

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, January 21, 2026

6:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Mitchell H. Greenwald, Chair
Catherine I. Workman, Vice Chair
Jacob R. Favolise
Laura E. Tobin
Molly V. Ellis

Members Not Present:

All Present

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Ferland, City Manager
Amanda Palmeira, City Attorney
Andy Bohannon, Deputy City Manager
Don Lussier, Public Works Director
Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Parks and Recreation Director
Frank "Pepper" Anderson, Parks and Recreation Superintendent
Mitchell Smith, Highway Operations Manager

Chair Greenwald called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and explained the procedures of the meeting.

1) Monadnock View Cemetery Expansion Project – Parks and Recreation Director

Chair Greenwald asked to hear from staff. Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Parks & Recreation Director, introduced Frank "Pepper" Anderson, Parks & Recreation Superintendent, and consultant David Ward of Grever & Ward. She asked Mr. Ward to present.

David Ward, participating remotely, stated that Grever & Ward has specialized in cemetery design and planning work for the past 50 years. He continued that they work mainly in the northeast and eastern U.S. but have worked all over the country. In February, they were invited to submit a proposal for the City of Keene. In June, they were authorized to move forward with a master plan and site visit. What was unique about this project, for Grever & Ward, was that Keene had a large area, over nine acres, in the frontage of the cemetery. It is not unusual to have unused space in the front of a cemetery, but usually it is not such a large space. This is a nice, visible site from the outside of the property. There is good quality land, which is also unique. Many times, the last part of cemetery land is some of the toughest land, whereas this is flat ground that is good for operations, with very good, highly drained soils, which is good for cemetery use. The only issue will probably be turf maintenance with irrigation, but it is a good situation overall.

Mr. Ward showed an image of the design, part of the Master General Plan, and stated that on a site this large, they try to break it down into more usable sections. The sections are road loops that are self-contained and can be individually developed as needed. The team developed phases,

based on proximity to the current cemetery and some other factors as far as ease of development. For each phase, they projected a number of graves, as a benchmark so Keene knows what their future availability will be. He showed an aerial rendering of the design. He continued that something the team thought was particularly important on this “blank canvas” is to have a strong focal point or nucleus for the design. They did that by including a circular feature that is almost a roundabout road system, with the other sections radiating out. They felt that a good feature, also practical, would be what they refer to as a “committal shelter,” in this case, an open-sided gazebo. Many cemeteries are starting to have committal services for burials in a central location rather than at the graveside, due to liability reasons or poor weather conditions, for example. Such a committal shelter has a practical purpose as well as visual appeal. They looked at enhancing it with some radial columbarium's, which are niche cabinets. People purchase one niche at a time. They are granite-covered, with a sort of honeycomb interior. The names are either engraved or put on the outside of the niche as a possibility for memorializing. He continued that the photo shows a typical unit, premanufactured units which are dropped into place with a crane. The advantage with this type is that they are more economical because they come preassembled, and relatively easy to install. Another option, which he has an example photo of, is customized niche walls. They are built on site, designed from scratch and meant to fit particular sites, maybe using materials common to the area, to give a “home” feeling to the development. They are similar to the premanufactured ones, one-foot niches with memorialization on the surface.

Mr. Ward continued that there are many options with this. The reason he is talking about cremation is because it is a big part of cemetery development nowadays. It is the biggest change in cemeteries that has happened during his lifetime. Another photo shows the option of a niche wall/memorial wall, and the internments are made in the ground in front of it. In New England, Grever & Ward has been designing cremation gardens for about 30–40 years, before they became popular. They have done several developments where they have tried to blend the cremation area into the regular cemetery. A photo shows individual cremation plots with monuments that are meant to blend in. There are many options, once the cemetery is under construction, for planning the individual burial space.

Mr. Ward continued that the team did a Master Grading and Drainage Plan, and they should note that this is schematic drainage only; it is not designed in detail at this point. With the grading, they are trying to make sure that water runs off to the roads where it is collected by the drainage system, and it always looks nicer to lot owners to have these elevated panels of space, one or two feet above the road, so the lawn areas are not just an extensive flat area. When people buy lots, they seem to really appreciate it having kind of an elevated appearance. The road system has high and low points, and at the approximately six low points, the team hopes the City can get involved with infiltration of storm water, dry walls or leach chambers that put storm water directly back into the subsoil. They have the soils for it, if they are correctly identified. The engineers will have to take these locations and go into the more detailed design of those systems. This is a framework they can work from, either as a whole or in phases. Showing another image of the high and low points, he continued that the challenge with any flat site is making water run in any direction, so the team has very gentle high and low points planned for the development.

Mr. Ward continued that they calculated earthwork needs based on the plan and determined that about 8,000 cubic yards of fill would be needed. It sounds like a lot, but it is only about six inches of soil over the entire site. What is unique about cemeteries is that they gradually generate fill over time, about a yard and a half of surplus soil from every burial made with a full-sized vault. Grever & Ward always tries to plan for that to be used within the site rather than being trucked out of the cemetery or to a mound somewhere in the back, which happens often. This particular plan is meant to somewhat balance, avoids the cost of purchasing fill, hauling fill in, and wear and tear on the roads. Plus, they have control over the quality of the fill because they are using the soil already on site. It is a better system, in terms of quality and drainage.

Mr. Ward continued that one of the things the team was asked to include, and which they probably would have suggested anyway, was an alternate entrance/exit, a controlled exit. These are good for many reasons. They can be used for exiting funeral traffic, to keep the flow going through the cemetery after funerals. Someone brought up the fact that many people go for walks in the cemetery, and it might be a good gateway for them to enter, rather than competing with traffic. It would be good to also consider using it as the primary entrance in the future. It is better to just have one primary entrance, and the day may come when the City is fully using this area and this becomes the primary entrance, and the current entrance would be the controlled one. By "controlled," he means there is a gate that is usually closed, which the cemetery could open as needed for an event. To be a permanent entrance, it should have a widened road and would typically have decorative gates and wing walls with mounted, backlit signage. There are many possibilities with that, but by keeping the options open in this area for the future, they could use it for a temporary, controlled exit/entry now, and in the future, it could possibly become the main entrance.

