

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HERITAGE COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, November 12, 2025

4:30 PM

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

Members Present:

Molly Ellis, Chair
Rose Carey, Vice Chair
Julie Emineth
Louise Zerba
Cauley Powell, Alternate
Kathy Halverson, Alternate
Jill Bouchillon, Alternate

Staff Present:

Megan Fortson, Planner

Members Not Present:

Acacia Johnston

1) Call to Order – Roll Call

Chair Ellis called the meeting to order at 4:31 PM. Roll call was conducted. Chair Ellis stated that all three alternate members can be voting members tonight.

2) Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes – October 8, 2025

As a correction for the October 8 meeting minutes, Ms. Fortson asked for the correct spelling of Alina Nightingale's name, which Ms. Nightingale provided.

Ms. Zerba made a motion to approve the October 8, 2025 meeting minutes as amended. Ms. Halverson seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Downtown Video Project

A. Compensation for Filming

Chair Ellis stated that Ms. Powell has video footage to share. Ms. Powell stated that it is about five minutes of content, with a few seconds of each clip. She continued that she and her partner, Evan, included footage from sunrise and sunset, to get different lighting.

As the HC watched the video, Ms. Powell gave information about it, and the HC members discussed it. Ms. Powell stated that the focus is primarily on the architecture, trying to capture the features of the buildings that make them unique, as well as this moment in time, with clips of street signs, vehicles, pedestrians, and so forth. HC members spoke positively about the footage, praising the details and closeups.

Ms. Powell stated that it felt important not to film buildings at times of day when lights are on inside, to respect people's privacy; however, they did experience some issues filming at other times from the sunlight causing a glare. Ms. Emineth replied that she liked the glare in some of the photos, because it made the windows stand out. Others agreed. Discussion continued about lighting, seasons and weather, camera angles, and so forth.

Ms. Carey stated that she has photos to share from the book "*Central Square and Beyond*," which helped her to create a panorama of Main St. She continued that they are from 1880-1890. HC members looked at the photos and discussion ensued. Ms. Powell stated that she needs to expand the filming slightly outside of Central Square to the other churches, schools, and maybe banks. Discussion continued about which schools and churches from the photos Ms. Carey brought in are now gone.

Chair Ellis stated that she has been working on writing her assigned narratives, and noted that she has only written about one building so far. She continued that they need to figure out how to disseminate what they have written. For example, they could email it to Ms. Fortson and Ms. Fortson could share it with the group. Ms. Carey stated that she brought what she wrote, and she has what Ms. Emineth researched, which is more extensive. She asked what length they are looking for. Ms. Bouchillon replied that she thought they were doing 60-second sound bites. Others agreed, and discussion continued.

Ms. Powell suggested she read what Ms. Carey wrote (with research by Ms. Emineth) out loud, as a reference, to give them an idea. Ms. Powell read Ms. Carey's narrative about the Bullard and Shedd Block. Discussion continued.

Ms. Carey stated that she wanted to introduce Ms. Nightingale and her part. She continued that Ms. Nightingale is from MC2 High School, and her participation in this project has been approved by her school, for school credit. They are looking to explore what role Ms. Nightingale will play. She is interested in going to Fact TV and getting the camera, and doing some filming, as the HC directs her or as Ms. Nightingale feels would be of value to add to the project. She asked if Ms. Nightingale wanted to talk about what she is doing. Ms. Nightingale stated that she is not sure yet how she will be doing this work. She continued that she has six or seven "internship site visits" that she has to do, which could include things such as filming, and attending the monthly Heritage Commission meetings. She noted that she is particularly interested in the history, filming, and editing components of the project.

Ms. Fortson stated that last week, she and other Planning staff attended a conference for Planners in New England, and the closing presentation was by an oral historian who works for the College of the Atlantic. The presentation was about how she went to different towns in Maine, collecting stories from people. She has also worked with different municipalities and historical societies to take untranscribed, archived interviews they had, and used a few of them to make different walking tours. The walking tours reminded her of the HC, because they focus not just on the historical components of a community, but also on the people who lived in those places. She can share this as a resource if the HC is interested. It is something that could potentially fit in nicely for this project.

Ms. Powell stated that she loves the idea, but in some ways, it feels like the HC has four or five different projects going on. She continued that she does not see any reason to not keep working on all of them, and maybe they are not finite. They can continue with their work, continue collecting stories from people. There is no reason to have it be defined by a certain beginning and ending time period. They can keep working on things as they are able and as things make sense. Ms. Emineth stated that the Italian Neighborhood Project would really cross over well here, regarding oral histories. She continued that there might be some oral histories from people who, for example, were business owners back in the day. Like Ms. Powell said, they can gather stories and information now, and years from now, it might be useful for walking tours with new technology.

