

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONGREGATE LIVING AND SOCIAL SERVICES LICENSING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, May 27, 2025

6:00 PM

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

Members Present:

Andrew Oram, Chair
Medard Kopczynski, Vice Chair
Alison Welsh
Tom Savastano

Staff Present:

Rick Wood, Fire Marshal/Building Official
Paul Andrus, Community Development
Director

Members Not Present:

Jennifer Seher

I. Call to Order: Roll Call

Chair Oram called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM.

II. Minutes of Previous Meeting: March 25, 2025

A motion by Mr. Kopczynski to adopt the March 25, 2025 minutes as presented was duly seconded by Ms. Welsh and the motion carried unanimously.

III. Unfinished Business:

A) CLSS-2025-05, American House Keene, has paid their application fee and their license has been issued

Mr. Wood reported that American House Keene paid its outstanding application fee, so the license was issued, and he said there were no other remaining issues.

IV. Applications:

Ms. Welsh reported that because of her overseeing the Cheshire County Behavioral Health Court and the Treatment Court, people from all her programs used the services of Emerald House, Monadnock Peer Support, Keene Serenity Center, and Live Free Recovery. However, she stated no pecuniary interest or benefit/gain from these services. Mr. Savastano also alerted the Board that he had donated to House of Hope in the past but was in no way involved with the organization. Vice Chair Kopczynski explained to the public that Board members were reporting potential conflicts of interest, which is a standard in City government. Upon disclosure, if

members felt it was needed, the Board would vote to determine whether financial conflicts existed, and the members should be recused from voting on the application.

- A) **Continued CLSS-2025-02: Applicant, Patricia Forman, House Supervisor for Emerald House, is requesting a renewal Congregate Living & Social Services License for a Residential Care Facility, located 32 Emerald St., that is in the Downtown Growth District and as defined in Chapter 46, Article X of the Keene City Ordinances.**

Chair Oram opened the Public Hearing and requested staff comments. Rick Wood, Fire Marshal/Building Official, reported that Property & Housing Standard, Fire Department, and Police Department Inspections all occurred on February 4, 2025, with no comments rendered. So, staff had no issues with renewal. When the staff report was completed for the previous meeting, it listed the application fee as incomplete, but Mr. Wood said it had been paid since, so that was an old note.

Chair Oram welcomed the applicant Patricia Forman, Residential Services Manager for Monadnock Family Services, who oversees Emerald House. Ms. Forman had nothing to add to the application.

Chair Oram opened the floor to public comments and heard none.

Ms. Welsh felt like the Neighborhood Plan could have been more detailed and recalled discussing it in the past. She wondered if Ms. Forman had reviewed or added to it, asking what the organization did to have a great relationship with neighbors and the surrounding area. Ms. Forman said no, the Neighborhood Plan has not changed because as stated in the Plan, the nature of the residence is that people cannot come onto the property for events. However, she said clients go to Brewbakers or Toadstool, for example, the latter of which one client had a job at. She said clients had wonderful relationships with people at businesses all around them, like Puggy's, noting the absence of other residences around this property.

Ms. Welsh asked if there had been any significant Police reports for the area. Mr. Wood said the Police Lieutenant reported no concerns with this property.

Vice Chair Kopczynski recalled this Board places a great deal of emphasis on discussions with the public and neighbors. So, he said this conversation about outreach was extremely important. He said because clients do not talk to anybody it probably did not seem necessary to plan, but they created a Plan for this reason. He noted Puggy's would not be there much longer. The Vice Chair asked if staff were in regular contact with neighbors and Ms. Forman said no. Vice Chair Kopczynski asked if they had tried. Ms. Forman replied no. The Vice Chair said to give it some thought. Ms. Forman asked him to expand on what he meant. Vice Chair Kopczynski explained it is always helpful to gain as much support and education as you can in any business or any operation, so the more communication with your direct neighbors to find out inadvertently

something they could do differently might improve neighborhood relationships. He said if you never talk, you never know.

