urged the City of Keene to do what it could to help them, or at very least, to commit not to adding or aiding in the harm.

Makayla Carter of Keene wanted to petition for Keene to be a safe place for the LGBTQIA+ community. The previous few months, she said the LGBTQIA+ community had faced threats of violence and even death growing out of hatred from groups of people who disagree with the community's very existence. Although this tragedy had been going on for years, Ms. Carter said with the current political climate, the LGBTQIA+ community was facing more discrimination than ever before; especially with recent laws being passed that censor history and voices of the past generation who fought for freedoms today with but not limited to book bans, bathroom bans, and limiting gender affirming care. Ms. Carter encouraged the Committee to let Keene be a safe place that the LGBTQIA+ community could call home and feel safe with their friends, families, and neighbors.

Tom Savastano of Keene expressed his opposition to the original petition to make Keene a sanctuary city for the LGBTQ+ group. His opposition also extended to any proposed change of language to “safe city,” etc., which he said would elevate this group—or any group—for special recognition and treatment. Mr. Savastano noted that Keene Pride’s petition used phrases like “increasing and alarming legislative attacks,” “troubling Surgeon General policies,” and “atmosphere of fear and uncertainty.” He said that the testimony so far certainly indicated there could be serious problems in our society. However, he said the issue was that Keene Pride’s petition did not reference any specific proposed laws or substantive policy debate now and in the future; Mr. Savastano said that was really needed. Secondly, he said it appeared that this recognition would only be the first step toward greater levels of favorable treatment. Mr. Savastano quoted Keene Pride’s petition wanting, “collaboration between City leaders, local organizations like Keene Pride, and community stakeholders to create programs and initiatives that uplift and support LGBTQ+ residents.” He said that would mean using City resources, time, and money to elevate a particular group’s interests. Mr. Savastano believed the answer was fair and equal treatment across the board. He believed Keene had already run fairly and on pluralistic principles. He felt that no group should be elevated for special recognition and treatment. Mr. Savastano urged the Committee to reject this petition and reject the precedent that it would be acceptable for many other groups to seek special favorable treatment for their goals and priorities. He said City resources, time, and money were finite not infinite.

NH Representative Nick Germana of Baker Street wanted to speak about why he thought a petition or declaration like this was warranted, referring to the landscape in which everyone was living right now. Mr. Germana cited the President of the United States who issued an executive order declaring that there are only two sexes, despite the fact this is biologically simply not true, attempting to erase the existence of hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of Americans. Mr. Germana said that same President issued an executive order saying trans individuals are inherently dishonest and dishonorable, therefore prohibiting them from serving in the United States military. Mr. Germana mentioned a Justice on the United States Supreme Court, in a concurring opinion in the Dobbs case, stating that the Supreme Court should go back and rethink the Lawrence v. Texas case, in which the Supreme Court ruled laws making homosexual behavior illegal are unconstitutional. He added that a fellow NH Representative and member of the General Court recently suggested that the majority party in Concord should revisit NH’s original law respecting same sex marriage. Mr. Germana said week-after-week in Concord, he saw elected officials stand in the well of the New Hampshire House of Representatives and demean, diminish, dehumanize, and demonize members of the LGBTQ+ community. He said those elected officials argued that members of the LGBTQ+ community are inherently prone to violence, criminality, and that their presence in public spaces is inherently threatening and dangerous to justify legislation that directly undermines the civil rights of LGBTQ+ citizens. These legislations had barred these community members from participation in some of the same activities everyone else takes for granted, like entering into some public spaces. Mr. Germana noted that when books were removed from school libraries for offensive material, it was often due to LGBTQ+ characters or authors. He said there was absolutely no question these members of the Keene community were under attack in our country right now; it was not hyperbole; they had every reason to fear for their safety. He called Keene an accepting and inclusive community and said the City should state that those are genuinely its values. Mr. Germana addressed the argument that the City should not single out one

group over others for this type of statement and countered, stating that sanctuary policies are specifically for groups being targeted by legislative actions like the ones he cited.

Autumn DelaCroix of Court Street said she did not realize “sanctuary city” had become offensive, so she would speak about the proposal despite it no longer being the precise wording. Ms. DelaCroix stated that the City of Keene was worried about its future population, especially its young workforce and students choosing to leave. She suggested that to keep them, the City must make it clear they are welcome and said, “naming the city a sanctuary would send forth a Clarion call that the City supports this community; a call whose echo would be heard across the state and draw the youth to Keene.” Ms. DelaCroix said this declaration would set a precedent clarifying the City’s values and those of its officials, its employees, and its people. She said failing to take this opportunity to become a sanctuary city would likewise make clear a lack of values in light of the national climate, stating it would be vital to show support rather than alienate this vibrant, politically motivated community. On a more personal note, Ms. DelaCroix wanted to emphasize the distinction between equality and equity, given the discussion of why the LGBTQIA+ community should get something special. She said she had the right to marry who she wanted, her wife, without any fuss. Since transitioning, Ms. DelaCroix stated she must fight annually—despite having had the equal right to marry her wife—to prove to the insurance company that she is who matches the Marriage Certificate, because the City Clerk has no format to allow her to update her name and gender. This had forced Ms. DelaCroix annually to newly disclose her transition to her insurance company. When she asked the City Clerk’s office about it they said there was no recourse. When she asked the Attorney General of NH, they said the only recourse would be to sue the City of Keene, which Ms. DelaCroix did not want to do. She hoped the City would develop solutions that acknowledge there are trans people in the City. Ms. DelaCroix said it would not be a special right even if it is unique solution to unique problem that not everyone has.

