

City of Keene
New Hampshire

FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, January 22, 2026

6:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Thomas F. Powers, Chair
 Bettina A. Chadbourne, Vice Chair
 Bryan J. Lake
 Kris E. Roberts
 Michele A. Chalice

Members Not Present:

All Present

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Ferland, City Manager
 Amanda Palmeira, City Attorney
 Andy Bohannon, Deputy City Manager
 Dan Langille, City Assessor
 Bryan Ruoff, City Engineer
 Don Lussier, Public Works Director
 Aaron Costa, Asst. Public Works Director /
 Wastewater Treatment Plant Manager

Chair Powers called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

1) Thomas Burton - Request for Increase to Disabled Veteran Property Tax Credit

Councilor Roberts stated that if this item passed, he would stand to benefit from it. The Committee recused the Councilor from voting on this item.

Mr. Thomas Burton read the following statement for the record. Mr. Burton is a permanently and totally disabled veteran:

“I want to again begin by sincerely thanking the City and the taxpayers you represent for the \$4,000 disabled veteran property tax credit that Keene already provides me and other veterans in my position. That credit reflects a thoughtful and deliberate policy choice and it is not something I take for granted. I understand that every dollar in the city's budget represents a balance of competing priorities and I am generally grateful that disabled veterans are included among them. I also appreciate the committee's willingness to review and consider increasing the credit to the \$5,000 is now authorized under the state law. Even bringing this forward for discussion shows careful stewardship and respect for both fiscal responsibility and community values. For disabled veteran homeowners like myself this increase would be meaningful. I live on a fixed income and manage my finances carefully, so I could remain stable, independent and rooted here in Keene. An additional \$1,000 per year would provide modest but real support in maintaining my home and continuing to contribute as a long-term resident.

I want to be clear that I view this assistance with humility. I do not see it as an entitlement, but as a measured and intentional decision made by the City and its residents. I am mindful of that support and deeply appreciate all of it. From a financial perspective, disabled veterans tend to be stable long-term homeowners, whose income is federally funded and consistent. While our

primary medical and support services are provided through federal systems, that dynamic allows the City to benefit from our continued presence and economic participation without a corresponding increase in local service costs.

Thank you for the credit Keene already provides and thank you for the careful consideration of the proposed increase. I appreciate your time, your diligence and responsibility and the responsibility you carry in reviewing matters such as this.”

Councilor Chalice asked how long Mr. Burton has been a resident. Mr. Burton stated it has been since 2018.

City Assessor Dan Langille addressed the committee next. Mr. Langille stated currently there are 68 veterans that receive this credit, which equals \$272,000. This money needs to be raised as part of the budget and is distributed by the taxpayers. Increasing the amount from \$4,000 to \$5,000 would have a \$68,000 impact. Mr. Langille stated the minimum amount that is required is \$700 but the City can offer up to \$5,000. He stated this change in part, by the legislation this past year is because disabled veterans can also receive the standard veteran credit, which is \$300. In total the veterans' credit is \$4,300. This is referred to as stacking. The legislation removed that option, so City no longer can offer both credits to a veteran. If the City takes no action, the veterans will actually lose \$300 and only be receiving this credit.

Mr. Langille stated his recommendation tonight is to at least initially, increase this credit to \$4,300, which would for the first billing have no impact on the tax base or tax dollars and no impact on the veteran. The City would then review all exemptions and credits in the coming months and take another look at this. The Committee at that time can determine how they want to move forward.

Councilor Lake clarified the last time this RSA was changed was in 2019. Mr. Langille stated he wasn't sure of the exact year, but it was fairly recent.

Councilor Powers clarified the reduction is a dollar amount on the tax bill. Mr. Langille agreed and went on to say some veterans don't receive a tax bill at all. Others receive a reduction on whatever their amount is.

Councilor Chalice clarified this credit is only for those who own a piece of property. Mr. Langille agreed and added the veterans are required to apply for it and stated the City does not determine whether an individual is disabled or not. The City receives a letter from the Veterans Affairs indicating someone is 100% totally and permanently disabled. The City only determines they were honorably discharged and live at the property.

Councilor Lake asked, should the Committee approve this request, when it would take effect. Mr. Langille stated timing would have certain issues this year because of the revaluation. However, if the \$4,300 is approved, those who are eligible would receive one-half of that credit on their first tax bill and the remainder on the second bill. Even if there are additional changes made to the tax rate they would still receive that for the final tax bill.