Mr. Ward continued that regarding projections, one advantage of the Master Plan is they can project numbers of internments over the years, and they came up with about 5,700 graves. If it were to be done like this, he thinks the total internments would be much more because of the growth of cremation. Cremation includes probably five or six times the number of internments in the same given area that full-size burial lots do. If Keene is at 50% cremation right now, which he thinks is what he heard during the original meeting, that will probably grow, so some of this space will undoubtedly be converted to cremation-type uses. Approximately 73% of the land is purely interment space; that is a high conversation rate by most standards because they are not necessarily having to get into things like detention ponds, hopefully, because of the existing soil conditions.

Mr. Ward continued that Grever & Ward was asked to provide an overall cost estimate for the whole 9.4 acres, which they did. Contractors do the bulk of the work, site preparation, earthwork, and drainage. Drainage will probably be the biggest variable, and this figure might be undershot at this point, until the drainage is engineered. Drainage typically goes up in cost, not down. The cost estimate also includes other items, foundations for structures, pavements for the roadways and walks, lawn preparation, general landscaping, major trees, and other improvements such as the gazebo. At the end of the cost opinion, they have a City cost index, showing that Keene is about 6% lower in cost than the country's average, which is good. They applied that, which deducted a portion of the total cost. Then, they have a fairly large contingency, because it is a low-detail planning effort right now, of about 20%, just for unknowns. Their estimate is about

\$1.5 million for the whole 9 acres of infrastructure. There are many finishing costs involved with developing and laying out the burial sections and things like that, but for getting the basic infrastructure there, that is the projected cost. It is about \$164,000 per acre, which gives them an idea of what it would be to cut this in half, roughly. Then, they look at the site development cost per grave, which comes out to about \$270 per grave. That is useful in comparing what the pricing is on graves in the future. Many cemeteries do not allow for site development when they set their grave prices; it is common to just match prices in the area, but it is good to know what portion of the cost of the grave should be going to future site development. The only other exclusions, and one other large one, is irrigation, because this is a very well-drained soil type and they know the City has already been talking about irrigation. That level of detail is beyond the Master Plan other than just the main supply lines.

Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Parks & Recreation Director, stated that staff wanted to bring this to the MSFI Committee because they need to identify the different infrastructure changes that will be happening within the City limits, and the Monadnock View Cemetery is an area they need to focus on because it is running out of space very quickly. She continued that they currently have two cremation spaces left in the burial area, and 39 full-body burial spaces left. That excludes the Jewish section, which has about 160 spaces and is thus in good shape. When they talk about future planning, this plan as currently depicted would last about 60–65 years. As Mr. Ward mentioned, knowing that many of these burial lots will be converted to cremation spaces and that would triple the amount of space available. They presented to the Trustees this morning. This will be a Trustee-funded project, and part of the CIP, as they are moving forward. When a cemetery spot is sold, the money goes to the Trustees for perpetual care, so the Trustees have this pocket of money for instances like this.

Chair Greenwald asked if the Committee had questions or comments. Hearing none, he asked if members of the public had any questions.

Chair Greenwald stated that the cemetery is very attractive, and it is run very nicely. Mr. Anderson replied that the team works very hard at it, so he appreciates the feedback and will relay that to the team.

The following motion by Councilor Ellis was duly seconded by Councilor Favolise.

On a vote of 5 to 0, the Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee recommends accepting the Monadnock View Cemetery Master Plan Design, as provided by Grever & Ward, as informational.

Chair Greenwald stated that at the next City Council meeting, he will be away, so Councilor Workman will be giving the MSFI Committee's reports.

2) Presentation – Public Storm Response Maps - Public Works Director

Chair Greenwald asked to hear from the Public Works Director.

Public Works Director Don Lussier introduced himself and Mitchell Smith, Highway Operations Manager. He continued that he and Mr. Smith have a slide presentation for the Committee tonight. The first thing they wanted to talk about is something that Harry McKelvey started before Mr. Smith took over when Mr. McKelvey retired. The Council expressed a desire and goal to do more with public communications and being more transparent about City operations, so one of the things the Public Works Department wanted to test drive – which is very much a work in progress, and which other communities have done – is showing the public where the snow plows are operating and where they have been over the past four to 12 hours. The Department deployed this at the very end of last winter season but did not yet have the kinks worked out. Now, they are ready to show it to the Committee. If you go to the Public Works Department's webpage from the City's website, you will see "Snowplow Tracking." Clicking that brings you to two links, a coverage map and a current plow location map. Clicking "Current Plow Locations" brings you to a map that shows where the snowplows are. At the moment, they are not plowing, but salting. The map shows the snowplows' names, which were chosen by youth from the Community Night event in the fall. About 12 of the main plows have been named, such as "The Snowtorious B-I-G" and the "Blizzard of Oz," which are active in the City right now. You can zoom in on the map and see where the plows are. There is about a five-minute delay in the time it takes for the plow to report to the database and for the database to refresh. The Snowtorious B-I-G is currently salting on Elm St., and the Blizzard of Oz is about to turn onto Davis St. The other link shows where the plows have covered over the last period of time. The default is the last 24 hours, but you can choose the last four hours or eight hours. You will see, in the past eight hours, there have been about 1,000 trips to the snow dump. The crew was picking up the piles today, so they were going back and forth from downtown to the snow dump. During a snowstorm, you would see that as the snowstorm continued, all these lines would get filled in as the plows hit all of the streets.

Councilor Favolise stated that he has a question related to downtown storms, but not necessarily to the plow map. He continued that one of the changes the Council made, starting last year, was the downtown winter parking ban being lifted. Regarding communication with the public, that was one of the Council's priorities, more than enforcement in the first year. He asked if the Public Works Department has seen good compliance this year. He has seen a few parking bans issued. Mr. Lussier asked how many vehicles they have had to tow. Mr. Smith replied "a lot." He continued that he would say more than when they had the regular winter parking ban. Mr. Lussier added that to that end, they have added a couple of tools to the toolbox. He continued that the City has deployed the system where they can now participate with the State's emergency notification system, so they are using that and pushing out messages. They are experimenting with the formatting to make it clearer and easier to read and understand. The other tool is one they may have seen on Gilbo Ave., where the Department put up a couple of signposts. It labels the names of the lots, routinely. During the snow parking bans, they hang a little banner there. The website has photos showing what those signs look like for the Gilbo East lot and the Commercial St. lot on the south side of Gilbo Ave. There are two signs the Department can post. One says, "PARKING BAN TONIGHT, No Overnight Parking," and the other says that a parking ban is in effect and it is okay to park overnight there. That way, people have that real-time visual cue reminding them of where they are supposed to park that night. When there is a parking ban in effect, those banners go up. It is still incumbent on the people that are parking on the street to take advantage of one of the several ways the City has to let them know. The

Department sends out the information using the Constant Contact email notifications, social media, the State's emergency notification system, and the City's website. So, there are many ways they are trying to get the word out, but they are definitely seeing more issues than when everyone knew they could not park on the street overnight.