Sam Jackson of Court Street agreed with Ms. DelaCroix’s comments. Ms. Jackson added that there were a lot of young people in the LGBTQIA+ group, and this would be a really good opportunity to show them how much the City does care in a political climate that, at every turn, has claimed it cares and changed its minds. If being totally honest, Ms. Jackson said she was considering leaving Keene because she did not feel incredibly safe here. While the City was safe in a lot of ways, she noted that things that change, and they could change fast. Ms. Jackson stated that she did not want to lose her family but needed to know that they would be safe and protected. She would rather not have to think about escape routes.

Rebecca Montrone of Winter Street, a Keene businessowner, read a letter submitted to the City Council, expressing concerns regarding the proposed LGBTQ+ “sanctuary city” designation: *“Dear members of the Keene City Council, As a longtime resident of Keene and a local business owner, I’m writing to share my concerns about the proposal to designate Keene as a sanctuary city for the LGBTQ+ community. First and foremost, I believe everyone in our City, regardless of identity, deserves to live freely, safely, and with respect. This is how I conduct my business and my personal life, and I know many—I would say the vast majority in Keene—feel the same way. That said, this proposed designation raises important questions. 1) Sanctuary from what? I have not seen credible evidence that LGBTQ+ individuals in Keene are currently in danger or unable to live their lives openly and peacefully. I believe our community already strives to welcome and protect everyone equally without needing a special designation. 2) Impact on our City’s balance*

and culture, (Ms. Montrone interjected that this really concerned her) designating Keene as a sanctuary city for this specific group could serve as a magnet, drawing a disproportionate number of people here for that reason alone. It may also discourage individuals and families whose lifestyle, values, or priorities differ with what such a designation signals, making them less likely to choose Keene as a place to live, raise children, start a business, or invest in our community. In effect, it ties our City's reputation to a particular political and cultural ideology rather than preserving the broad and diverse mix of values that make Keene a vibrant and welcoming place for everyone. 3) No discrimination, just fairness. Choosing not to single out one community for special sanctuary status does not indicate a desire to discriminate or marginalize them. Quite the opposite. It affirms our commitment to treating everyone with equal dignity and respect without favoring one group above others in civic policy. In my view, true inclusion is rooted in equality, respect, and the freedom to live privately as one chooses, without elevating any one identity group to a higher symbolic status. This is what has always made Keene feel like home to so many of us. Thank you for your time, for considering the broader impacts of this proposal, and for your continued service to all who call Keene home."

Richard Doherty of Elm Street said he had lived in the Monadnock Region since 1981. He moved to Keene because was feeling unsafe in one of the small local towns further away in the current political climate and thought Keene was really accepting and welcoming to queer people. He supported any wording of this proposal because it was basically his situation. Mr. Doherty said he had been welcomed into the Keene community really incredibly so far, like the being invited to be the speaker at the Pride Art Walk this summer and to share his queer life history and the Cheshire County Historical Society. No matter what the wording, he thought it would be a smart action for the City to have something indicating that this is a safe and welcoming place for people to come. On the issue of having enough City resources and that needing to be equal, Mr. Doherty stated that "the straight, white community gets more than their share, [more] than queer people do" because queer people do not feel comfortable in every space. So, he thought it would be smart to have resources for everyone because there was clearly a section of the population advantaged over the queer community.

Dr. Mary Gannon of 33 Parker Street in Winchester spoke as a member of the Monadnock Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging Coalition Steering Committee and NAACP Chapter in Windham County, VT. Her work over the previous 35 years included supporting initiatives in public education to create safe, welcoming, and belonging school cultures. Dr. Gannon said she had a lot of things she wanted to say but looked at her notes and realized they might not be as relevant. Sitting there as someone who identified as a straight, white cisgendered individual, she noted she did not live with the fear, weight, or concerns that many who had spoken before her did. She said she was heartbroken because of some of the things she heard tonight. Dr. Gannon agreed with and appreciated many of the comments shared about what the culture and climate felt like nationally, but more importantly, in NH at this time. One of the things she was most concerned about that had not been mentioned was the youth watching. She said the students in Winchester were watching; many were wrestling with their senses of identities and relying on adults who always spoke about how much they valued diversity and inclusion. Dr. Gannon said the community did not actually think diversity was always a good idea when it came down to policies and practices that meant anyone might have to feel uncomfortable. Dr. Gannon did not know what the Council would decide or how the community would reckon with this, but stated we were living

in a culture of terror and fear, so she was most concerned about how adults would start modeling/walking/talking what they feel so passionate about.

