

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Tuesday, August 12, 2025**

**6:00 PM**

**Council Chambers,  
City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Harold Farrington, Chair  
Alex Henkel, Vice Chair  
Councilor Michael Remy (arrived at ~ 6:07 PM)  
Cody Morrison  
Emily LaVigne-Bernier  
Dr. Joseph Perras  
Alexander Von Plinsky, IV  
Joe Walier  
Juliana Bergeron  
Kenneth Kost, Alternate (Voting)  
Councilor Philip Jones, Alternate (Voting)

**Staff Present:**

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

**Members Not Present:**

Leatrice Oram  
Joshua Meehan  
Elizabeth Wood  
Mayor Jay V. Kahn, Alternate  
Councilor Catherine Workman, Alternate

**1) Call to Order and Roll Call**

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

**2) Adoption of Meeting Minutes – June 10, 2025**

A motion by Councilor Jones to adopt the June 10, 2025 minutes was duly seconded by Mr. Von Plinsky and the motion carried unanimously. Councilor Remy was absent.

**3) Final Discussion of Draft Comprehensive Master Plan**

Before final discussion of the draft Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP), Chair Farrington shared an opening statement to sincerely thank the Steering Committee for taking part in this vast undertaking. He noted this could not have occurred without the efforts of City staff. However, Chair Farrington wanted to focus on the Steering Committee members who made this possible,

volunteering since February 2024—a more than 18-month commitment. He spoke about recruiting these 17 Steering Committee members, who were very busy and contributed diverse experiences and so many accomplishments in their professional and volunteering lives, many of which help Keene in some way. Chair Farrington called the City truly fortunate that the Committee members were willing to give of themselves and guide this effort, for which he thanked them, saying he was inspired by their commitment to this effort. Committee members brought their voices, values, and visions to the table; they posed tough questions, listened with empathy, and worked tirelessly to ensure this CMP would reflect not just the City in 2025, but where it aspires to be tomorrow. Chair Farrington called the CMP a thick document, but so much more than that; he said it is a blueprint for Keene’s success. While he was certain there were specifics in the CMP each person objected to, he hoped everyone would agree the final product reflected the voices of many Keene people—as steered by this Committee’s collective wisdom and compassion. Chair Farrington said he was proud of this CMP, but he was even prouder of participating in its development with each of these Steering Committee members, who he thanked again.

Chair Farrington requested City staff comments. Ms. Brunner said she had nothing specific, stating her hope was that everyone had a chance to read and digest the lengthy document. There were some minor revisions, with the most recent draft sent to the Steering Committee approximately one week before this meeting. So, Ms. Brunner was hoping Steering Committee members might go around and share any remaining thoughts or requested tweaks needed to the CMP. Chair Farrington noted that the meeting packet included a summary of the seven areas of recent changes to the draft CMP, which he thought was helpful, particularly the revisions made to the Implementation Matrix.

Councilor Remy arrived.

Chair Farrington agreed to discuss the communication from Mayor Jay Kahn before continuing with the general discussion. The City Council was on its annual summer break, so the Mayor was not present to introduce the matter. The Chair read the Mayor’s email into the record and then discussion ensued:

*“I’m not able to attend the meeting, so I’m sharing a thought via email for your consideration. The [Master Plan] MP authors have considered and incorporated many of our thoughts and edits into the Plan. The August 12th meeting is a final discussion on the Master Plan, in other words you’ll be asked if you have any final edits before the document is passed to the City Council for their review and action.*

*I’ve suggested previously that the label for the Environment Pillar (Flourishing Environment) fails to capture what is the existential shared asset experienced by Keene and Monadnock area residents. Nineteenth century New England authors were most commonly Inspired by their environment. Henry David Thoreau’s mother was born in Keene on Main Street. He visited Keene and his mother many times. I can’t imagine Henry David Thoreau climbing Mount*

*Monadnock and declaring ‘gosh, this is a flourishing environment.’ I think the many authors who climbed Mt. Monadnock and visited Keene, along with our current neighbors, find something in common, that our environment is inspiring.*

*I would like the MP Steering Committee to consider labeling this Pillar, ‘Inspiring Environment.’ I believe Inspiring Environment captures something shared by Monadnock area residents and visitors alike. A Master Plan should be inspirational and it is most appropriately wrapped into the pillars through something in which we all share, the environment.*

