

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CITY COUNCIL RULES OF ORDER
WORKSHOP MINUTES

Monday, December 1, 2025

6:00 PM

**Cohen Hall,
Keene Public Library**

Members Present:

Laura E. Tobin
Randy L. Filiault
Robert C. Williams
Edward J. Haas
Philip M. Jones
Andrew M. Madison
Kris E. Roberts
Bryan J. Lake
Jacob R. Favolise (arrived late)
Catherine I. Workman
Bettina A. Chadbourne
Thomas F. Powers

Jay V. Kahn, Mayor

Members Not Present:

Kate M. Bosley
Michael J. Remy
Mitchell H. Greenwald

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager
Terri Hood, City Clerk
Rebecca Landry, Deputy City Manager
Andy Bohannon, Deputy City Manager
Darcy Newport, Human Resources Director
Kari Chamberlain, Finance Director
Daniel Langille, City Assessor
Paul Andrus, Community Development
Director
Andrew Mueller, IT Director
Marti Fiske, Library Director
Jason Martin, Fire Chief
Carrah Fiske-Hennessey, Parks and
Recreation Director
Donald Lussier, Public Works Director
Steven Stewart, Police Chief
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner

1) Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by the Mayor at 6:00 PM.

2) Introduction – City Manager

The City Manager provided a handout with the new draft goals for 2025–2026 for review. These are the edits as documented from the first goals workshop

3) General Discussion

Goal# 1. Strengthen Financial Stewardship and Organizational Efficiency

The Manager explained that goal #1 relates to financial stewardship and streamlining to make processes more efficient. Projects and departmental budget requests should continue to tie in requests with the goal it will further.

Councilor Haas asked how we measure how we've reached goals and report to our progress to the community? He suggested the City consider how to provide this information and how we are measuring success. The Mayor suggested that the total dollar value of grants we have successfully received should be one of the benchmarks for success.

There was discussion on how to measure economic vitality of City beyond Rooms & Meals Tax, bond rating, etc. This will be particularly useful before and after Downtown Project. The Manager commented that people see our storefronts and will be watching for small business closures due to economic impacts. Although it is hard to know what the root cause of them leaving is, people will assume it was because of the Downtown Project. The Mayor added that we are seeing an influx of businesses right now, and that has been a positive.

Councilor Tobin noted that, along the same lines, the City should be exploring revenue streams and whether they are enough to accomplish goals. The Manager explained that on an annual basis the City looks at the fees we are charging to assess whether it still covers the cost to provide the service. That is a good reminder to ensure this is happening.

Council should try to speak more clearly on why the decisions have been made. E.g., We are spending money now to save money later on this project.

Council Jones noted that streamlining internal processes is more a staff thing. The Council should be streamlining the external processes. He pointed out that expanding online payment options is also more of an operational goal. The Manager stated these items were added because they were brought up at the prior workshop, noting these are all a mix of operational and larger community goals.

Councilor Roberts stated the only goal statement he sees as a Council goal relates to communicating budget, CIP priorities and financial decisions. Council needs to be more plugged into and go deeper to understand why certain financial decisions are made.

The Manager asked Councilors if they want this mix of operational and Council goals to remain together. The consensus was yes, keep it this way. The Manager agreed this made sense because it could align operational goals to Council goals when bringing things forward for consideration.

The Mayor stated that he met with other mayors around the state. One of the items that came up was that residential property is taking up a larger portion of the total property valuation in most cities, with less of it coming from commercial and industrial. A homeowner's exemption for a primary residence was discussed. The Mayor added we are going to be facing the same kind of backlash as when the state downshifts costs to municipalities.

The Manager cautioned that residential properties are being built much faster than businesses. If you exempt residential homes, someone must pay for them. It becomes a question of who that burden would shift to.

Goal #2. Enhance Resident Well-Being and Emergency Preparedness

The Manager went through the goals listed in this section, and asked if it captured the conversation accurately.

Councilor Workman noted that in the second bullet she would like it to be less reactionary and include direct outreach with a community partner as this will best benefit the unhoused before there is an incident. The Manager stated the City did create a part-time outreach position for casework and outreach which has since been made permanent and the hours have been increased.

Councilor Filaault commented on the current economy, revaluation and downshifting of costs by the state he fears the unhoused population is going to grow. He suggested the City get the word out on the City website for those that might need help but are reluctant to ask. The Manager noted these services are listed online on the Human Services site. All the applications and links to services for the region are there. To improve that maybe we could make something more prominent on the homepage that lets people know which department. This will be done, does not need to be added to the goal.