Chair Oram closed the Public Hearing.

Having been familiar with this operation for many years and the clients of this residence—not in a negative way—Vice Chair Kopczynski stated he thought he would probably hear from the neighbors if there were problems. He said that was not the point of his suggestions, rather how to enrich the neighborhood, which Ms. Forman said she appreciated.

Ms. Welsh echoed Vice Chair Kopczynski, calling this a great service to the community that Ms. Welsh appreciated, stating she had some complex clients do really well at Emerald House.

The Board considered the three criteria for approving the application.

The licensing board shall consider the following criteria when evaluating whether to approve, renew, or deny a congregate living and social services license application.

Criteria 1: *The use is found to be in compliance with the submitted operations and management plan, including but not limited to compliance with all applicable building, fire, and life safety codes.*

A motion by Mr. Savastano to find that Criteria 1 was met was duly seconded by Ms. Welsh and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

Criteria 2: *The use is of a character that does not produce noise, odors, glare, and/or vibration that adversely affects the surrounding area.*

A motion by Vice Chair Kopczynski to find that Criteria 2 was met was duly seconded by Ms. Welsh and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

Criteria 3: *The use does not produce public safety or health concerns in connection with traffic, pedestrians, public infrastructure, and police or fire department actions.*

A motion by Mr. Savastano to find that Criteria 3 was met was duly seconded by Vice Chair Kopczynski and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

A motion by Ms. Welsh was duly seconded by Vice Chair Kopczynski to approve CLSS-2025-02 for Monadnock Family Services DBA Emerald House to operate a Residential Care Facility located at 32 Emerald Street. The motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

- B) Continued CLSS-2025-13: Applicant, Karen Richi, Administrative Director for Monadnock Peer Support, is requesting a Congregate Living & Social Services License for a Small Group Home, located at 24 Vernon St., and is in the Downtown Core District and as defined in Chapter 46, Article X of the Keene City Ordinances.**

Chair Oram opened the Public Hearing and welcomed the applicant, Karen Richi, Administrative Director for Monadnock Peer Support. Ms. Richi reported that the only change was the building undergoing renovation and there was a building permit for this work. Additionally, their Executive Director had departed, and Sheriff Eli Rivera was serving as Interim Executive Director.

Chair Oram requested staff comments. Rick Wood, Fire Marshal/Building Official, noted because the Executive Director left there was a discrepancy between his name (Steven) listed in the application and Ms. Richi's name in the minutes. Mr. Wood also reported that both Building and Fire Departments were overseeing a current building project at this property, stating that the applicant had been very diligent to ensure proper safety was in place throughout the process. Mr. Wood reported a couple of minor items in the Fire Inspection report that were all resolved, so there were no outstanding issues. He said staff supported the application, especially with the improvements and ADA access.

Vice Chair Kopczynski asked if staff would reinspect building safety after construction. Mr. Wood said yes. He explained the two elements of this project: (1) accessibility – moving the main entrance to grade level and a limited-use/limited-application (LU/LA) lift for 2nd floor access, and (2) moving the residential spaces from one area to another, which he said was already built-out but pending the final move. Both Fire and Building Inspections would reoccur before the applicant would be allowed to make use of those spaces.

Ms. Welsh asked if the number of beds would change with the remodel and Ms. Richi said no.

Vice Chair Kopczynski asked if the applicant made any changes to their outreach efforts. Ms. Richi said there was currently a plan in place to meet with all neighbors quarterly by hand delivering letters and inviting them to lunch to talk about issues that arise. Vice Chair Kopczynski asked if it worked well. Ms. Richi said yes, and the next lunches were planned for September 2025. Rick Wood, Fire Marshal/Building Official, said he meant to bring one of the letters, as the Fire Department is a direct abutter and receives them regularly. The last letter was advising neighbors about the upcoming construction project, and they appreciated that kind of outreach.

Ms. Welsh recalled incidents with Police reports in 2024 and asked if those were resolved as well. Mr. Wood said yes, the Police Lieutenant reported no concerns with this renewal.