*I recently attended a NH Business and Economic Affairs Department event unveiling its Workforce Toolkit, designed to attract new workers to NH. They identified two common features that contribute to NH’s Employee Value Proposition: love of an outdoor lifestyle and making a difference in their community. It helped reinforce for me how important our Monadnock area environment is to inspiring people to move here.*

*I rest my case. Thank you for considering this Pillar label change in my absence.*

*Jay”*

Vice Chair Henkel asked if other names were considered for the Pillar that the Steering Committee should be aware of. Ms. Brunner said no, explaining the quandary was that every other Pillar had a two-part name, so there was an attempt to brainstorm the same for the Environment Pillar. The original word was *vibrant*, which was then used for a different Pillar. Thus, the existing situation. Ms. Brunner said there was always the understanding when drafting that it could change, but the cumulative groups never came up with a better word. So, she thought whatever resonated with the Steering Committee would be workable throughout the CMP (i.e., replacing “Flourishing” with “Inspiring,” if it was the will of the Committee). She added that the only messaging to the community the whole time had been “Flourishing Environment.” However, she did not think it was a big issue to change the name if it was important to the Committee.

Mr. Von Plinsky said he read the Mayor’s email. It got Mr. Von Plinsky thinking that he was never a huge fan of “flourishing,” but as he thought about it more, he believed it was the right word. He said his primary reason being that “inspiring” or almost any other word—as the Mayor discussed in his email—is about the human perspective on the environment. Whereas to Mr. Von Plinsky, the word “flourishing” has two meanings: (1) an area/environment where people can flourish, and (2) allowing the environment to flourish in its own right. He said “inspiring” or any other word he had produced did not capture *the environment for its own sake* in (2) of “flourishing.” Mr. Von Plinsky said this entire CMP is human-focused and resident-focused by design. He called that an important part, but said the residents do exist in this environment that needs to flourish in its own right. So, Mr. Von Plinsky supported sticking with “Flourishing Environment,” and respectfully disagreed with Mayor Kahn.

Councilor Remy disagreed with Mr. Von Plinsky, but was also unsure he aligned with Mayor Kahn on “inspiring.” The Councilor did not like the word “flourishing” because the current “Flourishing Environment” Pillar description did not highlight the community’s interaction with the environment. He said it is not just about having a lot of trees, but also trails and the interaction people have with the outdoors. He acknowledged that it is important to have a healthy and flourishing environment around us for those activities to occur, but said the Pillar title was missing that community interaction. So, Councilor Remy supported “Inspiring Environment,” with a subpoint acknowledging that the environment must flourish to allow such interactivity. He agreed that it is hard to find the perfect word.

Councilor Jones thought “flourishing” implies that something exists already and “inspiring” implies something goal oriented (i.e., it exists, how can it be better?). He posed it for the Committee to consider.

Ms. LaVigne-Bernier was inspired by what Councilor Jones said about “flourishing.” Ms. LaVigne-Bernier thought sometimes humans try to take too much credit for the beautiful world they live in. So, she was unsure whether “flourishing” was the right word. She liked what she heard about the environment and humans *interacting* with each other, saying the environment really is always there and important.

Chair Farrington said he had this conversation with City staff a few times and the best he came up with was “harmony with the environment,” which was not two words.

Dr. Perras agreed with all the comments. Having been a part of projects like this for many years, he said the group could wordsmith this for another two years. He agreed that neither “flourishing” nor “inspiring” might be the best words. Being newer to Keene but coming from a place with a very similar environment, Dr. Perras appreciated the sentiment of humans flourishing within the environment that they have an impact on. Simultaneously, he agreed with the Mayor that the environment is a huge draw for people to move to this area. Dr. Perras called the environment spectacular and said the convenience of accessing recreation should be a huge selling point. He was unsure whether that was “flourishing” or “inspiring,” but felt it should stay as “Flourishing Environment.”

Ms. Bergeron suggested there could still be another, better possibility, like “thriving.” However, she did not think the group should get hung up on it.

Mr. Morrison agreed with the suggestion not to debate semantics longer than needed. While he did not have strong feelings and he thought “flourishing” may be imperfect, he said finding the perfect verbiage may be more difficult than the Committee would like. He added his feeling that the term “inspirational” implies a one-sided perspective from a one-sided relationship—the human element. Mr. Morrison thought “flourishing” would encapsulate both the interests of humans and nature. He said while nature is something that can flourish without human involvement, inspiration can really only happen with human involvement.