Emily Benson of Kendall Road explained her job to attract and retain employees to Bensonwood, her family's local construction company. She said she was very ethically and morally behind the spirit of Keene Pride's petition and wanted to provide an economic viewpoint to the discussion. Ms. Benson noted that Bensonwood had over 100 employees across approximately 15 professions related to construction and like most businesses in Keene, was having a lot of trouble attracting and retaining employees. She said adding inclusive language to their policies, bathroom signage, and other things had made a positive impact on Bensonwood's recruitment efforts. She added that some of her co-workers felt safer having the inclusive language around the company. Other coworkers who might not have understood or liked new signage at the company came to understand that it helped make coworkers feel safe, attract new coworkers, and attract young people with skill sets and talents desperately needed. Ms. Benson was also really concerned about how the recent anti-trans laws in NH would affect Bensonwood's ability to attract and retain talented people, especially current LGBTQ+ employees; the company was already losing many employees to Boston and places in MA that were adopting sanctuary policies or inclusive language. She really believed that if Keene could clearly position itself as a community that supports and protects its LGBTQ+ residents, it would send a powerful message that this region is a place where people of all identities could thrive; even as the state was sending a very different message through the bills being passed and rhetoric. Ms. Benson said the City's commitment to inclusivity would make a real difference not just morally, but also practically and economically, for building a strong and resilient workforce in Keene; as well as to help her ability to attract and retain employees.

Kristen Petricola of Beaver Street said it was wonderful to be part of a community of people who could thoughtfully disagree about something very important. She thought the City has a moral obligation to stand behind marginalized communities who are under attack by the current leader of the ruling political party. Ms. Petricola thought the community could find a way to do that by working together with the notion of a moral obligation.

Rev. Elsa Worth explained that five months after she was called Saint James Episcopal Church in Keene, her middle child came out as transgender, and a few months later tragically died by suicide. She said she and anyone who knows transgender youth, know how tenuous life is for them; even in the best of times, the stigma is difficult. Eight years later, Rev. Worth said she could not imagine what it is like for trans children or their families. She was unsure how many in the room—especially those opposed to this—had such personal experiences and knew that there was actually an Underground Railroad being organized for families to leave hostile states and come north; not to New Hampshire, because she said it was not a safe place anymore. Rev. Worth stated, "In my faith, God goes well out of God's way to run toward those who are hurting and marginalized on the edges, and this is not called favoritism, this is called love. And I think that there is a population among us, many that are in need of love from a town whose best vision of ourselves is as a welcoming, creative, open community." She thought it was important to remember there are people who do not feel the equal rights that everyone else assume; she said that lack of rights could not only be hurtful, but deadly. Rev. Worth urged this Committee and the City Council to find a

way not to single out this group, not to apply favoritism to this group, but to remember this group and stand with them in this time of attack.

The City Manager left the meeting due to a water main break emergency.

Lynn Forrest had moved to Keene seven months prior, and one reason was the openness she felt in the community. She said she supported the purpose of the issue before the Committee, whether called sanctuary city or something similar, she thought the purpose was important. Ms. Forrest stated she is a lesbian and was a member of the LGBTQ community before it had all the letters at the end. She was afraid in the current political situation with a gay daughter, Black grandson, and transgender ex second husband; Ms. Forrest had a whole family worrying across the U.S. She said recognizing the LGBTQIA+ community would not elevate them above anybody else, only recognize the threats against that community currently and in the future. Looking at history in other places, she said the hetero population did not have to worry about those threats; she specifically stated “hetero” as opposed to “straight” because she thought straight was a very positive thing. Ms. Forrest said she loves the City and wants it to have her back. She was really excited everyone spoke so respectfully to each other. She quoted Israel Kamakawiwo’ole who said, Aloha means “not stepping on anybody’s toes.” Ms. Forrest hoped everyone in Keene would continue to act with Aloha.