The Mayor asked if Community Development has given some thought to the new flood maps and how to communicate the implications of that to the public. The Manager stated that the City disagreed with some of the changes on the flood map and it has not been finalized. It will become available through the website and GIS mapping once final. Mari Brunner, Senior Planner noted that if anyone asks about a property they can be routed to Mike Hagan for a review of the current flood map and comparison to the new iteration that will be finalized soon.

Goal #3. Support a Vibrant Local Economy, Arts and Cultural Community

The Mayor stated there has not been a College/City Commission for several years. This is the time to do that. For the community to have a coordinated place to communicate to the college leadership, the legislature and other stakeholder groups. The Manager stated this was added to goal #8.

Goal #4. Invest Strategically in Infrastructure and Asset Management

Councilor Tobin suggested activating the existing green spaces that are underutilized sometimes. This would create spaces where community can happen. She thinks we have enough available spaces, but we need to focus more on recognizing and promoting these spaces.

Goal #5. Expand and Preserve Diverse Housing Options

It was suggested that the first bullet be parsed into two separate goals. The first would be to Encourage new housing development and communicate economic incentives and other housing development tools, and the second would be focused on protecting/preserving existing housing.

A revision related to leveraging land was suggested that would encourage public and private partnerships with employers, developers, etc.

Councilor Jones suggested adding encouraging regional advances in housing opportunities because all the surrounding communities have more land than we do.

Goal #6. Advance Environmental Sustainability and resilience

Councilor Williams requested to add something about a street tree program, and identifying funding sources for it for long term sustainability as well.

The Mayor was wondering about the current energy plan. Do we have something that extends through 2026–2030? The Senior Planner stated we have a plan with goals out to 2050. There are some very long-range plans. The Mayor suggested a refresh of the plan may be in order. It was last reviewed when discussing the rates for the community power program. It looks like there aren't a lot of goals with specificity right now. The Manager commented there will need to be an update and a re-establishing of the next phase. Councilor Lake, a member of the Energy and Climate Committee, stated there will be things coming from them in the coming months, and they can look at the plan and make some suggested revisions. Councilor Haas stated this is certainly a measurement and evidence of progress.

Goal #7. Improve Public Communication, Engagement, and Education

Councilor Filiault commented there are many people out there not hearing what we are hearing right now. Any improvements we can make in sharing information would be great.

Councilor Madison noted inaccurate information does get spread around. We need to ensure the City is in a position to put out timely and accurate information and deal with misinformation.

The Deputy City Manager, Rebecca Landry, suggested we figure out who our social media influencers are and ask them to share accurate information on our behalf. The Manager added that if we see the same misinformation being perpetuated, we do put out correct information to counter it.

Councilor Workman stated the Communications Department has put together some really great PSA's that have resonated with the public and been impactful. She gave kudos to the department for their efforts.

The Mayor stated some other communities have done a "City Service Academy" where we focus on City services for a period of time to engage people and get them to be more active in the

community. The Manager stated the challenge we have is time and capacity. This sort of initiative requires a lot of work. She mentioned the summer youth program as an example of this type of program. She felt this was like advancing out a volunteer program which has been included in the goals statements.

Councilor Tobin wanted to highlight our successes, the feedback she heard about the communication related to the water main break was very positive. People had timely and accurate information, and it was well communicated.

Councilor Chadbourne stated that over the last year new residents she knows were very complimentary about the communication the city has with residents. We are doing better than we think we are. We need to realize we are doing a lot of things right.

Ms. Landry explained we keep track behind the scenes by looking at how much online engagement we have. For every 5 complaints we have 5,000 people positively engaging and sharing information with their friends. There is far more positive feedback than negative.

Councilor Powers stated we are always trying to deal with the emergent issue rather than looking at how we are handling things as a whole. He believes that 80% or more of the people in this community are satisfied with what we do. Some of the things we do to try to get the message out is to get younger people to engage.

Councilor Chadbourne commented that we've spent a great deal of time and money on marketing materials. When do we decide it's enough and to focus on smaller things.

Goal #8. Ensure a Strong, Engaged and Supported Municipal Workforce

A revision was suggested that would include establishing a coordinated volunteer strategy to lessen workload.

Final Thoughts

The Manager thanked the Councilors for their engagement in this process. She noted that these goals statements, as amended tonight, are the eight City Council goals for the next two years.

The Manager stated the next step will be to update the goals as discussed this evening, and submit them for acceptance by the City Council.

There being no further business, Mayor Kahn adjourned the meeting at 7:56 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Terri M. Hood, City Clerk