Ms. Welsh wanted to once again add that Monadnock Peer Support provided case management and step-up/step-down programs that had been hugely beneficial for the community and for her programs too. So, she was appreciative.

Knowing his role, Sheriff Rivera said he would not have added to his busy schedule and stepped into this central position if he did not believe in this organization. He wanted to ensure the organization would be successful in its mission to support the community.

Chair Oram closed the Public Hearing.

The Board considered the three criteria for approving the application.

The licensing board shall consider the following criteria when evaluating whether to approve, renew, or deny a congregate living and social services license application.

Criteria 1: *The use is found to be in compliance with the submitted operations and management plan, including but not limited to compliance with all applicable building, fire, and life safety codes.*

A motion by Vice Chair Kopczynski to find that Criteria 1 was met was duly seconded by Ms. Welsh and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

Criteria 2: *The use is of a character that does not produce noise, odors, glare, and/or vibration that adversely affects the surrounding area.*

A motion by Ms. Welsh to find that Criteria 2 was met was duly seconded by Vice Chair Kopczynski and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

Criteria 3: *The use does not produce public safety or health concerns in connection with traffic, pedestrians, public infrastructure, and police or fire department actions.*

A motion by Mr. Savastano to find that Criteria 3 was met was duly seconded by Vice Chair Kopczynski and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

A motion by Mr. Savastano was duly seconded by Ms. Welsh to approve CLSS-2025-13 for Monadnock Peer Support to operate a Small Group Home Facility located at 24 Vernon Street. The motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

- C) **Continued CLSS-2025-14: Applicant, Samuel Lake, Executive Director for Keene Serenity Center, is requesting a Congregate Living & Social Services License for a Group Resource Center, located at 24 Vernon St., and is in the Downtown Core District and as defined in Chapter 46, Article X of the Keene City Ordinances.**

Chair Oram opened the Public Hearing and welcomed the applicant, Samuel Lake, Executive Director of the Keene Serenity Center. He reported no major changes to the application. He noted that current renter and previous applicant, Monadnock Peer Support, operated on the same property.

There were no public comments.

Vice Chair Kopczynski knew the applicant had outreached to neighbors, their landlords, and the City, with Mr. Wood noting staff had been there to discuss the construction. The Vice Chair noted new business neighbors, for example. He remembered some past chatter from neighbors that he thought was rectified by the Neighborhood Relations Plan and asked how that was going. Mr. Lake reported no news on outreach. He said the past experience Vice Chair Kopczynski mentioned was ultimately a good one because it forced a public interaction and discussion. He said they had kept the door open since for the organizations that commented the year prior; they had his personal email and phone number. Additionally, Mr. Lake said he regularly walked around the community with Serenity Center clients wearing vests to clean up trash, etc., and meet their neighbors. He participates in Monadnock Peer Support's quarterly meetings and the Community Kitchen's many public forums. So, Mr. Lake said they were participating in the community as much as possible. Vice Chair Kopczynski said that it was important for him to hear because the Serenity Center is so central in the area and the neighborhood was developing around it in the positive. So, he thought outreach—especially through the Community Kitchen—would be vital, especially with significant changes coming in the downtown.

Ms. Welsh asked if the minor items listed on the February 2025 inspections were rectified. Rick Wood, Fire Marshal/Building Official, clarified at the time of Fire Inspection they did not have the most recent fire alarm test report, which was administrative paperwork. It was all rectified at this point.

Ms. Welsh stated her appreciation for the Serenity Center's work because they transported a lot of her clients and provided many other services, groups, and benefits. She was grateful for all they had done for the community.

The Board considered the three criteria for approving the application.

The licensing board shall consider the following criteria when evaluating whether to approve, renew, or deny a congregate living and social services license application.