Bronwyn Sims of Nelson said she spoke as a woman, athlete, and a gymnastics coach for girls and women in Keene, as well as a signatory to the Declaration on Women’s Sex-Based Rights called The Declaration. Ms. Sims explained that The Declaration was authored by Women’s Declaration International, a global feminist women’s rights organization dedicated to opposing the erosion of women’s sex-based rights caused by incorporation of gender identity ideology in law and policy; she volunteered with its U.S. chapter. She shared her perspective on the proposed declaration establishing Keene as a sanctuary city for the LGBTQIA community. Ms. Sims said she deeply values fairness and respect for all individuals, and believes the community thrives when everyone is treated equitably. She respectfully suggested that any declaration should honor all people equally, rather than focusing on one specific group, stating that recognizing one group over others can unintentionally make some community members feel overlooked or undervalued. If the Council felt a declaration was necessary, she encouraged a message celebrating the diversity and worth of every individual in Keene, fostering unity without elevating one group above others. Ms. Sims also wanted to share concerns that some women and girls in the community had expressed, particularly regarding fairness in sports and the safety of private spaces like bathrooms and locker rooms. As a coach and athlete, she said she had seen how important it was for women and girls to have equal opportunities in athletics, as protected by Title IX for over five decades. She stated that some women and girls had their awards, scholarships, and podium placements stolen through policies allowing males to compete in women’s sports. She said this had led to feelings of frustration, injury, and trauma among female athletes who worked hard to succeed. Ms. Sims also wanted to share a personal experience at the Keene YMCA that left her feeling unsafe. After exiting the shower completely unclothed in the women’s locker room, she said she encountered a man dressing in the same space. Feeling uncomfortable, she quickly moved to a private changing area. When Ms. Sims inquired at the front desk, she was informed that the YMCA has a community locker room for individuals who identify outside traditional gender categories, but it was unclear why this space was not used in this instance. She said this experience raised concerns

for her about the safety and privacy of women in designated spaces, particularly for those who have experienced past trauma. Ms. Sims believed clear policies and consistent enforcement were essential to ensure women's and girls' safety. She thanked the Committee.

Heather Harada of Keene stated that she went to school for fashion design, so she appreciated an alternative community. As a completely outgoing and outspoken person, Ms. Harada said she never felt like she fit in Keene because of her personality, so she understood what everyone was saying. She noted that she was specifically present for a higher perspective; for those doing astrology, she stated being a Sagittarius from the 9th house. Ms. Harada said the audience was honing on specifics and she wanted to provide the higher perspective. She felt there was a spiritual warfare happening on this entire Earth at this time and that everyone deserves to have respect and to feel they fit in. Ms. Harada said she had been targeted by Police in Keene because she is blonde, stating she had been pulled over for no reason while late for work; she had story-after-story. She said she was at the meeting to note that she did not understand how the City could make people feel safe in a tangible way. She personally felt that was an internal, individual job. So, Ms. Harada wanted to hear how a city could do that in steps because she would love everyone to feel included, but did not know what that would look like; how could local policies make people feel safe? She said she had been through a lot in this City. Especially having an alcoholic husband who passed away one year prior, Ms. Harada believed safety and worthiness was an inside job, not something policies could create. So, she expressed confusion—comparing it to the hangman in Tarot—asking how to make people feel physically safe in the City. She said she did not feel physically safe in the City, with no offense to the lovely Police Officer in the room, but said every time she saw Keene police she was paranoid; whereas she came from Nashua and was not paranoid there. Ms. Harada said she totally understood what this community was saying but asked what the proposal would look like. She thought there was a spiritual warfare happening in this world and behind it, dark and light; she asked how to make it gray. She was unsure. Like Dr. Gannon, she did not state most of what she intended after listening to others speak. Ms. Harada concluded that yes, she understood what the petitioners were saying but did not know how Keene could do it. She said you have to look inside and figure out how you can feel safe.

NH Representative Jodi Newell (Cheshire 4) of Leverett Street spoke in support of the Keene Pride petition. Ms. Newell said she had spent hours and hours in hearings about bills that were coming through the state, listening to stories of people going through extreme attacks and extreme fear. She saw exactly what these types of policies translated to people personally. Then, she said she was so happy she got to come home to Keene, where the people who she loves most in the world—who had come out recently—felt very welcome and very free to do that. Ms. Newell thought anything the City could do to underscore that safety and protection for the LGBTQ+ community would be warranted, needed, and she would appreciate it. Representative Newell also took the opportunity to thank the Keene Fire Department for their help when her house was on fire the year prior.

Elijah Zimmer of Bellows Falls, VT, wanted to provide an outsider's perspective as someone who is a frequent visitor to Keene. Mr. Zimmer felt that Keene was a welcoming place. He believed that the more the City could demonstrate it is welcoming to all people, the more it would grow and prosper. He thought this declaration was definitely a way to demonstrate that all people have an equal place here. Mr. Zimmer stated that everyone is not equal until all parts of the population feel

safe and equal. He added that he was a Town of Rockingham, VT, Selectboard member, so he understood the Committee's challenge with this very complex issue. Mr. Zimmer realized there were many different sides, but from the perspective of an outsider, he said this would be something that could have a very positive effect on the City's image.