Chair Greenwald stated that the signs are excellent. He continued that he thinks they will be very helpful when it is not snowing. He could never figure out which lot to tell his tenants to park in; it was confusing. But they could read those signs. Mr. Lussier replied that last year, the Highway Division had tried to do this and got quotes for fabricated signs. Originally, they had talked about doing changeable message boards so they could use those for events, too, but the price was absolutely absurd. Having the signs fabricated would still be very expensive, so he did some sketching and gave it to Mr. Smith and his team, and Public Works staff built those signs. The total cost was just under \$1,000 for the two signs. It was very cost effective, and they look nice. Come spring when the wood dries out, they will put on a coat of stain to seal them so they will stay looking good.

Councilor Tobin stated that when she saw the plow coverage map and the current plow locations, it was not what she expected. She continued that she expected to be able to see where the plow is coming from and where it is going to - that is, a little bit of the route. For the coverage map, she expected it to be more about the priority locations, not just lines going back and forth, so she could get a sense of where the plow would be going next and when she could expect it to get to her. Mr. Lussier replied that the system is not everything he wishes it was, and he and Mr. Smith have talked about looking at alternatives. He continued that this is a service the Council wants to be able to provide to the public, and he and Mr. Smith think it is worth continuing, and would like to look at other vendors to see what else is available. The coverage map, in particular, is one he does not think is as helpful as some of the other versions he has seen. Some of the other versions offer what is like a "color-coded bread crumb trail" that shows where the plow went over the last period of time. It will fade over time, so if your street has not been plowed for eight hours, say, that colored line will be very light, but if it was just plowed, it will be a dark/bright line. That gives you a better sense of how recently your road was plowed and when you could expect to see a plow again.

Chair Greenwald asked if there were any further questions. Hearing none, he asked for a motion.

The following motion by Councilor Favolise was duly seconded by Councilor Workman.

On a vote of 5 to 0, the Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee recommends accepting the presentation from Public Works on Public Storm Response as informational.

3) Downtown Infrastructure Project Update - Public Works Director

Chair Greenwald stated that as he thinks everyone is aware, the Downtown Infrastructure Project was put out for bids. He continued that the Public Works Director will explain the results of the bids, but basically, the bids were not in a realm anyone wanted to hear, and they have been rejected. The Public Works Department did an incredible analysis of every line item, comparing

all the bids and what was high, what was low, and came up with some suggestions on how to trim the project without harming it. He asked to hear from Mr. Lussier.

Mr. Lussier stated that as they know, the bids were opened on December 18, and the bids were well above what they expected to see. Staff have spent the past few weeks evaluating the bids, understanding where the costs went up, talking with contractors, and trying to come up with some answers for the Council. Bid tabulation is a document staff prepares for all of their publicly bid projects, a detailed comparison, line by line, of the costs. It compares the actual quotes they get from contractors with the engineers' estimates for the work. Staff uses it as a tool to identify red flags. Things they are looking for include whether there are wild differences from one contractor to another that might indicate that one of the contractors did not understand what the bid was asking them for. Something else they see sometimes is that contractors might play games a little bit with their bid, for example, by bidding very low on a line item they think the City might not use or that they might not do very many of, and they will bump up the number much higher if they think the City has underestimated the quantity they think will be needed. If the contractor thinks they will hit a lot of rock, they throw a very big number at "rock excavation," with the hopes of hitting a giant payday, for example. Something else that is common is that they will bid high on the work done early in the project, so they get more money earlier in the contract, and then all of the work at the tail end they are kind of doing at a loss. All contractors do those sorts of strategic games with their bids. If it gets to the point where the City does not trust the contractors' numbers and thinks the contractors are trying to pull a fast one on them, which is called "unbalanced bidding," that would be a basis for the City to consider dismissing the low bidder because they were not bidding fairly and accurately.

Mr. Lussier continued that in this particular project, staff are looking for where those big differences are between the engineers' estimate and the bids. They saw that it was not just one or two items that were wildly off. Many items, across the board, were just much higher unit prices. That led them down a train of questioning with the contractors when they spoke with them. City Engineer Bryan Ruoff and his staff had several conference calls with the contractors that bid on the project, as well as contractors that had been looking at the project, had downloaded the plans, had been asking questions and attending the pre-bid conferences, but had decided not to bid. They wanted to understand not only why the bidders were bidding high, but also why some of the contractors they expected to put in a bid ended up not doing so. They learned some insights from these contractors that did not bid. The number one thing they heard from several contractors was that they were concerned about their ability to have adequate production rates. All of the City's construction contracts are "unit price contracts." The City pays by the linear foot of water main, the linear foot of sewer main, the ton of asphalt, and all of these different line items, finished, installed, and provided to the City. That means that to get good pricing on that, the contractor has to be productive. A crew that installs a length of water main will consist of an excavator, a dump truck, a compactor, and some other equipment, along with a few laborers, equipment operators, truck drivers, and a foreman – that is a crew. That crew on a project like Island St. last summer, for example, where it is wide open and they can just keep going, might be able to put in 300 feet of water main on any given day. Here, the contractors are saying they assume they could do about 100 feet a day, maximum, of water main. Due to the number of competing utilities crammed into a confined space, the distance between intersections where they have to change traffic control patterns, coordination with adjacent property owners, and all of

those restrictions and difficulties of working in a condensed, downtown environment, the crews' production rates would be much lower than they would otherwise be. That drives up the unit prices for everything. That echoes what they saw in the bid tabulation, where it is not one or two items that Stantec just blew the estimate on. All the pay items were higher because they are assuming the amount of work that they get done on any one day is less. That was the biggest thing staff heard. Regarding the other concerns they expressed, the contractors that chose not to bid did not believe they could get this contract done in two years. The size of the contractors that are in the region that the City is accustomed to working with are not equipped to get that much work done, that size of a project, in two years. So, that made them shy away from it. Although they did not say this, he suspects that the bidders that did put in bids probably had concerns about completing the work within the time constraints, too, but they priced that into their bids, so that if they go over the time, they will pay for the fine with elevated unit pricing. They will make enough profit during the construction season that it gives them some cushion to absorb those fines.