Chair Powers stated he would like to move forward with the full credit for the 68 veterans.

Councilor Chadbourne noted the Assessor is suggesting a \$300 increase now and when there is more information revisit the issue. She stated if the City approved \$5,000 credit for 68 veterans that amount would equal \$340,000.

Councilor Lake asked if the City was to go with the \$5,000 now whether that would create a shortfall in the FY26. The City Manager stated this is something she would like to review for further clarification before the next Council meeting regardless of the vote this evening, because it is mid-year, it will be a little bit different. She added it is not part of the budget in terms of the budgeted amount, but it does impact the revenue; the taxes that are being collected. She stated she would be happy to look into that before the next meeting.

Councilor Chalice stated she would like to have seen a breakdown of all aid provided to veterans in the City. She agreed the 68 veterans in the City deserve to be compensated but stated the City is going into a difficult tax year and wanted to know that one group of people are not over benefiting when there is another group that is struggling financially. She asked whether this would be a part of Mr. Langille's analysis. Mr. Langille stated he would bring forward all exemptions and all credits offered by the City so the Committee could see the entire impact.

Councilor Chadbourne stated she came to the meeting after reading the letter from the petitioner with the idea of approving the \$5,000 request. However, the Assessor is suggesting a \$300 increase which is what she would like to approve tonight and then consider the difference at a later time. Councilor Chalice agreed with Councilor Chadbourne.

The following motion by Councilor Chalice was duly seconded by Councilor Lake.

That the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee directed the City Manager to draft a resolution related to the tax credit for service connected total disability increasing the amount from \$4,000 to \$4300.

Councilor Lake asked the City Attorney whether taking an action on this item now jeopardizes the Council from discussing this item as part of the budget because the value amount has been changed. Attorney Palmeira stated if the City Council does change the credit amount and then in the same calendar year wants to change the credit amount again, that would implicate the rule that prevents that same item coming up twice in one calendar year. However, the City Council could vote to suspend that rules if they do want to pick it up again, which requires a 2/3 vote. The City Manager added the motion could also say that this item would be reviewed after the revaluation.

The motion was amended by Councilor Lake to add the language "this item would be reviewed after the revaluation." The amendment was seconded by Councilor Chalice. The motion to amend passed unanimously, 4 to 0. Councilor Roberts abstained.

On a vote of 4 to 0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the amended motion to direct the City Manager to draft a resolution related to the Tax Credit for Service-Connected Total Disability, increasing the amount from \$4,000 to \$4,300 and that this item would be reviewed during the revaluation. Councilor Roberts abstained.

2) Execution of Lease - 11 Central Square - Deputy City Manager

Deputy City Manager Andy Bohannon addressed the Committee. Mr. Bohannon stated Culinary Journey Management Company, which was the Town Square Tavern, approached the City in December 2025 and indicated they are not able to keep their business open anymore due to financial reasons and have surrendered their lease. Cheryl and Nicola Bencivenga have shown interest in leasing this space at 11 Central Square. Mr. Bohannon stated that before the Committee tonight is a request for a recommendation to have the City Manager do all things necessary to negotiate and execute a lease with Nicola's LLC for the space at 11 Central Square.

Councilor Chadbourne stated there is a lot of excitement about this restaurant coming into this space.

Councilor Chalice asked for an update on 10 Central Square. Mr. Bohannon stated that this space needs some renovations, and once that is completed, it will be rented in the future.

The following motion by Councilor Lake was duly seconded by Councilor Chadbourne.

On a vote of 5 to 0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to negotiate and execute a lease with Nicola's LLC for the use of space at 11 Central Square.

3) Execution of an Agreement for Engineering Services With NXTGen for the Design of the Gilbo Avenue Solar Pavilion Project - City Engineer

City Engineer Bryan Ruoff addressed the committee and stated the next item before the committee is an execution of an agreement for engineering services with NXTGen for the design of the Gilbo Avenue Solar Pavilion project. He stated staff was before the Committee six weeks ago to request this contract be awarded to Stantec at the December 18, which was voted against by City Council.

He went on to say the engineering division 15 minutes after that decision by Council reached out to the second submitting qualified engineer and requested a scope and fee proposal. He stated this project is part of the scope of the City's downtown infrastructure improvements project and is being funded by a federal grant from the Northern Borders Regional Commission Timber for Transit Grant; 80% federally funded and 20% City match. Mr. Ruoff stated NXTGen's scope is more than what Stantec had included because the City is having NXTGen review some of the preliminary work Stantec completed to make sure we are getting the best value for this project. He noted the proposed price has also decreased from Stantec's price of \$340,000 to NXTGen's price of \$300,000.