Steve Lindsey of Franklin Street, a former NH Representative, spoke in support of the Keene Pride petition. He said, "We are lighting a candle in the darkness by this forthright action." He stated there was a lot of darkness in the world right now, as seen in Washington, DC, and Concord, NH. Mr. Lindsey said this was not a good thing for vulnerable groups. One of his favorite images of Keene is when the City lights up Main Street and the main thoroughfares in the fall; for example, he referred to the former Kristallnacht Remembrance, when merchants would display candles on Main Street and Central Square to make a bold statement against the darkness. Mr. Lindsey wanted the Committee to do the same by supporting this petition.

Jennifer McCalley of Pako Avenue explained that she always told her kids every person deserves safety and fairness, and that we should stand up for our neighbors even if it is hard or scary. Ms. McCalley said Keene Pride was asking the community to acknowledge that queer and trans folks did not have safety or fairness everywhere, but that this community would stand up for them all. She said there were some people in NH and the country actively working against queer people in order to divide and grab power. Ms. McCalley said affirming Keene Pride's request and petition may feel hard, but as leaders, the Committee was called to do hard things and many were standing beside them to help them do the right thing; "We're queer, straight, cis, and trans, but we are behind you, ready to do the hard thing." She said Keene Pride's petition was not for special rights at the expense of anyone else in Keene, it was an opportunity to show that Keene would not tolerate any part of the community being bullied or targeted.

John Schmitt of Keene recalled that the last time was before the Committee he was one of the few to discuss religion, so he wanted to briefly do so again. Mr. Schmitt stated that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. He said that was history "because of the behaviors of this LGBTQ+ movement." He did not think the City should encourage "these people" in any way, stating that it would be going against God. Mr. Schmitt also stated that he had not seen violence in Keene against any particular group and did not see how the City could stop that violence if it was real by making any possible statement, other than hiring enough Police to place on every corner. He suggested that if there was violence, Police would investigate after the fact, not stop things. Mr. Schmitt suggested personal protection and that others who were worried about their safety were being naïve. He continued, addressing the name "Keene Pride," stating that pride is one of the seven deadly sins; he said it was the reason everyone had been listening quietly, the reason Lucifer was thrown out of heaven, and the reason Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden—they wanted to be like God. Mr. Schmitt stated, "This group uses pride. They're apparently very proud of their sexual aberrations." He noted he was not without sin, but he was not proud of them, he was ashamed of them. He thought it said something to use a name like "Pride." Regarding bullying in schools, Mr. Schmitt said that cannot be stopped, that "kids will be kids," and the schools might have to do something about it. He did not think any statement the City made would do anything about that. He said he heard talk about bigotry and hate, and said those terms were used to denigrate people who want to speak truth, like himself. Mr. Schmitt said people would call him a bigot and hateful, but he was not. He stated that his religion taught him from Jesus Christ

that he has to love everybody, even his enemies. Mr. Schmitt stated, “I don’t hate this group. I hate their behaviors because God hates their behaviors. Nature even hates their behaviors.”

Rev. Craig Breismeister of Pako Avenue stated that he had served Cheshire County churches for over a decade. He spoke in favor of the sanctuary designation from a religious perspective and as a Christian minister. Rev. Breismeister felt the Christians who had big pulpits in the ears of legislators appeared to have forgotten the heart of Christianity—love of neighbor. He was very concerned about the current political climate that was increasingly hostile to the LGBTIA community. So, Rev. Breismeister called upon this body to deliberate with a love of neighbor, compassion, grace, and a servant’s heart.

Finnigan Jackson of 157 Eaton Road, Swanzey, explained that he worked in Keene with several groups of people from ages 2–103. Mr. Jackson said that in the previous six months, he had said goodbye to a lot of the people he knew of because they were afraid of living in this City and in this country. He had seen a couple of people move back to Keene but not many people who have left wanted to come back; he said they were afraid. He heard it day-to-day—including from several straight people—how much they were afraid. He said, “We’re not the only ones on our side. The whole country is afraid, the whole country is divided, and everyone’s not sure what to do.” Mr. Jackson wanted to mention that he saw a lot of people leaving because he thought that perspective was needed if the City wants to be more supported.

Ann Savastano of Winter Street wanted to speak in response to some comments, noting her background having attended an Evangelical seminary, the board of which Billy Graham served on. She said that remained the background of her own spiritual convictions and morality. Ms. Savastano said that she interestingly discovered, and her perspective was now informed by, being a direct descendant several times over of William Bradford the Pilgrim; she studied this and participated in the 400th anniversary of the Pilgrims. Ms. Savastano believes that the U.S. Constitution, when properly adhered to, is a remarkable document that gives rights and freedoms—even from government overreach—which should be respected. She said the Constitution is based on Judeo-Christian principles, as most of the people who formed it had those principles. Ms. Savastano stated that this nation’s body of law is primarily based on Judeo-Christian principles, but said part of that—uniquely—was not prescribing certain religious beliefs. Rather, she said the Constitution guarantees religious freedom and freedom of speech. In looking back over some of the history of our nation, which is unique, Ms. Savastano said she saw civil discourse and respect for individuals, not a socialist state and what is good for the collective. She saw real respect in this nation that she thought had been missing historically—and in many nations today—for individual liberty, rights, and respect. She was afraid some of that was being eroded by the divisions in the nation and in communities; between cultural divisions and the lack of civil discourse. As an Evangelical Christian, Ms. Savastano agreed with Mr. Schmitt in certain ways.