Criteria 1: *The use is found to be in compliance with the submitted operations and management plan, including but not limited to compliance with all applicable building, fire, and life safety codes.*

A motion by Mr. Savastano to find that Criteria 1 was met was duly seconded by Ms. Welsh and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

Criteria 2: *The use is of a character that does not produce noise, odors, glare, and/or vibration that adversely affects the surrounding area.*

A motion by Ms. Welsh to find that Criteria 2 was met was duly seconded by Vice Chair Kopczynski and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

Criteria 3: *The use does not produce public safety or health concerns in connection with traffic, pedestrians, public infrastructure, and police or fire department actions.*

A motion by Vice Chair Kopczynski to find that Criteria 3 was met was duly seconded by Ms. Welsh and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

A motion by Ms. Welsh was duly seconded by Vice Chair Kopczynski to approve CLSS-2025-14 for Keene Serenity Center to operate a Group Resource Center Facility located at 24 Vernon Street. The motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

D) CLSS-2025-10: Applicant, Phyllis Phelps, Executive Director for House of Hope, is requesting a renewal Congregate Living & Social Services License for a Large Group Home, located at 31 Wyman Rd., and is in the Rural District and as defined in Chapter 46, Article X of the Keene City Ordinances.

Chair Oram opened the Public Hearing and welcomed the applicant Phyllis Phelps, Executive Director for House of Hope. Ms. Phelps noted one change that they converted the office into a bedroom with two beds for better accessibility, avoiding the stairs; it did not change their number of beds, and they installed a smoke detector in room.

Chair Oram requested staff comments. Rick Wood, Fire Marshal/Building Official, reported that inspections were completed on March 4, 2025, with a few minor notes from the Fire Department that had all been rectified.

Ms. Welsh clarified that there were still 12 beds, but two were moved for accessibility purposes, and asked if that area was now ADA compliant. Mr. Wood said it would not necessarily make the whole facility ADA compliant, but they were trying to become more accessible. Without construction taking place there would not necessarily need to be structural changes.

There were no public comments.

Vice Chair Kopczynski noted this facility is isolated from neighbors, with the nearest being the Retirement Center. So, with the nature of House of Hope's business, Vice Chair Kopczynski

asked if there was potential for interplay. Ms. Phelps said yes, with one of the elderly teaching the ladies line dancing, for example, and they invite the women for shows; she called them good neighbors with a lot of wisdom to tap into.

The Board considered the three criteria for approving the application.

The licensing board shall consider the following criteria when evaluating whether to approve, renew, or deny a congregate living and social services license application.

Criteria 1: *The use is found to be in compliance with the submitted operations and management plan, including but not limited to compliance with all applicable building, fire, and life safety codes.*

A motion by Vice Chair Kopczynski to find that Criteria 1 was met was duly seconded by Mr. Savastano and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

Criteria 2: *The use is of a character that does not produce noise, odors, glare, and/or vibration that adversely affects the surrounding area.*

A motion by Mr. Savastano to find that Criteria 2 was met was duly seconded by Vice Chair Kopczynski and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

Criteria 3: *The use does not produce public safety or health concerns in connection with traffic, pedestrians, public infrastructure, and police or fire department actions.*

A motion by Vice Chair Kopczynski to find that Criteria 3 was met was duly seconded by Mr. Savastano and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

A motion by Vice Chair Kopczynski was duly seconded by Mr. Savastano to approve CLSS-2025-10 for House of Hope NH Inc. to operate a Large Group Home Facility located at 31 Wyman Road. The motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

- E) **CLSS-2025-11: Applicant, Jen Houston, Executive Director for Live Free Recovery Services, is requesting a renewal Congregate Living & Social Services License for a Large Group Home, located at 361 Court St., and is in the Medium Density District and as defined in Chapter 46, Article X of the Keene City Ordinances.**

Chair Oram opened the Public Hearing and welcomed Evan Johns on behalf of the applicant, Jen Houston, Executive Director for Live Free Recovery Services. Mr. Johns had nothing to add to the application.