Mr. Kost supported “Flourishing Environment,” agreeing with Mr. Morrison that it was not one-sided. Mr. Kost noted that much of the CMP and everything in the City (e.g., Planning Board) is a balance between developing for people and protecting the great environment around them. He thought “flourishing” would imply the environment everyone loves will flourish and the community will flourish in that environment.

Councilor Remy used ChatGPT during the meeting (saying that it was unsustainable), seeking suggestions for alternative words. The recommendations were: “connected,” “interactive,” and “harmonious.” Councilor Remy liked “Interactive Environment.”

Mr. Morrison’s interpretation was that the group had agreed not to act on this. Procedurally, he asked if the Steering Committee should motion to keep the term “Flourishing Environment.” Chair Farrington said he would prefer a motion to act on the Mayor’s communication.

A motion by Councilor Remy to change the word “flourishing” to “inspiring” for the “Flourishing Environment” Pillar was duly seconded by Councilor Jones. On a vote of 0–11, the motion failed.

Chair Farrington welcomed further comments on final CMP draft.

Mr. Von Plinsky posed a question about “Appendix A: Implementation Matrices” and the priorities list for the Flourishing Environment Pillar. He noted the Steering Committee talked a lot about having a community-facing dashboard to track the community’s progress on its environmental goals. Mr. Von Plinsky recalled it being given a mid-level priority and he thought it should be a higher priority, stating “you care about what you measure and measure what you care about.” He suggested that it would be very helpful to have that one place where people could go to see positive environmental things the City is doing to act on these goals. Mr. Von Plinsky suggested increasing the priority, but said it would not be consequential otherwise.

Chair Farrington asked how the priority for this goal was determined. Ms. Brunner explained that under the Flourishing Environment Pillar, this was Goal 3, Priority 4: “Develop a community facing environmental dashboard.” She said that action came from the Prioritization Survey and though she could not recall the exact cutoffs, things that scored in certain ranges were assigned as low, mid, and high importance. Ms. Brunner said “Appendix B: Prioritization Survey Result Data” includes the exact numerical scores for reference (this item was given a score of 3.1 as shown on page 118 of 128). Ms. Brunner concluded, applauding Chair Farrington’s letter at the beginning of the CMP. Ms. Brunner appreciated anything that could bring history into a document like this is.

Dr. Perras thanked Ms. Brunner and Planner, Ms. Fortson, for their diligent work and reminders. Dr. Perras reiterated that the group could wordsmith forever, but he thought this CMP draft represented really strong work and a lot of voices heard. He had no recommendations for

changes. Dr. Perras said there was a lot in the CMP, so the next challenge would be execution and financing.

Councilor Jones said it had bothered him since the 2010 CMP that the City had not done enough for implementation. Ever since the City started interviewing consultants for the current CMP, the issue of implementation had been on his mind. So, he was happy to see the Implementation Matrix, which would make accomplishing things easier and help provide the much-needed sense of accomplishment (i.e., checking boxes). He called it a great part of the new CMP that he was pushing for from the beginning, so he was grateful.

Mr. Walier thought staff had been outstanding and said the CMP provided a roadmap. He hoped a lot of the things within the Plan would be implemented, stating he thought the Pillars captured some of the same topics the Steering Committee had talked about—Housing, Workforce, Economy, Environment, Neighborhoods, & Mobility. Mr. Walier thought it was all captured in a good format.

Mr. Kost agreed that it was amazing work, from picking the right consultant to all the work over 18 months. He pointed out Councilor Laura Tobin's name should be corrected to "Laura E. Tobin." Mr. Kost recalled at June meeting, the Steering Committee discussed a possible range goal for population growth and an idea for adding another 2,000–3,000 people, for example. However, he did not see anything about that in this draft of the CMP. He commented on the need for balance between attracting people to the City, but not too many more than the City can accommodate. He asked what the Committee wanted to do, stating it seemed like a piece that could be there but was not.

Chair Farrington said the June meeting minutes captured the Steering Committee's consensus not to set a number or range. Mr. Kost did not think that was the case. Ms. Brunner added that the one really clear message she took away from June's conversation was that everybody agreed to ensure Keene has a healthy, strong workforce. She said there was a lot of discussion about an aging population, which is why it is important to ensure the City is attracting more of a workforce. So, she thought the discussion tied more into the Adaptable Workforce Pillar.