Mohammad Saleh of Keene did not plan to speak but felt compelled. He stated that if he went home and his children asked him why he was late, he would have to tell them what he was doing, they would ask if he made a position, and he would not be able to say he was silent. Mr. Saleh said there are moments when we have to take a strong position, even if it is inconvenient. He said this was a moment and he understood it was political, with pressure from Concord and potential economic consequences for the City. All that said, he thought everyone needed to look deep in

their heart and say, “Do we stand with the oppressed and the people who are feeling vulnerable and feeling afraid?” Mr. Saleh noted that he is an immigrant, and explained he comes from a culture and country where all the minority rights are not necessarily enshrined. He became an American Citizen approximately 30 years prior. Mr. Saleh said he loves the United States because this country gave him the promise that everybody is equally protected and nobody is afraid. He said he loves NH and Keene because he believes that that Keene, in particular, is the most welcoming City he had ever lived in; it felt more like home than where he was born. Mr. Saleh added that Keene is also the City of Jonathan Daniels, stating he always reminds himself of that. He said, “It is like not any other City—Jonathan Daniels gave his life because he stood with the oppressed.” So, Mr. Saleh asked the Committee to consider that when they voted.

Rev. Derek Scalia of Keene said he was thinking the prior weekend about how far we had grown apart from one another. At this meeting, he said neighbors were hearing neighbors tell painful stories, that they need to be seen, and that there is something deeply troubling happening in our communities—not just here, but throughout NH, New England, in the country. Rev. Scalia stated that when his neighbor cries out for help, he has a moral obligation to at least hear them; when they share their pain and suffering, his obligation is to accompany them, which he said he could do as a citizen and a deep person of faith. However, he expected his government to acknowledge that there was pain and suffering happening here, stating that an effective government is a place where people can share their pain and suffering and expect that the government at least hear them; a government in which there can at least be a sense of justice, purpose, resolve, and humanity seen, acknowledged, and affirmed in this community. Rev. Scalia said he had seen the City do it in beautiful ways. He was excited to accompany the City on this next journey as it again affirmed this is a place where people can be seen, valued, and respected; and when they share their pain and suffering, the City will hear it and accompany them.

Stanley Wood of Main Street said he was not for theatrics and would get to the point. He did not understand debating the fact that people could feel safe here or have a banner stating they are safe here. Mr. Wood said it would not mean stating one group of people were better or worse, but acknowledging people were scared and they were welcome in Keene. He said, “Love your friends, love your neighbors.” Mr. Wood added, “If we’re talking about a religion that’s not going to hate everyone, but we are clearly trying to push away a certain group of people. I think that might be hate.”

Linda Chmielewski of Keene stated that people who opposed the Keene Pride petition or said there was nothing to be worried about had not seen the abuse, they did not know because they were not in this situation. She said it was a shame those in opposition were not open to other people’s ways of life. Ms. Chmielewski said you cannot help it; you are born this way.

Patrick Heneghan of East Surry Road shared an anecdote of a phone call the week prior with his son who lived in Copenhagen. Mr. Heneghan said his son was upset and scared. Copenhagen is a very friendly country, and his gay son was not scared about living there but was scared about his parents living in the United States. Mr. Heneghan said it does not matter that his son is gay and said all the people who spoke at this meeting were the sons, daughters, and children of other people. He said he listened to his son for nearly 30 minutes talk about why he was afraid to come home and visit his family. Mr. Heneghan said he heard that the City would be elevating other

people with this petition. He said he had five other children. One of his children was gay and he said his son elevated him, taught him understanding, and gave Mr. Heneghan insight into his world, family, and neighbors. He said his son is a gift and a blessing. Mr. Heneghan felt that by elevating this group of people, they would reach out and elevate him in return and asked what would be wrong with that. He reiterated that his son was afraid to visit his home in NH and Mr. Heneghan wanted him to be able to visit, noting that these were all his neighbors. He said he did not know much about religion, but said he was a “‘roaming’ catholic” because he likes to roam in whatever faith tradition teaches love, forgiveness, tolerance, and acceptance.