Mr. Ruoff stated at this point staff is ready to execute a contract and are requesting approval.

Councilor Lake stated he was excited about this project. He indicated he, however, has some hesitancy partially because of the cost decrease. He noted the cost has come down more than 10% below from an organization that the City chose not to go with leads him to think that there are other scoring areas that are much lower than what Stantec had come back with. He went on to say he tried to find information on NXTGen to see what other projects they had worked on but had a hard time finding a lot of information about them. He asked whether the City Engineer had examples of other projects that NXTGen had worked on that might have a similar scope.

Mr. Ruoff stated NXTGen is a very different company from Stantec, and they are using sub consultants to do the design-related work, whereas Stantec did a lot of the work in-house. NXTGen is the umbrella of the renewable energy's platform of the work, and they work as the general contractor/general engineer on facilitating the design of the timber structure of the site design and everything there on through. Where they are seeing cost savings is that they are proposing to use more senior level staff and their hours are considerably less than what Stantec had proposed. Stantec had a lot more staff and junior level staff doing a lot of the legwork and more hours associated with that.

The areas that are necessary as far as federal funding for the project are the NEPA review and approval. The proposed scope is pretty much right in line with what Stantec was proposing. Staff feel NXTGen's consultants are capable of delivering a great product for the City. Councilor Lake asked whether the cost savings were realized when the review was performed or was it when NXTGen went into the detail of the project to provide a full scope of work. Mr. Ruoff stated the City needs to do an IGE for all federally funded projects to do a comparative estimate. For this scope of work, the two estimates the City completed for both consultants were relatively the same. Cost savings were realized when Stantec's staffing and allocated hours were reviewed.

City Manager clarified from the Engineer that the City won't be aware of cost until later in the process because this is an RFQ; the review of the proposals was only based on qualifications, not on price. Once the contractor has been selected, the City negotiates the price. Mr. Ruoff agreed.

Public Works Director Don Lussier addressed the Committee and stated the City has to follow what is referred to as the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR). For professional services they require qualifications based selection—which means you select a contractor that is most qualified without consideration for their price. The City is not allowed to ask for a price as part of that submission of qualifications. Once the City has ranked them and selected the most qualified firm, you would negotiate a scope first, then they prepare their fee and the City at that point prepares what its estimated fee is. He added the City can't know what one firm's price is versus the other firm before a selection is made.

Mr. Ruoff added NXTGen has a bigger presence in Canada might have been the reason the Councilor could not find more information on them.

The following motion by Councilor Chadbourne was duly seconded by Councilor Lake.

On a vote of 5 to 0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to execute an agreement with NXTGen for engineering services for the design of the Gilbo Avenue Solar Pavilion Project, for an amount not to exceed \$300,000.

4) Relating to the Reallocation of Unspent Bond Funds for the WWTP Service Water System Upgrade Project Resolution R-2026-04

Asst. Public Works Director / Wastewater Treatment Plant Manager, Aaron Costa, addressed the Committee and stated he was before the Committee to talk about the reallocation of unspent funds from the aeration line replacement project and having those funds reallocated to the service water system upgrade project.

Mr. Costa explained that the wastewater plant is equipped with a non-potable water service system and that service water is wastewater that has received full treatment and is suitable for discharge into the river. To conserve resources, service water is used throughout the wastewater plant and applications where drinking water quality is not required.

The service water system is original to the plant. It is 40 years old and has reached the end of its useful life. The total project budget for this was \$327,400 dollars. \$41,800 was used for engineering services, which leaves \$285,600 for construction services. The City advertised for a bid and received five bids for construction. The lowest bid came in at \$389,000, which was more than the City had allocated for the project. Staff are before the Committee to request additional funding. The aeration line replacement project is complete and there are some leftover funds in that project. If those funds were approved to be transferred, it would provide for \$434,000 for this project leaving around \$45,000 for any change orders that may arise.

The following motion by Councilor Roberts was duly seconded by Councilor Chalice.

On a vote of 5 to 0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the adoption of Resolution R-2026-04.

5) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Power adjourned the meeting at 6:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

Edits submitted by,
Heather Fitz-Simon, Adminsitrative Assistant