Mr. Lussier continued that the third thing they heard from several contractors was the amount of subcontract work that is required. Most of the contractors who put in a bid or considered it were utility companies. Their bread and butter is putting utilities in the ground. Everything above that – asphalt, roadway, concrete, landscaping – is work they subcontract out to others. They are the prime contractors, and they are used to managing subcontractors as part of their project. They add on their management fee, typically, about 10% markup on the cost of the subcontractors, and their management staff in the office will manage the subcontractors' schedules and everything else. For this project, the portion of work that will be done by subcontractors versus the portion that will be done by their own crews and their own foremen was higher than they would have preferred.

Mr. Lussier continued that some of those concerns are ones the City can address, while other concerns are just the nature of the project. Before he gets into recommendations, he wants to recap where that all puts them, in terms of the project budget and what the funding gap is. Up to today, through FY26, the City Council appropriations plus the grants the City has already received for the project total a little over \$15 million. That includes a couple million dollars of principal forgiveness for the drinking water, about \$66,000 in principal forgiveness for sewer, and \$71,000 for the stormwater portion. They also received a grant to help offset the cost of design for stormwater. In the CIP that has already been approved by the City Council, FY25 through FY31, they had planned for \$4.7 million to be appropriated into the project in FY27. They have spent some of that on the design fees. Dating back to 2017 or 2018 when they first started the conceptual designs phase, and public meetings and all of that, all of those costs add up to about \$2.7 million. Right now, they have about \$17 planned for the project. In August, the City got an update from Stantec that said the estimate had increased. They told the City the project would be closer to \$20 million. In response, staff planned some updates to the CIP. These are not approved, but in the draft CIP that is being reviewed and being worked on by Finance right now, and which the Council starts reviewing next month, staff had put in to bump that \$4.7 million planned up to \$8.5 million. Minus the cost to date, that gave them \$21 million all in for construction and engineering. They thought they were in good shape. Then, actual bids came in a little over \$28 million. That gives a funding gap of \$7 million.

Mr. Lussier continued that the question is how to close that gap. There are times when you get bid results that do not work, or no bids, and the best answer is to just put the project back out to bid. That makes sense if contractors did not have enough time to see the bid or they did not get their bids in on time. That was not the case here. The contractors that the City was trying to attract knew about the bid, came to the pre-bid meetings, and had all their questions answered. The bid was out for six weeks. There is no reason to suspect that if the City put it back out to bid as it is currently structured that they would get any different result, so that is not a recommendation for the Committee tonight. Instead, staff recommends a combination of some changes to the scope, some value engineering, and some cost-saving measures, plus some adjustments to the structure of the contract to ease those work restrictions and alleviate those concerns about the timeline.

Mr. Lussier continued that the first bucket of items is scope staff thinks they can eliminate. The first two line items, common excavation and crushed stone, relate to the way they plan to reconstruct the roadway. The slide shows a cross section of the road from the design plans. In ideal circumstances when rebuilding a road, at the end of the utility work, they excavate out the top two feet of soil below the roadway, remove that material, then bring in new gravel material as a base. The advantage is that those “new, imported” gravels have known engineering qualities, so they know what the compacted density of that soil will be, and they know it will bear the future traffic loads. Once you dig through it and stir it up with the underlying soil, the quality of that gravel, the ability to resist rutting and settlement over time, is a little bit diminished. They had originally planned this as a “full box reconstruction,” which means removing two feet of soil and bringing two feet of new gravel in. What they are recommending instead is to replace some, but not all of the gravel. They would essentially rototill the asphalt surface into the underlying gravel, about eight inches of that, which is a process called “reclamation.” They reclaim the surface, add it to the gravel, use that as future road base, and import another eight or so inches of new gravel above that. They would still have everything finely graded and compacted and have good quality gravel below the asphalt. It just would not be *as much* new gravel. For those two line items, just by reducing the quantities, they can save over a million dollars.

Mr. Lussier continued that the next one is temporary pavement. They talked about this in August when they got the cost estimate update, and he argued that they should not eliminate the temporary pavement. As a matter of business suitability and making it easy for people to get around downtown, managing dust, ruts, and inconvenience to public, he thinks they should keep *some* of it, but the contract as they previously bid it assumed that all of the surface would get temporary pavement four inches thick. He thinks they can cut that approximately in half and use it a little more judiciously where they really need it to maintain a reasonable traffic pattern, not have a lot of ruts, and manage dust as best as possible. They could save a couple hundred thousand by reducing the quantities they include in the contract and managing it a little more judiciously. The next one, uniformed officers, is similar. Traffic control is done by either police officers with their cruisers, or traffic control staff, known as flaggers. Generally, flaggers do a better job of directing traffic than the officers do, as their focus is on moving traffic more than the police officer’s is. The advantage of police officers is that they come with a cruiser and the blue lights command more attention and respect from the traveling public. At times, they absolutely will need the officers, particularly in Central Square when they are doing the signal system, but they can reduce that. They had budgeted 2,000 hours of police officers for the

project. Cutting that about in half means saving about \$100,000, which he thinks is reasonable. They could still manage traffic safely.

Mr. Lussier continued that the next item is lighted bollards. They planned to use these at some of the higher-volume crosswalks, at the head of the Square and at Railroad Square, crossing to Gilbo Ave. They throw light, making the crosswalk more visible, but they are predominantly aesthetic features. A photo shows the locations of regular-sized streetlights, which there will be plenty of to illuminate the area. The lighted bollards were more for aesthetics. The cost in the bid was about \$131,000. They can save about \$80,000 by reducing that and just putting in standard bollards for traffic control. They still need something there to keep traffic away from those places. The bollards serve to stop vehicles from driving into Railroad Square, for example.