Ms. Welsh asked City staff if the facility had been inspected. Rick Wood, Fire Marshal/Building Official, said yes. He also recalled a question about the Food License, which was updated. The only remaining question was a note about missing laundry room floor tiles. Mr. Johns replied that he had current photos, and it was his understanding Ms. Houston submitted them. Mr. Wood asked if the work was completed and Mr. Johns confirmed. Mr. Wood said he would have the Community Development Department reach out to resolve it. Lastly, Mr. Wood noted the Fire Inspection had minor notes that had also been rectified.

There were no public comments.

Vice Chair Kopczynski noted that in the past, neighbors actually came and testified about this application/organization, which was not the case in this instance, and he was surprised. However, he noted how well Live Free Recovery Services had done with outreach, with the Board modeling its conversations on how well it had been accepted in the community. The Vice Chair asked if that was still the case. Mr. Johns said as far as he knew. Specifically for the 361 Court Street property, he said the House Manager had a great relationship with the neighbors and would communicate on a regular basis if needed. He said if there had been a complaint, he would have heard about it. He was grateful to hear that people would come and testify positively on behalf of the organization, which was a smaller one in Keene always trying to expand. Mr. Johns said outreach was still the same, with direct phone numbers for supervisors in the area; they try to deal with issues in the moment. Additionally, they have an outreach team, with individuals assigned to certain local organizations.

Ms. Welsh corrected the application date typed next to the signatures that listed 2020 (page 75). Mr. Wood noted that on the previous application it was a two-digit year input field and staff would try to rectify it.

Chair Oram recalled that each resident at the 361 Court Street location was required to sign a code of conduct about their responsibilities, including a substantial section on behavior and relationships with neighbors. Mr. Johns said yes, everyone goes through an intake process when they review those program rules to respect oneself, their peers, and their neighbors. The Chair recalled the code of conduct being quite thorough and well written, saying it sets a tone. Mr. Savastano asked who reviews it with the clients. Mr. Johns said whoever is on shift, it could be the House Manager or other staff person on first or second shift; they always try to do it before 4:00 PM. Mr. Savastano asked if the document is physically placed in front of individuals to read and sign. Mr. Johns said yes. Mr. Savastano agreed that it was a very well written document.

Ms. Welsh added her appreciation of Live Free Recovery's varied levels of care and her hope for a woman's sober living facility. Ms. Johns agreed, noting the overwhelming need.

There were no public comments.

The Board considered the three criteria for approving the application.

The licensing board shall consider the following criteria when evaluating whether to approve, renew, or deny a congregate living and social services license application.

Criteria 1: *The use is found to be in compliance with the submitted operations and management plan, including but not limited to compliance with all applicable building, fire, and life safety codes.*

A motion by Ms. Welsh to find that Criteria 1 was met was duly seconded by Vice Chair Kopczynski and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

Criteria 2: *The use is of a character that does not produce noise, odors, glare, and/or vibration that adversely affects the surrounding area.*

A motion by Vice Chair Kopczynski to find that Criteria 2 was met was duly seconded by Ms. Welsh and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

Criteria 3: *The use does not produce public safety or health concerns in connection with traffic, pedestrians, public infrastructure, and police or fire department actions.*

A motion by Mr. Savastano to find that Criteria 3 was met was duly seconded by Vice Chair Kopczynski and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

A motion by Ms. Welsh was duly seconded by Vice Chair Kopczynski to approve CLSS-2025-11 for Live Free Recovery Services to operate a Large Group Home Facility located at 361 Court Street. The motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

- F) CLSS-2025-12: Applicant, Jen Houston, Executive Director for Live Free Recovery Services, is requesting a renewal Congregate Living & Social Services License for a Large Group Home, located at 26 Water St., and is in the Downtown Transition District and as defined in Chapter 46, Article X of the Keene City Ordinances.**

Chair Oram opened the Public Hearing and welcomed Evan Johns on behalf of the applicant, Jen Houston, Executive Director for Live Free Recovery Services. Mr. Johns had nothing to add to the application.