Ms. Bouchillon replied that there are walking tours that use GPS and involve recordings people can listen to on an app on their phones. Ms. Fortson stated that that is exactly what the professor she was just talking about has. She continued that this professor captured photos and video footage of the communities she was in and hosted a local event in each community for people to come see and hear the stories she had collected. She turned it into a course she teaches, and her students transcribe old interviews and interview other people. Discussion continued about oral histories, and ideas, and using the Cheshire County Historical Society as a resource.

Ms. Powell asked Ms. Carey if they are trying to focus on a specific time period. She continued that everything changes over time, so there is the question of which version of the Block is the correct one on which to focus. Ms. Carey replied that these photos were the best she could find, since they were consistent from one photographer. She continued that using the Bullard and Shedd Block as an example, the Bullard and Shedd store is no longer there, but there should be a mention of it. All of these Blocks need to be updated by someone who walks around on the streets and takes a look at the buildings. When you walk it, you get a different view from books or the internet.

Ms. Emineth stated that it would be great if there were binoculars or glasses you could put on and see what something looked like before. She continued that it would be great to see a photo of the old building and then see a photo of what it is now. Sometimes people think only of buildings' value in the past and forget the value they have today. Discussion continued.

Ms. Powell stated that maybe the HC could reach out to current business occupants and tenants of these buildings, share the history the HC has, and ask if they would be willing to participate in this project, by talking about what it is like to be in the space, or their memories, or their favorite elements of the buildings. The question is how to reach people. Discussion ensued about how to reach people, such as having the City help, using some of the HC's budget to send out mailers, putting flyers in doorways, or putting an ad in the Monadnock Shopper.

Discussion continued about buildings' histories and how the businesses have changed over the years. Ms. Carey stated that while that information is good, they cannot get captured by the history. She continued that they are trying to document what is here and now. She has done these short blurbs, and she thinks if they walk around and add to them as they can, what is relevant for today, that is the scope of this project—not to do another re-do of historic Main St. Discussion continued about how to balance the history with the here and now.

Chair Ellis stated that she wants to read her narrative out loud to see if it is close to 60 seconds, and to get feedback on whether it is too historical. She read her narrative about the Elbridge Keys Block.

HC members replied that the information is interesting. Ms. Emineth offered feedback about focusing more on the building and location, less about the history of the family. Discussion continued with ideas for the narrative, and the length they want for narratives. Ms. Powell suggested 60 seconds for historical information and 60 seconds for information about the present use/state of the building.

Ms. Fortson gave ideas for how they could focus on the structures that exist, and tie in stories about buildings' features from the past, such as the current wellness studio on Main St. with the basement that used to be a barber shop, with an old vault rumored to be from the bank. She continued that she is thinking of it in terms of a walking tour. Discussion continued about whether it could or should be a walking tour, story map, or something else. Ms. Powell talked about the possibility of putting QR codes on the buildings. She continued that the goal is to find a way to make the history of the community easily accessible to the people in the community. Discussion continued about what the QR codes could lead to, and how to let the community know about the QR codes, maybe through a website, or signs by the businesses and a scheduled tour or mini festival.

Ms. Powell stated that it sounds like the general idea is to get buy-in from local businesses to have, say, a sign inside their front window. She continued that it could require a project write-up, a one-paragraph description of what the HC is doing and what the goals are. Ms. Emineth replied that the HC has so many good ideas and many potential projects, but for now she wants to stick to Ms. Carey's vision. She continued that the HC has said repeatedly that they need to focus on one thing. If they focus first on the here and now, they can add in the past history later. Focusing on the present will be good, too, for current businesses. QR codes are small and easy, and once up, can easily be turned on or off or added to. Others agreed that they should try and focus, instead of going down too many rabbit holes.

Ms. Carey stated that to focus back, they had some questions, such as who will gather this information and how. She continued that they can determine how much research they have done, and what still needs to be done. Chair Ellis asked if the HC could have a Google Drive. Ms. Fortson replied yes, they should be able to, because other City committees have done it. Discussion ensued. Ms. Fortson stated that she will look into it, let the HC know, and determine how to get a Google drive set up in a way that complies with RSA 91-A, the Right-to-Know law. Per HC members' questions, she clarified that members of the public would be able to view the HC's Google Drive but not edit it.

Ms. Powell stated that she has a question about the video project. She continued that they began with the idea of filming buildings' exteriors, but it sounds like many interesting features are interior. If it is possible, they could try filming interiors, but it would be more beneficial to have some write-ups first to send to people when they are asking people about that. Ms. Fortson stated that they could also consider doing some door-knocking. Ms. Powell stated that they should again look at the individual Blocks and make sure each is assigned to someone and that no one is duplicating work. Chair Ellis stated that they could create a spreadsheet of the buildings and assignments, to check off when the research has been done, narratives have been written, and so on and so forth.