City Councilor Catt Workman of Colorado Street said she was holding her comments until a later date but heard a lot of people asking what they could do and challenged people to do a couple of things. First, she referred to the Riddle Homophobia Scale created by psychologist Dr. Dorothy Riddle. Councilor Workman listed the four levels of homophobic attitudes: repulsion, pity, tolerance, and acceptance. There are also four levels of positive attitudes: support, admiration, appreciation, and nurturance. She said the community needed to get to the “nurturance” part, stating that was the goal of the Council’s 2021 Declaration of Inclusion. Lastly, Councilor Workman encouraged everyone to read one of her favorite books, *I Promised I Would Tell*, which she said paralleled what was happening and would provide a bit of education; \$9.99 online and only 100 pages. She asked everyone to please educate themselves.

All members of the public who wished to speak had the opportunity, so Chair Bosley closed the floor to public comments.

Councilor Haas wanted everyone in the audience to understand that ultimately, the Committee would have to follow some process regarding the Keene Pride letter that was submitted, though he acknowledged the content of the letter had changed during the meeting. He said there were a variety of different next steps the Committee could choose for asking Keene Pride for a different letter: accept as informational and waiting for new submission or send it through to the Council as is for a “no” vote. He did not think the latter option was preferable. Regardless, Councilor Haas looked forward to working through the process. Additionally, he noted how many people came to a City meeting and stood for the first time and spoke up for their values. Councilor Haas said what a wonderful comment that was and though values differed based on our backgrounds and upbringings, it was great that everybody could stand and say what they believed and disagree. He thanked Mr. Toepfer for his work and the Pride events, and the wonderful atmosphere Pride brought to this community, as demonstrated by the Pride Festival coming up in September. Councilor Haas added that he expected to see everybody in the audience at the Pride Festival if they believed what they were saying. He called it a great place to show true support for the Pride community. Councilor Haas also thanked Ms. Farrington for her letter because it started with a value statement that the Councilor thought everybody in the room would agree with about dignity and respect. Councilor Haas hoped everyone could come together through further conversations and develop something along the lines of shared values. He said the real issue here was a group that was under attack from our governments and said no matter the agreement with the Keene Pride group, the City should stand up and support the group. Councilor Haas said that support might just be attending the Pride Festival and spending as much money as possible, or it could be a document out of the Committee—he was unsure that would happen at this meeting. He reiterated the idea that our government was attacking a specific group; he said groups are attacked all the

time by other groups, which is not right, and the City should work on that too. However, he said when the government attacks a group, that is when the Council should stand up for it.

Chair Bosley applauded the audience for being very respectful of each other's opinions during this hard conversation with different perspectives. She appreciated that it allowed a good, healthy conversation to a result that everyone could be proud of at the end.

Councilor Williams shared a story from his first job detasseling corn in Wisconsin, when he used to get beat up on a regular basis for being gay. Councilor Williams stated that he is not even gay. He did not think there was anything wrong with being gay, so he got the label on him, and people beat him up for a few weeks before he told people he was not really gay, and it stopped. Councilor Williams said that violence exists, he had seen it, understood it, and people had experienced it a lot more than he had. He thought it was deeply regrettable and begged the question of where that comes from. Councilor Williams thought it came from the values of the community, and said in a community with homophobic values, kids will beat up their coworkers because they think that is the right thing to do. However, he said if a community can make a statement that says, "No, we value these people. We understand not to raise them above anyone else, but to say that we recognize that they are under threat in a way that most other people aren't." Councilor Williams thought that was very important. He noted that when any group comes to a government to say they feel in danger, it is the government's job to respond to that. So, he thought the Council should. He said it was difficult to determine the wording, but he referred to the three points Mr. Toepfer provided at the beginning. For the City to publicly state:

- That Keene is a safe and welcoming City for the LGBTQ community,
- That being LGBTQ plus is never a crime, and
- That the City of Keene will never use its resources on their own or in conjunction with the federal or state government in the unjust search and seizure and harassment of LGBTQ+ people.

Councilor Williams was open to workshopping the language, but his preference was to ultimately have the Council unanimously adopt such a statement, or at least a strong majority. He wanted to refer this language to the City's Human Rights Committee (HRC) to workshop for a recommendation back to this Committee before a final recommendation to Council.

Chair Bosley was similarly concerned about trying to write something at this meeting because she wanted it to have careful thought. She appreciated the opportunity to sign the City Council's original 2021 Declaration of Inclusion, which she read:

"Before the Keene, New Hampshire City Council on the nineteenth day of August 2021. Declaration of the City of Keene, New Hampshire as an Inclusive and Welcoming City. We, the governing body of Keene, New Hampshire do hereby declare our pledge to make Keene a City of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We as a City truly welcome people of all colors, creeds, beliefs, lifestyles, nationalities, physical abilities, mental abilities to live, work, play, worship, and shop in our welcoming City. We vowed to condemn and never ignore acts of racism, bigotry, oppression, and hatred. We truly believe that diversity, equity, and inclusion makes us stronger."