Ms. Welsh corrected the application date typed next to the signatures that listed 2020 (page 75). Mr. Wood noted that on the previous application it was a two-digit year input field and staff would try to rectify it.

Mr. Savastano pointed out a discrepancy on the staff report. Rick Wood, Fire Marshal/Building Official, agreed and apologized, noting the staff report listed a different location but had Ms. Houston's name and all the other information pertaining to this particular facility. Under the

“Request” tab, there was reference to a different property, but in fact the top of the page/report correctly listed this property, 26 Water Street.

Chair Oram asked for other staff comments. Mr. Wood said there were no other concerns. Having visited the facility personally, he called it very well done. There had only been minor notes from the Property & Housing Inspection about treading on stairs to the basement that needed replacement and from the Fire Inspection for the fire alarm and sprinkler, which was typical. Mr. Johns reported the stairs were completely replaced. Mr. Wood said in his experience the applicant had been very responsive to anything the City brought to them.

Ms. Welsh was very appreciative Keene had a well-run sober living facility. She had clients who lived there prior to Live Free Recovery’s ownership.

Vice Chair Kopczynski noted the constrained location of this facility, citing farms, a restaurant, the entryway to the Post Office, a home, and a shelter—on the other side of which the Vice Chair thought there might be a fraternity house from the signs of parties and beer cans. Vice Chair Kopczynski said 26 Water Street was well-run within that context but asked how it actually accommodated all of those neighbors with unique interests, noting it might be a rhetorical question. Mr. Johns did not have a specific answer, recalling that all Live Free Recovery programs have an Outreach Coordinator; he thought house managers communicate with those coordinators. Vice Chair Kopczynski thought some of the uses surrounding this property might be challenging for the residents (e.g., Cumberland Farms or large parties) and wondered how the House Manager actually accommodated that. Chair Oram asked Mr. Johns to have Ms. Houston address it during application renewal in 2026.

Chair Oram closed the Public Hearing.

The Board considered the three criteria for approving the application.

The licensing board shall consider the following criteria when evaluating whether to approve, renew, or deny a congregate living and social services license application.

Criteria 1: *The use is found to be in compliance with the submitted operations and management plan, including but not limited to compliance with all applicable building, fire, and life safety codes.*

A motion by Mr. Savastano to find that Criteria 1 was met was duly seconded by Ms. Welsh and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

Criteria 2: *The use is of a character that does not produce noise, odors, glare, and/or vibration that adversely affects the surrounding area.*

A motion by Mr. Savastano to find that Criteria 2 was met was duly seconded by Ms. Welsh and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

Criteria 3: *The use does not produce public safety or health concerns in connection with traffic, pedestrians, public infrastructure, and police or fire department actions.*

A motion by Mr. Savastano to find that Criteria 3 was met was duly seconded by Ms. Welsh and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

A motion by Mr. Savastano was duly seconded by Ms. Welsh to approve CLSS-2025-12 for Live Free Recovery Services LLC to operate a Large Group Home Facility located at 26 Water Street. The motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

- G) CLSS-2025-15: Applicant, Lesli Suggs, President & CEO for Unity House, is requesting a renewal Congregate Living & Social Services License for a Small Group Home, located at 39 Summer St. and is in the Downtown Transition District and as defined in Chapter 46, Article X of the Keene City Ordinances.**

Chair Oram opened the Public Hearing and welcomed the applicant’s representatives: Matthew McCollum, Vice President of Community Programs for The Home for Little Wanderers, & Austin Naomi, Community Director.

Chair Oram requested staff comments. Rick Wood, Fire Marshal/Building Official, reported the Property & Housing, Fire Department, and Police Department Inspections all occurred on March 4, 2025. There was only one Property Standards comments regarding a secured window that needed to be unsecured again for ventilation purposes. Mr. Wood reported that this would be the second renewal for this property and the application was complete. Mr. McCollum thought it would only be the first renewal and discussion ensued about the applicant coming to this Board for general discussion before going to the Planning Board for approval; Mr. McCollum said those licenses were approved within one week of the other. He noted the time it took to open the program was significant.