Mr. Lussier continued that with the next one, it breaks his heart to recommend removing it, because it would have been a really nice feature. The plan called for granite seating walls around the landscape beds, which he has a graphic to show. On each side of the landscaped bed in Railroad Square are large granite blocks for seating. They would be beautiful. However, throughout the project there were about \$175,000 worth of those granite blocks. They go in the column of something that would be really nice to have, but are not absolutely necessary, so staff recommends putting that in the contract as a bid alternate. If this next round of bids come in with attractive pricing, they can consider adding it back in.

Mr. Lussier continued that the last thing on illuminations is bid alternates. As they may remember, when they were going through this whole process, there were several items the Council wanted to include in the contract as bid alternates so they could get pricing and know whether they were in the budget. They are at the point now where they can safely say that compacting trash receptacles are no longer an option. They will take that out and not let the bidders worry about it. Similarly, the shade structure proposed for Railroad Square would be lovely to have at some point in the future, but it is something they could easily add later and have it at a lower cost if it was done as a separate contract. For the next round of bids, staff wants to not include those.

Mr. Lussier asked if there were any questions so far. Chair Greenwald stated that he has a communication from the Mayor. He continued that they were talking about removing conduit, and removal of pipes. He asked if that is not one of the recommendations. Mr. Lussier replied that it is not one of staff's recommendations, although it is something they looked at. Regarding the spare conduit, the City has a Dig Once Policy. The goal is that when they are doing an infrastructure project like this, they put in everything they will need so they do not need to come back in the foreseeable future. As part of this project, they included two empty conduits, basically wrapped around the project perimeter, up one side of Main St., across the Square, and down the other. It is two empty PVC pipes in the ground, along with a hand hole that you could access those conduits from at every intersection around the perimeter. They would be empty until they are needed for some City purpose, such as leasing the conduit to a telecommunications provider that wanted to come in and provide service through the downtown or access a particular business that needed fiber, or that sort of thing. Staff looked at that spare conduit, and he thinks the cost was \$90,000 for all of that infrastructure. Staff talked about the removal of pipes as well, in August when the price update came up. It is fairly common to abandon pipes in place. For

instance, if a water main will not be used in the future, they would cut it where they do not need to dig it up, put a cap on it, and just leave it there. For this project, he is hoping that they do not need to touch these utilities again for 100 years. He does not love the idea of leaving empty conduit in the ground for some future Public Works Director to have to deal with the consequences of that decision. They talked about it, and there is a savings of not chasing those pipes, but it is not a recommendation at this point.

Chair Greenwald stated that the Mayor's final question is about contingency, what the percentages are. Mr. Lussier replied that there is no contingency, per se, in the bid. He continued that there are items in the contract for allowances. For example, there is an allowance that protects the contractor if there is a significant change in the price of liquid asphalt. If the price of oil spikes up after the bids get opened, the contractor has a little bit of protection knowing that he will be able to adjust his cost for asphalt and diesel fuel based on that delta between where the price of oil was on the day he submitted his bid versus where it is when he is doing the work. Those allowances work out to the City's benefit, because the contractor has to price that risk in. If he does not have that protection he has to think about what could happen, and assuming that prices could go up 20%, he has to assume that he is not buying asphalt at the price he could buy it at today, he is buying it at some future price. Having that allowance gives him a little bit of protection, and therefore he is not passing on that risk to the City. That allowance goes both ways. If the price drops after the bids are opened, the City gets that benefit.

Councilor Favolise stated that if the pipes in place were to be a recommendation, Mr. Lussier mentioned an unspecified cost savings. He asked for more information. Mr. Lussier replied that he thinks that price was about \$99,000. Councilor Favolise stated that the second part of his question is, other than concern for the future Public Works Director in 100 years, whether there is any other infrastructure or engineering reason why they could not leave the pipes in place. Mr. Lussier replied no, it is not an engineering concern. He continued that the concern is that as that pipe eventually fails, the soil around the pipe starts to migrate into it, which creates a sinkhole. The risk is they would eventually have settlement, sinkholes, and that sort of thing in the downtown. It is repair work in the future. It is not engineering from the perspective of life safety; it is more about premature pavement failure and convenience to the public.

Mr. Lussier continued that the next bucket of items he wants to talk about is scope that they can defer. Some of these items are ones he thinks Public Works staff can handle more cost effectively outside of the contract, and other items can be handled by a second contract down the road and be more cost effective that way. For bike racks, trash receptacles, and benches, Public Works staff are already doing that. Every fall, they take the benches in, and every spring, they put them back out. Potential savings there are a little overstated, because they would still have to buy benches, but they can buy them more cost effectively than the bid price for the contractor to supply them installed. That is an easy change to make with no real change in the final product. The bid item for the fountain was \$90,000. As much as he wants to see the fountain change, that could easily be postponed and be done under a separate contract at a later date. The same is true of the catenary lighting, which is the overhead lighting planned for Railroad Plaza and the bike path between the Transportation Center and Margaritas. It will look beautiful, and he wants to be able to do it, but the bid price came in at about 10 times what they estimated the cost would be. He thinks the bidders just did not want to be bothered with it, and he thinks they could get a

much better price if they put in the poles under this contract so that the foundations are there to do it, but put out a separate contract for a local electrician to string the lights at a later time.

Mr. Lussier continued that the price for relocating the pay stations was much higher than they expected. They could save a lot of money by having Public Works staff do that, and Public Works staff have already relocated the pay stations and know exactly how to do it. Regarding the gazebo stair modifications, today there are stairs on one side, and the proposed plan was to put stairs on three sides to open it up and make it easier for the viewing public to see the performers in it. He spoke with the Highway Superintendent, and his team is eager to take on this project. This can be done in-house for a much more reasonable cost. The last item in this bucket is the Christmas tree base. Currently, an 18-inch diameter drainage pipe is planted in the ground, and every November, staff sucks all the dirt out of it and puts the tree in it. In February, they pull the tree out and put the dirt back in. As part of this project, they plan to make the Christmas tree base less maintenance-intensive and put a structure over it, so it is just a matter of removing a manhole cover. It is not a big item; it is \$8,000. That can be done in-house at a fraction of the cost, for the same result.

Councilor Favolise stated that he wants to make sure the math in his mind matches what Mr. Lussier is saying. He continued that he understood that the lighting piece was a bid alternate. Mr. Lussier replied that the Council was split on whether they wanted cages around the bulbs, so the bid alternate was to add the cages. He continued that the price given was for the base bid. The cages would have added another \$42,000 to it.