Chair Bosley said that it was signed by all sitting Councilors at the time (one vacancy) and she was very proud of that Declaration. While City Declarations do not go away, she thought it was possible the Council could write something to rival/recreate a modernized welcoming statement/declaration. She did not think the Committee was equipped to do that at this meeting. For actionable steps, she liked the suggestion of having a workshop through the HRC or having Keene Pride resubmit a letter with revised language for the Committee to consider that would be appropriate. However, while considering actionable steps, Chair Bosley said accepting the letter before the Committee as informational made sense to her in order to have a path forward.

Councilor Madison also commended the audience for a really civil discussion, which does not always happen. He said he had not experienced discrimination in his life as a straight, white man. However, he saw and believed the people in the audience and understood that the fear was real. Councilor Madison believed the City needed to reassure the LGBTQ+ community that they are safe, welcome, and home in Keene; that the City would never use its resources or power to disenfranchise or make someone feel unsafe. He said he felt the need for that statement in the current political climate, citing laws at the national level and actions by the President that eroded Americans' faith in their safety and their own security from their government. Councilor Madison referred to politicians at the Statehouse in Concord who ranted and raved about Live Free and Die but drastically eroded that principle. He thought Keene needed to take stand and did not know what exactly that would look like. He agreed with accepting the letter as informational or referring it to the HRC to wordsmith. Councilor Madison thought the Council needed to do something to send a message to this community that this is their home, they are safe, welcomed, protected, and the City is happy to have them here. He said if something like this would bring more people like Mr. Toepfer, Ms. Jackson, and Ms. DelaCroix to this community, Councilor Madison would be thrilled to see it.

Vice Chair Jones agreed that the Committee should not accept this as informational. He explained to the audience that this process started through the Human Rights Committee; Vice Chair Jones and the Mayor already met with the HRC twice. So, Vice Chair Jones was proud to say the HRC was ready to start working on something that would be acceptable to the entire community.

Councilor Haas noted that sending this back to the HRC was a necessary path to accomplish next steps. However, he pointed out that many people did not feel welcomed at the Human Rights Committee meetings. So, he asked the HRC to make other voices feel welcome in their meetings and deliberations, which Councilor Haas noted are all open to the public and are posted on the [City Calendar](#).

Chair Bosley asked if the Committee should motion to recommend accepting this letter as informational and then have a second motion to send a communication to the HRC directing them to continue working on statement language. The City Attorney, Amanda Palmeira, agreed with the idea of two motions. Councilor Williams was concerned that by accepting the letter as informational, it would trigger the clause in the Council's bylaws prohibiting the topic from being addressed again within the calendar year. Chair Bosley assumed the intent of the new letter would have slightly different language (i.e., no reference to "sanctuary"). The City Attorney agreed that the Rule Councilor Williams referred to was in Section 33, which prohibits items of the "the identical subject matter to that matter shall not be taken up again by the City Council during that

calendar year.” So, the City Attorney stated that as long as Keene Pride’s future communication would be different than a petition for sanctuary city designation, it should be fine. Chair Bosley added that the Council could always suspend its Rules of Order to reconsider the same matter in the same calendar year.

Councilor Haas made the following motion, which was duly seconded by Councilor Madison.

On a vote of 5–0, the Planning, Licenses and Development Committee recommends accepting Keene Pride’s Request to Designate Keene a Sanctuary City for the LGBTQIA+ Community as informational.

Councilor Haas made the following motion, which was duly seconded by Councilor Madison.

Before voting, Vice Chair Jones questioned directing an advisory Committee, especially when it was already working on something. He felt like it was bullying the HRC when all these volunteers were working on something good and special. Vice Chair Jones thought they should leave the HRC out of it. Chair Bosley felt that the Council gave direction to its committees fairly regularly. She provided the example of drafting language for the Charitable Gaming Ordinance and requesting the help of the Energy and Climate Committee to create proper direction for an individual Ordinance for electric charging stations that the Council could adopt citywide. So, Chair Bosley thought there were times the Council did offer input and direction into the Committees’ movements. She hoped the HRC would not see it as a negative, but as they have Council support to move forward finding a solution to all of the concern heard at this meeting. Councilor Williams agreed and said it would be valuable to give the HRC a mandate for what they were doing, which was how he saw this motion. Vice Chair Jones agreed with the Committee.

On a vote of 5–0, the Planning, Licenses and Development Committee recommends directing the Human Rights Committee to work with the concerned parties to draft a statement recognizing the LGBTQIA+ community and assuring dignity and respect for all persons and all communities in the City of Keene.

4) Adjournment

Deputy City Manager, Rebecca Landry, provided the audience with a brief update about a water main break on Water Street.

There being no further business, Chair Bosley adjourned the meeting at 8:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katrinya Kibler, Minute Taker
July 13, 2025

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