Ms. Welsh asked the applicants to elaborate on the planned neighborhood meet-n-greets. Mr. Naomi said they had debated how to implement them because of issues with both state law and HIPPA preventing kids from being on property while they happen. So, the kids have to be away at an event during that time for people to come in and discuss how they can volunteer, donate, or work with the company at large—The Home for Little Wanderers—not just Unity House. The goal was to have the first meet-n-greet by the end of the year.

Ms. Welsh thought the mission of Unity House was great and was glad it came to Keene. Mr. McCollum said the challenge in engaging the community when running a kid-serving program is always finding that balance between wanting to bring people in and not wanting to disrupt kids’

privacy. Generally, the organization tends to *go to* individuals, engaging and interacting more than having kids feel on parade in the facility, which he said oftentimes does not work, especially a whole room of teenagers, for example.

Mr. Savastano asked if the goal was still four neighborhood meet-n-greets. Mr. McCollum said yes, citing the challenge that not many direct abutters were attending the meetings, so they started seeking ways to engage them differently, even just changing the date and time.

Ms. Welsh asked if they had any trouble filling the House and Mr. McCollum said no. It is an eight-bed unit, and they were at seven or eight for some time. He noted that during a start-up year of a new program, it could take some time until the house is full of residents who help establish the ideal culture. Additionally, in NH at this time, there were very few Level 2 programs like this, so Mr. McCollum cited a lot of push downs from higher levels of care trying to get those kids transitioned; he said those kids often were not ready for that step-down, creating a balancing act for Unity House to decide whether it is not the best fit and they should move on.

Ms. Welsh asked if the applicant was impacted by any federal or state funding that they expected to be jeopardized. Mr. McCollum said no, they were in a similar situation as others, but cited questions about the state budget, what would happen if Medicaid/Medicare was cut, or proposed cuts to the Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). He said the organization leadership was meeting monthly with DCYF and there was a lot of emphasis at this time on reducing the number of beds because of the residential costs, which was concerning for those running residences. He noted approximately 60–70 children in out-of-state care at this time (places like Arkansas and Illinois, for example) and stated a lot of emphasis on bringing them home to NH; a lot of the reason for opening this program and one in MA was to help bring more NH kids home every year. Ms. Welsh recalled that and said she was glad to have the organization in Keene. Mr. McCollum said it had been a wonderful community for Unity House.

Vice Chair Kopczynski hoped they would continue testing out their important neighborhood meet-n-greets, even if they find they do not happen as often. If their outreach evolved, he asked if the applicant would bring a different Plan to the Board. Mr. McCollum said yes, they were always looking for the best approaches as they were developing and growing. At this time, they were building relationships with the various businesses, churches, and individuals living immediately around them—some of which he said wanted nothing to do with Unity House and others wanted a lot to do with them. So, he said the organization was taking a more individual approach as well as engaging with the larger community events like Keene Pride, which the young people were excited to participate in. Vice Chair Kopczynski asked how they were relating with the local churches. Mr. McCollum said community churches would do projects with Unity House and kids living at Unity House attended churches in the community. Ms. Welsh asked if Unity House engaged with the Monadnock Interfaith Project (MIP) and Mr. McCollum said no. Ms. Welsh recommended connecting.

Mr. Savastano asked—knowing the neighborhood’s concerns of large vs. small group homes—if the House had stayed consistently at eight residents. Mr. McCollum said yes, and they had no intention of converting to a large group home at this time. If they did, they would go through the whole reapplication process. He noted there is an apartment in the facility that would be ideal for a staff person, but that would be nine people living there and would make it a large group home. Mr. Savastano asked if there was an overnight awake staff person and Mr. McCollum said yes, it operates 24/7/365.

Discussion ensued briefly as Mr. Savastano asked about pages he thought might be missing from the application online. It was determined to be an internal City issue with the length of the files. Chair Oram recalled the application being lengthy and thorough the year prior and assumed they were only being provided with the changes. Ms. Welsh agreed it was the best application the Board had seen.