Next, Mr. Kost said some of the implementation strategies seemed no-cost or cost only staff time. He called them low investments that would be important not to wait five or 10 years to implement. He said he could provide comments suggesting how to shift them. For example, for the first one under the Housing Pillar, he wondered why wait five years to implement a GIS map showing existing development when it seemed it could be useful now. He questioned if these could be triggered after the CMP's publication somehow. He mentioned others that seemed easy and important to accomplish sooner, like attracting developers here to build.

Lastly, on Implementation, Mr. Kost discussed monitoring, asking if the City would participate in leading or supporting that effort, if led by another community group(s). He wondered whether there would be a checklist to track when things in the CMP are completed. Ms. Brunner hoped

that once the CMP was finalized and adopted, the matrices shown in the appendices could be transformed into spreadsheets and used as living documents while projects are completed. She thought the consultants did their best to guess what would be short-, mid-, and long-term projects based on current City staffing and resources; however, she noted that circumstances and priorities could change with time, but the overall vision and goals driving them are most important. Ms. Brunner hoped those spreadsheets would help staff and the Planning Board track project implementation. Mr. Kost agreed with Councilor Jones that without structure and intentional implementation, this would just be a Plan.

Councilor Remy called the CMP awesome. So, he said he was nitpicking. He noted the only City Board that listed “Alternate” members was the Planning Board. As a matter consistency and equity, he suggested striking mention of Alternates. Chair Farrington agreed.

Ms. Bergeron thought it was amazing that the Steering Committee and community developed a document this strong, covering so many of the things she was interested in seeing. She called this revision more usable, workable, and public. Ms. Bergeron was happy with it.

Ms. LaVigne-Bernier added that it is a visually appealing document. Throughout the experience, she felt the consultant provided an interesting experience through the presentations. Ms. LaVigne-Bernier was grateful to learn from her fellow Committee members and for this opportunity, both in and out of meetings. Looking at the CMP, she said it was a reminder that she was such a small part of so much work behind the scenes beyond even this Steering Committee.

Mr. Morrison echoed his colleagues about the great work of City staff, and everyone involved. One prominent change he agreed with was the Implementation Matrix and anonymizing some of the partners who would be responsible for doing the work. He felt the first draft of it, though specific, could have potentially locked out other entities from being able to pursue various projects, detracting from the impact of the CMP. On the visuals, Mr. Morrison did not prefer the color-coded priorities and probably would have gone with gray, but said he is not an artist. On implementation and tracking, he said he had full confidence that City staff would be able to manage and track this. He imagined these were things department heads and the City Manager would incorporate into various work plans, job descriptions, etc.

Vice Chair Henkel said, as a counterpoint on the visuals, that he thought many of the visuals had been thoughtfully incremented in the CMP. He recalled this Steering Committee having a thoughtful idea about the Future Land Use Map and trying to ensure it was seen as conceptual and not a specific regulatory document. Vice Chair Henkel thanked the Steering Committee, City staff, and the consulting team for creating a great document—which the Vice Chair thought would be easier for someone who was not a part of this process to understand 3–5 years from now. Given how long the last Plan was relied upon, he thought the level of effort that went into this Plan was well justified.

**4) Adoption Recommendation Vote**

The following motion by Councilor Remy was duly seconded by Mr. Morrison. On a vote of 11–0, the Master Plan Steering Committee recommends that the Planning Board refer the 2025 Comprehensive Master Plan to the City Council for its endorsement and that the Planning Board set a Public Hearing to adopt the Comprehensive Master Plan.

Ms. LaVigne-Bernier asked, if the Planning Board found any edits it wanted to the CMP, would it reconvene the Master Plan Steering Committee. Ms. Brunner thought the Planning Board would either handle the issue itself during adoption or it could reconstitute this Steering Committee if needed.

Ms. Brunner noted that a few months after the CMP’s adoption, she would send a shareable summary/overview document that would be more digestible for people who could not read the whole Plan.

**5) New Business**

None presented.

**6) Next Meeting: Date to be Determined, if Needed**

No next meeting was scheduled or likely to be needed.

**7) Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Farrington adjourned the meeting at 6:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker  
August 19, 2025

Reviewed and edited by,  
Megan Fortson, Planner  
August 21, 2025