Mr. Lussier stated that the last bucket of items is things he thinks they can change without really changing the substance of the project, or things that people probably will never notice, except for him and Mr. Smith. First is the replacement of drainage structures with drop inlets. The bid assumed that every one of the catch basins, the drainage basins that take the storm water from the street run-off, would be a standard, four-foot diameter manhole, concrete structure. Those structures were much higher in price than they typically see. From talking with the contractors, staff got the sense that contractors are concerned about being able to fit all of the stuff into a small space. A four-foot diameter structure is actually five feet on the outside diameter, and cramming that in between the curbing, water main, telecommunications duct bank, and all of the other things that they need to get in, was a concern. Instead, they can use a small structure, still concrete. The standard structure has a sump on the bottom. Any sediment that gets washed off the road is trapped there in the catch basin, and that is where they go to clean it out. It makes maintenance a lot easier. The smaller drop inlets do not have that sump, so as sediment gets washed off the roadway into the drainage system, it will migrate into the pipes, and they have to chase it downstream. The downside of this change is that it will make future maintenance a little more time-consuming, tedious, and difficult, but they think they could save about \$150,000, so that is a recommendation.

Mr. Lussier continued that they suggest reducing the quantity of textured concrete. They cannot eliminate it everywhere. They need that textured concrete to differentiate the different purposes, and to break up the higher impact zones. For example, if they just did Railroad Square as a flat slab of grey concrete, he does not think anyone would be happy with that final product. He thinks they can be more judicious about where they use the textured concrete, by eliminating

some of the buffers as textured and just using it where it is really purposeful for delineating different spaces. That could save about \$400,000. As they talk about textured concrete, he will swallow his pride and give some props to Chair Greenwald, who suggested during the design process that they look at exposed, aggregate concrete. Through the bid process, they found that that treatment is much more cost effective than the stamped patterns. It is more a process of washing off the concrete from the aggregate that is in the mix, versus an extra step in the process. It was a relatively small premium to do that treatment. He knows the public will ask, why not just eliminate the bike lanes? The difference between the exposed, aggregate concrete for the bike lanes versus just standard grey sidewalk, for the whole project, amounted to \$42,000. That is an option for the Council to consider, but the savings is just \$42,000, and for the amount of time they all spent debating bike lanes, he really does not want to revisit the question.

Mr. Lussier continued that the next item is an easy change to make, which is replacing the beveled curb. For all of the landscaped beds, Stantec proposed a little bit different curb than the one the City uses on the street. A photo shows the difference, which is mainly an aesthetic treatment, giving a polished, finished look to the curbing. But for \$159,000, when they are in a mode of having to save money, he thinks it is a reasonable sacrifice. Next, the cost in the bid for a field office, which is an office where the contractor keeps his plans and records, the inspector has space to keep their files and daily reports and do their computer work and stay out of inclement weather. The \$75,000 was right in line with what the City expected for a bid price, and it is a reasonable price. But if a downtown property owner offered a space to provide that office, there would be a savings to enjoy. Next is electrical value engineering, which was a bit nebulous. One of the local electrical contractors that does a lot of work in the downtown is very familiar with the City's system and contacted the Engineering Division to say he had ideas for how to change some of the proposed design, to still give the City everything they want for the system. He has ideas for how they could have all the lighting the way they want it, have all the electrical pedestals, the accessory outlets for events and whatnot, by redoing it a little differently and saving some money. He is putting a placeholder there because they do not know exactly what those savings might be. It is true value engineering, working with the contractor cooperatively to come up with more cost-effective ways to do things. He thinks they could save as much as \$100,000, by seeing what this electrician has to offer and getting his ideas. Staff will follow up with him as they go forward.

Mr. Lussier continued that the last item is most difficult to quantify. They heard very clearly from contractors that they were uneasy with the two-year contract. In particular, the contractors that are smaller and more local, ones the City works with on a routine basis, were concerned about being able to complete the project in that amount of time. Staff recommends the Council allow them to go back to a three-year phasing plan. He knows the downtown business community was really pushing for a shorter period of time, but unfortunately, with our geographical isolation and the contractors they are working with, the reality is that this is a three-year project. He recommends the Council allow this change. At the same time, it is difficult to say exactly what that means in terms of how much more competitive the bid prices will be. He is convinced that bidders that did not bid this time will be able to compete with the project if it is a three-year project.

Mr. Lussier continued that altogether, this bucket comes to almost \$2.4 million. He asked if anyone had questions about this bucket. Chair Greenwald replied that the document the MSFI Committee members have says \$2.8 million. Mr. Lussier replied that he is correct, the summary sheet does not include the reversion to a three-year contract, so the total for the three buckets will not match what is on the Committee members' sheets. It is \$1.6 million from eliminating scope, \$370,000 for deferred work, and \$2.4 million for those changes to the design contract, material changes and whatnot. He apologizes for not updating the summary sheet he gave the Committee. He thinks they found about \$4.3 million in savings.

Councilor Favolise stated that this started as a three-year project then went to a two-year project, so to now return to three years means going back to where they were. He continued that regarding the part about easing work restrictions, they made some commitments in terms of parking spaces and access to businesses. He asked if there are details of what "easing some of the restrictions" looks like. Mr. Lussier replied that allowing Saturday work will probably be one option. He continued that it is not necessarily that the contractor *will* do that, but it would be allowable. Regarding the amount of work, they had already talked about making it 50 spaces instead of 25, and they would definitely do that.

Mr. Lussier stated that this is \$4.3 million in savings, but they have a \$7 million funding gap, so they are not quite there yet. He continued that staff have some recommendations for additional funding. It pains him to recommend this, but he thinks it is where they are. The City Council, through the CIP process, appropriates between \$1.3 to \$1.4 million on average every year for road paving and preservation projects. Staff suggest that the FY26 project be deferred and that that money be reallocated to the Downtown Infrastructure Project, and as part of the FY27 CIP update, they would push off the FY27 work and that amount of money would be pushed over to the downtown project as well. That would add another \$2.7 million in funding to the project, without any change to how the taxes would be calculated. It is the same amount of spending that the City was planning on; it is just a matter of pushing it all into the downtown project.