Mr. McCollum said they were always looking to change, learn, and grow, so they appreciated the opportunity in this community. Mr. Naomi shared, for example, that people training therapy dogs had visited to practice with the kids. Unity House was also working on internships with Jacks Crackers. He thought a lot of the outreach had morphed into how to get the kids into the community vs. getting the community into the House to feel like a more natural experience. It was an interesting idea to Chair Oram that in this particular case, neighborhood outreach might be less important than community integration. Mr. McCollum thought it would have to be both—stating it is important to relate well with neighbors and for the kids to understand what it is like living in the world vs. inside a program.

Vice Chair Kopczynski thought these Ordinances were written very deliberately to incorporate mechanisms for enough communication and community integration, stating that if all these uses were clustered in one location it would not be good for anything; they work better when they are integrated into the community at large. Mr. McCollum agreed. Mr. McCollum stated a larger challenge for The Home of Little Wanderers in the whole State of NH (and everywhere they were doing business) was more and more communities closing down areas for programs like this to operate, restricting the uses to smaller cordoned areas (e.g., downtowns and urban centers less ideal for kids). While he cited the lovely Downtown District in Keene—where kids can walk down the street, interact with the community, and look for a job—he thought it was much different than the one in Manchester, NH, for example.

It struck Chair Oram that Unity House’s clientele is learning to be a part of the community and would be depending on institutional resources within the community to do so, like the public education system. He heard the point it was not either–or, but it felt to Chair Oram the very nature of Unity House’s work made the focus different than the typical Congregate Living and Social Services Neighborhood Plan; he wanted that in the record as an important distinction for the future in recognizing what the facility does. Mr. McCollum appreciated that, noting the goal is to always help these children get out of state custody. He said families are better at raising kids

than systems are, so trying to keep them out, get them home, or integrating them into the community on their own would always be the goal.

Mr. Wood noted the Community Development Department had recently hosted and participated in some community meetings, during which there was unsolicited feedback, recalling that when this facility opened people were unsure what to think about it. However, following all the outreach, everyone said they had nothing but positives to say about how it had integrated into the neighborhood.

Chair Oram opened the floor to public comments.

Autumn Nall of Summer Street, a direct abutter, said she had nothing but positive things to say about the facility, noting the residents would always throw the ball back over the fence for kids.

In response to Ms. Welsh, Mr. McCollum confirmed that The Home for Little Wanderers is the organization, and Unity House is the specific property.

Chair Oram closed the Public Hearing.

The Board considered the three criteria for approving the application.

The licensing board shall consider the following criteria when evaluating whether to approve, renew, or deny a congregate living and social services license application.

Criteria 1: *The use is found to be in compliance with the submitted operations and management plan, including but not limited to compliance with all applicable building, fire, and life safety codes.*

A motion by Ms. Welsh to find that Criteria 1 was met was duly seconded by Mr. Savastano and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

Criteria 2: *The use is of a character that does not produce noise, odors, glare, and/or vibration that adversely affects the surrounding area.*

A motion by Mr. Savastano to find that Criteria 2 was met was duly seconded by Ms. Welsh and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

Criteria 3: *The use does not produce public safety or health concerns in connection with traffic, pedestrians, public infrastructure, and police or fire department actions.*

A motion by Ms. Welsh to find that Criteria 3 was met was duly seconded by Mr. Savastano and the motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

A motion by Ms. Welsh was duly seconded by Mr. Savastano to approve CLSS-2025-15 for Unity House to operate as a Small Group Home located at 39 Summer Street. The motion carried unanimously on a vote of 4–0.

V. New Business:

None was presented.

VI. Non-Public Session: (if required)

VII. Adjournment:

There being no further business, Chair Oram adjourned the meeting at 7:12 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker
May 31, 2025

Reviewed and edited by,
Corinne Marcou, Board Clerk