Ms. Bouchillon asked what they need to do before the next meeting. Ms. Emineth replied that having the Google Drive is the first step. Ms. Powell stated that she will try to create a spreadsheet template by the end of the week, and they can see where they are with assignments and the gaps that

need to be filled in. Discussion continued. Ms. Nightingale spoke about her scheduling needs, regarding her participation in this project for school credit. Ms. Powell stated that at the next HC meeting, they can look at scheduling small groups of HC members to go out canvassing, and they will prioritize getting some dates booked for Ms. Nightingale. Ms. Carey replied that there is some work that Ms. Nightingale can get started; it does not necessarily have to wait until next month. She will get Ms. Nightingale over to Fact TV and get the camera. Discussion ensued about buildings Ms. Nightingale could film at, including indoor public areas that would not require getting permission for. Ms. Emineth stated that they could film the tree lighting.

Discussion continued. Chair Ellis asked if everyone is good with what to do next. Ms. Powell stated that if they are able to get a Google Drive, Ms. Carey can share her copy that she has already written, which is a great template. She continued that everyone can add to the Google Drive, and they do not have to worry about quorum issues that way.

Chair Ellis stated that “Compensation for Filming” is on the agenda. Ms. Powell stated that she is happy to volunteer her time. She continued that she talked to Evan, and he, too, wants to volunteer his time. If there is editing beyond what Ms. Nightingale wants to do, she talked with Brian, a former Heritage Commission member, who seemed open to it.

4) Hard Drive for Italian Neighborhood Project

Ms. Fortson stated that she thinks a hard drive that would meet their needs would be approximately \$80 to \$100. Discussion ensued.

Ms. Zerba made a motion to approve up to \$150 to purchase a hard drive for the Italian Neighborhood Project. Ms. Powell seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Ms. Fortson stated that as of Monday, the HC’s budget balance was \$13,497.

5) US Sesqui-Centennial 2026 Planning & Preparation – Updates

Chair Ellis stated that she talked with the City Manager, Elizabeth Ferland, and let her know the HC had passed a motion to be the licensing body for the Sesqui-Centennial celebration, but the City Manager’s response was that she had looked into it and found that since the HC is a City entity, it would be like the City issuing a license to itself and that is not possible. She continued that she thanks the HC for volunteering, but they are not the licensing body. The Keene Downtown Group kindly volunteered to do it instead. A volunteer committee has been formed to plan the Sesqui-Centennial event, if any HC members are interested in joining. The first meeting will be November 17, 2025 at 4:00 PM, but after that, meetings will typically be a Wednesday at noon, via Zoom.

6) Annual Report to Planning, Licenses, and Development Committee – Status Update

Chair Ellis stated that the HC is on the PLD Committee’s agenda this month, so that is all set.

7) Staff Updates

Chair Ellis stated that she ran into Marilyn Houston, who wants to rejoin the HC. She continued that Ms. Houston had been ill, but is now better. There is a vacant member slot. She is waiting to hear back from the Mayor's Office about whether Ms. Houston would still have to go through the whole application process and be approved, given that she was a member previously.

Regarding membership terms, Ms. Fortson noted that Chair Ellis's first term is expiring on December 31, and she does not think anyone else's term is set to expire this year. She continued that alternates have no term limits; they can stay as long as they would like.

8) New Business

Ms. Powell stated that she watched the Preservation Alliance's presentation on what heritage commissions are, and it was very interesting to learn about some of the projects other heritage commissions are doing. She continued that she wondered if the HC would consider the idea of "Heritage awards" to recognize different contributions and elevate the things happening in the community to help highlight good works. She gave more information about it.

Chair Ellis stated that she has one more item of new business. A parcel of land in Keene where there used to be a school, is owned by someone who is trying to get it re-zoned to allow a commercial building with potentially multiple stories. She continued that people in the neighborhood have protested and want the area protected. She wonders if the HC would want to write a letter to oppose the re-zoning. Discussion ensued. Ms. Fortson stated that it is a zoning map amendment application, to propose changing the underlying zoning district of these five parcels, about 1.6 acres of land. She continued that they are currently all zoned Low Density, so the only allowed use is single-family home. The owner of a few, but not all five of those parcels hopes to change the designation to Commerce.

There is no specific proposal in mind, but rezoning would allow for a taller building to be constructed, if these lots were combined. Discussion continued about the location. HC members suggested putting this on next month's agenda. Ms. Fortson replied that they can discuss it. She continued that she wants to check in with the City Attorney, regarding whether it would be a conflict of interest for the HC to write a letter about this. Anyone who is interested is welcome to attend the public hearing at the December 4, 2025 City Council meeting and share their thoughts as individual citizens, or submit their comments in writing to the City Clerk's Office.

9) Next Meeting – December 10, 2025

10) Adjourn

There being no further business, Chair Ellis adjourned the meeting at 5:38 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Megan Fortson, Planner