

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HERITAGE COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, February 11, 2026

4:30 PM

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

Members Present:

Acacia Royce, Vice Chair
Councilor Molly Ellis
Louise Zerba
Cauley Powell, Chair
Kathy Halverson, Alternate
Marilyn Huston
Connie Joyce, Alternate
Rose Carey (arrived at 4:38 PM)

Staff Present:

Megan Fortson, Planner

Members Not Present:

Julie Emineth
Jill Bouchillon, Alternate

1) Call to Order - Roll Call

Chair Powell called the meeting to order at 4:32 PM. Roll call was conducted. Chair Powell stated that Ms. Halverson and Ms. Joyce will both be voting members today. She welcomed Alina Nightingale to the meeting.

2) Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes – January 14, 2026

Ms. Zerba made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of January 14, 2026. Ms. Halverson seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) T-Mobile Hometown Grant Opportunity - Brainstorming Ideas

Chair Powell asked Ms. Fortson to talk about the T-Mobile Hometown Grant opportunity.

Ms. Fortson stated that this grant, brought to her attention by Senior Planner Mari Brunner, provides grant funds for projects proposing to build, rebuild, or refresh community spaces that help foster local connections in your town. She continued that a town has to have a population of less than 50,000 people, so Keene is eligible. You can get up to \$50,000 for shovel-ready projects. Projects must be physical builds or improvements that can be completed within 12 months of receiving the grant.

Chair Powell stated that she thinks this grant is awarded quarterly, and the first application deadline is sometime in February, which the HC will have missed, but there will be other opportunities to apply throughout the year. She asked if anyone had any projects that come to mind, shovel-ready ones related to historic properties, that the HC could support.

Ms. Zerba asked if the signage project would qualify. Ms. Fortson replied that it would depend on whether they had everything pulled together, but yes, she thinks that would be considered a project that refreshes a community space and helps foster local connections.

Councilor Ellis stated that she wonders if there are any items that had been cut from the Downtown Infrastructure Project that are ones the HC supported and are within the HC's purview, such as the lighting. Discussion ensued about what had been cut from the project. Chair Powell stated that those are great points, but to qualify for the grant, it has to be a shovel-ready project. Councilor Ellis spoke about how the projects she is thinking of, like the lights, are ones that were taken out of the Downtown Infrastructure Project and Public Works was thinking they could be done later. It is something for the HC to keep in mind for another time. Chair Powell replied that that sounds great.

Chair Powell stated that she thinks it would be good to see if the signage project fits the parameters. Ms. Huston asked what that is. Ms. Zerba replied that she meant the Keene Glass marker.

In response to a question about whether this grant has funded other City projects, Ms. Fortson replied that she is not aware of any history with this grant.

Ms. Carey arrived at 4:38 PM. Chair Powell stated that Ms. Joyce returns to alternate member status now that a quorum of regular members is present.

Chair Powell stated that if they were going to pursue the Keene Glass sign, they might want to include other signs in the grant application – ones that honor history or culture in Keene. Others replied with ideas, such as signs for the Italian Neighborhood or the Recovering Black History project. Chair Powell stated that the earliest they could possibly apply for the grant would be this summer, so that gives people time to ruminate about ideas.

Ms. Zerba suggested they look at, relative to what Councilor Ellis was saying, what aesthetic items have been removed from the scope of the Downtown Infrastructure Project that they might want to consider. Chair Powell asked if Ms. Fortson knows the status of the Downtown Infrastructure Project. Ms. Fortson replied that she is not sure, but she thinks it is still slated to start construction in April, and it was going to be done over the course of a few years. She continued that the City narrowed the scope when they reissued the call for bids. Chair Powell replied that it would be great if Ms. Fortson could keep them updated, if she hears anything. Ms. Fortson replied that she can follow up with Ms. Brunner, and City Engineer Bryan Ruoff, to see if there is information about what the timeline might be for the installation of those aesthetic elements. They can see what their receptiveness would be to the HC making that ask on their behalf.

4) Keene Glass Plaque Donation Request

Chair Powell stated that this is a donation request, included in the agenda packet. The Keene Glass plaque will cost about \$3,700. She continued that Steve Seraichick had come to a meeting to speak to the HC about the project, and he and the Yankee Bottle Club have done a lot of work to see this through. They are now in the fundraising stage. She asked for people's thoughts on the HC donating to the project.