Mr. Lussier stated that with the cost savings and the road rehab, if everything comes in at the same bid prices, they are at a funding surplus, theoretically. Of course, this is purely an academic exercise until they go out to bid again and get bid prices, but he thinks they are in the realm of being on target.

Councilor Tobin stated that she is looking at the rendering for Railroad Square and notices that most of what she sees will not actually be there. If the benches and lighting will be gone, it kind of feels like just paving it over. They have had discussions, in general, about activating unused spaces, and her concern is that they might be creating a space with no identity. Mr. Lussier replied that that is a valid concern. He continued that several granite seat benches were planned in Railroad Square, and staff would propose just using standard City benches, if that ends up being the way they go instead of the granite seat wall. That does not eliminate the concern, but that it is how they would address it. Regarding the lighting, they would still install the poles for future lighting to be hung from. The lighting would go in under a separate contract, hopefully in the very near future afterwards.

Councilor Tobin replied that she understands that all of these decisions individually make sense, but just for this space in particular, all of the structure of this space as it was designed seems like it would be removed. Even with benches, because it is not just about a place to sit. The way that it is now creates a certain structure. She thinks the quantity of granite benches was something like 220. She asked if they were all intended for this space, and if there is any way that some could be incorporated here. Mr. Lussier replied that he thinks that "220" figure is linear feet of granite benches, which is how it is measured for payment. He continued that they could definitely incorporate a portion of that. If they did it as a bid alternate, they could award the base contract and then say they want granite benches in certain spots. He would prefer bidding it as an alternate for the full quantity, because if the opportunity presents itself and the bids come in at good prices, he would like to keep them. He thinks they would be a really nice feature. He understands Councilor Tobin's point, but they are at a point where they need to consider what they can live without, and these are the things he thought they could live without and do at a future point. There is no easy solution. Chair Greenwald replied that the granite blocks could easily be put in later. Mr. Lussier agreed.

Mr. Lussier stated that he wants to talk about risks, regarding what it would be like if the Council chose to delay the project for whatever reason. They have already talked about cost escalation. If they do not go out to bid in the very near future with this revised package, they will not be able to get into construction in 2026. Costs will go up next year, but no one knows by how much. Last year, 4.1% was the regional average. Next year, it could be 3 or 3.5%. That is not insignificant. The other bigger one, which is more of a certainty, is the existing grant funding. He mentioned the \$2 million for the water fund, plus smaller amounts for the sewer and storm water work. Staff reached out to the NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) when the bids came in and they were talking about these different options, to ask if various options the Council might want to do would be allowable with the grant funding that they have in place. NHDES's response was essentially, yes, they would allow the City to extend the duration of the contract or bid it in multiple phases, but this project was supposed to be in construction in 2024 and they were supposed to have a draw already, so they wanted to know when the City would have its first reimbursement. It was a not-so-subtle nudge to say that NHDES wants the City to be spending the money. As he thinks he mentioned a year ago when the Council debated delaying the project for a year, if they would be okay to delay the project NHDES would work with them, no problem, but if it got delayed again and again, eventually NHDES would say they were going to cancel the funding and make the City reapply for when they really want to do the project. He thinks they are at that point. Maybe they would get funding again in the future, but staff does not recommend delaying the project unnecessarily.

Mr. Lussier continued that in summary, City staff's recommendation is to eliminate some work, defer some work or do it in-house, modify the scope as they have discussed tonight, and allow staff to re-bid this as a three-year project, but to turn it around expeditiously and put it back out for bid so they can be in construction in the spring of 2026. He would be glad to answer questions.

Councilor Workman stated that she commends him for taking the time to do such a thoughtful, planned out update/revision to the scope of the project for the Committee tonight. She continued that she is confident that she can speak for the Councilors who have been dealing with this

project for years at this point and say that they have always been realistic with the knowledge that at the end of the day, they might have to reduce the scope of the project and really consider their wants versus needs. She thinks Mr. Lussier has done a great job giving them something to work with and a framework for doing that. She wants to remind the viewers at home that the Council has always expected that they might be here at some point further down the road. She commends Mr. Lussier and his team for their work.

Mr. Lussier stated that much of the credit goes to Project Manager Bryan Ruoff and his team, who put a lot of legwork into coming up with these options and figuring out where the pain points were for the contractors. He continued that they did a lot of homework on this.

Chair Greenwald asked if members of the public had any questions.

Pete Moran of Myrtle St. stated that he does not know why they would want to spend \$8,000 for a plug in the ground for the Christmas tree base. He continued that if it gets filled in every year, he wonders why they cannot just put a cap on it and leave it. Mr. Lussier replied that that is what they are doing.

Mr. Moran stated that they could use hardpack instead of temporary asphalt. That could be churned up. There will be dust and debris regardless. Hardpack is not dusty once it is wet, sets like cement, and is easily removed. That could save a lot. Those bollards would be totally irrelevant at certain crossings. There is lighting already. Just doing some attractive downlighting off of the poles in those spots would save a lot of money. He did not hear that there are still plans to put in new lampposts or use the existing ones, because that number was a quarter million.

Mr. Lussier replied that the plan was always to reuse the vast majority of the poles that are already in the downtown, but not the light fixtures themselves, because most have been there for a while now and are getting towards the end of their life, so they plan to replace the actual lightbulbs. The new plan has more poles than are currently installed, so there will be additional lighting. Those are a separate price for purchasing versus just removing them and reinstalling them in a different location.

Mr. Moran asked, regarding the granite seating, what they will do with all the granite curbing they take out, and why that cannot be repurposed. Mr. Lussier replied that it is already included in the contract. He continued that there is a line item in the contract for removing and storing granite curbing. Not all of it will be suitable for reuse, as some of it is broken or of short length. Because the quantity will go up and some will be lost to the removal process, there is one price for reinstalling the curbing at a different location, and a separate price for providing new granite curbing. Mr. Moran replied that his point was that reusing granite, which could all be sandblasted, could be used for seating. Mr. Lussier replied that the granite seat benches they are talking about were envisioned as a large, solid block of concrete, not just curbing. Mr. Moran replied that there is nothing wrong with sitting on curbing. He continued that that can be chinked out and smoothed out, and there could be a huge savings there by repurposing all the granite the City takes out that gets dumped and stored. People could get creative using blocks. A block does not have to be that big; you could just put a chunk here or there as a place for somebody to sit. There would be zero maintenance.

Mr. Moran continued that he does not know why there is even a discussion about replacing the fountain. It has been there for a long time. He does not understand why “someone wants a Victorian look.” It is finite, and we have a lot of expenses here. He wishes them luck. Chair Greenwald replied that personally, he has given up on the fountain. He continued that he wanted to get rid of the pile of rocks, but at this stage of finances, and facing the public, he thinks the rocks are just fine. Mr. Moran replied that he agrees. He continued that they could ask a class of high school students to look at the pile and the granite the City has accumulated and see what they can do with it. That would be free.

Mr. Moran stated that they talked about having the Highway Department staff do some of this work. He wants to know how much the savings would be if they did that, versus if it were contracted out. Those numbers are not in the graph. Mr. Lussier replied that that is a fair observation. He continued that the cost savings listed in the presentation are a little bit overstated, because if Mr. Smith and his team are going to be installing the trash receptacles, they still have to buy the trash receptacles, and the park benches, and the materials for the gazebo stairs. The prices listed in the presentation are the bid price for the low bidder, and obviously, they would have some costs associated with that. They have not yet priced out all these different materials for the purchase costs.

Mr. Moran stated that he has one last question and wants to know the purpose of all the conduit going around the downtown perimeter. He continued that if someone wants some kind of technology, it should be on them. For satellite, they could put a dish on the roof. He does not see why the City should have to put dummy lines in. For compaction, he wants to know if Mr. Lussier has any thoughts about geofabrics to help reduce settling in some areas.

Councilor Favolise stated that this is a lot to take in, and then make a decision on, especially given the amount of time that the Committee and Council have spent in the past on all the finer details of this. He stated that he would continue to think about this, as he imagines they all will, between now and when Council meets. He has two questions. One is about a question Mr. Moran had about the bollards. He thinks he heard that there is a pedestrian safety aspect to that. He wonders how concerned they are about cars driving into The Stage Restaurant, for example.

Mr. Lussier replied that the Railroad Square / Gilbo Ave. intersection area is designed as a raised intersection. He continued that the whole intersection is at the sidewalk elevation. They need to have something to prevent traffic from turning into pedestrian spaces and keep vehicles out of those areas. The cost he listed in the presentation is the delta between a lighted bollard versus a regular bollard. They would still have that vehicle barrier; it just would not be lighted.

Councilor Favolise replied that he is still wondering if they have to have that. He continued that he is thinking more about the one at the top of the Square. He asked if drivers are trying to turn onto the sidewalk there. Mr. Lussier replied that it is probably less of a concern there than at the Railroad Square intersection. Railroad Square is adjacent to Railroad St., and he could definitely see someone trying to cut that corner and cut across the square or something like that, so there, he would definitely recommend having some vehicle barrier. At the head of the Square, it is a good point; if they do not want to have any bollards there, it is probably very low risk.

Andy Bohannon, Deputy City Manager, stated that he managed that space for quite a while, and people who rent do not really think about it, they just pull their truck right up to unload their gear so they do not have to carry it from the curb to the stage. He continued that Mr. Smith has probably repaired those ruts more times than he cares to, or repaired sprinkler heads. It happens more frequently than you would think, during off hours, because that is when the bands would be preparing. If you think about all of the pedestrians for the events that happen in that space, public safety would certainly be the number one priority on that front.

Councilor Favolise stated that there is something else he imagines was talked about, but he did not hear talked about tonight. He continued that he is not saying it is the answer or appropriate, but he wants to be clear that they have explored some different options, so his question is about using a portion of unallocated fund balance to offset some of this. He is not saying they should draw down the whole thing, but to think about what the impact here would be. Even if they are saving financially by pushing off some of the roadway projects or road rehabilitation, the cost does not go away, per se. There is an opportunity cost there. It still has to get done at some point. He wonders if there was any conversation about that, even if it is one road that they get done. Doing no roads for two years is hard.

The City Manager replied that that is a great point, and that is what they will be discussing when they do the CIP. She continued that right now, they have several projects that are slated to use fund balance, and there is a potential for adding some more to that.

Councilor Filiault stated that as someone who was part of the Committee for the first 85 meetings about the Downtown Infrastructure Project, he wants to commend everyone, especially Public Works staff, for working so hard to try to get this to a reasonable budget they can move forward with. He continued that everyone has things they would like to see added or deleted, but that said, he thinks it is imperative that this Committee vote in the affirmative tonight, to get this project rolling. That is not to say that down the road there could be additions and deletions as they go, but it is imperative to get this project on track. They can deal with the smaller details later.

Councilor Tobin stated that Councilor Workman said something about needs versus wants, which was helpful for her to hear. She continued that she echoes the gratitude. She knows Public Works has worked hard to nail down the best options for reducing the cost, eliminating pieces, and it is sad to see some of them go, but she knows Public Works makes beautiful benches.

Councilor Ellis stated that she is sad about some of the items that need to be taken away, but she agrees with what Councilor Filiault and Councilor Tobin said. She continued that it makes sense at this point to just get started, and hopefully at a future date, they can add back in some of the dream items.

Councilor Workman stated that to add to that point, she wants to be optimistic that they are deferring some of the scope of these projects. She continued that they have a great and resilient community that will rally around some of these items that stand out as being important to certain

groups and whatnot. She is optimistic that they will rally together as a community to include some of these deferred items at a later date.

Chair Greenwald asked if there were any further questions or comments. Hearing none, he asked for a motion.

The following motion by Councilor Workman was duly seconded by Councilor Tobin.

On a vote of 5 to 0, the Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to incorporate the scope of the work and the contract restriction changes into the Downtown Infrastructure Project bid documents, as presented, and to re-bid the project for construction beginning in the spring of 2026.

Chair Greenwald stated that he is an optimist, and he hopes that when this is finally on the edge of being awarded, the contractor will work with City staff and come up with other cost savings. He continued that they will end up with a good project. Mr. Lussier replied that that is not atypical for contracts. He continued that once the contract is awarded, the contractors often have ideas about how they can do the project a little more cost effectively and how to save some funds. Staff will negotiate those with the contractor if they think they have a better way of doing it. They are open to those suggestions.

4) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Greenwald adjourned the meeting at 7:54 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Edits submitted by,
Terri M. Hood, City Clerk