Ms. Zerba spoke in favor of the HC donating some amount. She stated that many years ago, the HC paid for a historical marker sign at the Corner News, so there is precedence.

Ms. Fortson stated that the HC has \$13,497 in its budget. She continued that \$3,700 will be total cost for the sign, plus an unknown amount for shipping. Mr. Seraichick has offered to do the installation labor himself.

Discussion ensued. Chair Powell stated that she, too, is in favor of the HC donating some amount, but she is not sure how much. She continued that maybe they could offer to match funds from others. Others spoke positively about that idea. Discussion continued about how much the HC might want to donate, and how to make this decision.

Ms. Fortson stated that the process is that Mr. Seraichick has gotten a letter of support from the HC, and is now looking for a monetary donation. She continued that he has to go before the City Council and seek approval for the installation of the sign in the public right-of-way. She is not sure if he would be allowed to install the sign himself, since it is City land. That might be for Public Works to do. Chair Powell asked if the City might waive the fees for Public Works doing the installation. Ms. Fortson replied that she is not sure, but she could ask. She continued that Mr. Seraichick first needs to submit the request to City Council to allow this installation in the first place. Chair Powell asked if it would be prudent for the HC to wait until Mr. Seraichick makes the request of City Council, or if the HC should make a decision first. Ms. Fortson replied that it is up to the HC, but she thinks Mr. Seraichick hopes to have information to provide to the City Council about money that the HC and/or others have promised, to show the Council that there is support. That would help him build his case.

Discussion continued about potential donation amounts for the HC to consider. Ms. Carey expressed concerns about not wanting to set a precedent and having more people ask the HC for money. Chair Powell spoke about how the HC does not have a metric they use to decide how to respond to donation requests for citizen-led projects, but maybe they should create such a metric.

Ms. Royce spoke about how her reservation about the HC donating to this project is that she recalls Mr. Seraichick saying something about the Yankee Bottle Club not having time to do fundraising.

Ms. Joyce asked if the HC has contributed funds for similar things in the past. Chair Powell replied that she had not been aware of the Corner News sign, but that would be a precedent. Ms. Carey added that another time, the HC gave money to the Historic District Commission (HDC) to support a mailing that the HDC was doing.

Councilor Ellis spoke about how she agrees with the idea of offering maybe \$500 to \$700 to the Keene Glass marker project, limiting the funds the HC gives so that they are careful with their budget and do not seem as though they have limitless cash to hand out to every good cause. Ms. Carey spoke about how the HC has its own projects they are working on, so they should be looking at how they are allocating their funds to those. Ms. Zerba suggested the HC send Mr. Seraichick a letter saying yes, the HC will contribute, but they want to know which other organizations are participating, and maybe the HC could provide some matching funds. Discussion continued. Councilor Ellis stated that she wonders if it would be helpful for the HC to give a donation as kind of a seed grant that could start the fundraising. Discussion ensued about \$500 being a good amount for that, and the question of whether they would want that to be matching funds, where the HC would give Mr. Seraichick \$500 if he raises another \$500 from others.

As discussion continued, Chair Powell stated that Ms. Carey raised a good point, about setting a precedent, and about the importance of the HC looking at their budget, how they choose to spend it, and the projects they choose to pursue. She continued that that is a long-term area to consider.

Chair Powell asked if someone wants to make a motion to donate \$500 to the project. Discussion ensued about whether it should be a flat donation, or conditioned upon matching funds. HC members agreed on a flat donation. Ms. Fortson clarified that the money will not come out of the HC's account until/unless this project request goes before City Council and the sign is ready to be put into the ground.

Ms. Zerba made a motion to approve a \$500 donation to the Yankee Bottle Club's historic sign project. Ms. Carey seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Chair Powell told Ms. Fortson to let her know if she needs her to formalize that. Ms. Fortson replied that she can draft a letter and send it to Chair Powell, so they have it on City letterhead.

5) Downtown Video Project Updates

Chair Powell stated that the Monadnock 250 Event has become a goalpost for the HC to have at least one round of the Downtown Video Project complete by—the written component. She asked Councilor Ellis if she could give a sense of what that expectation and need is and where that has landed.

Councilor Ellis stated that she thinks she talked with the HC last month about the idea of doing a one-minute clip to be read on the radio. She continued that Alan Rumrill already has a "Monadnock Minute" radio segmented and noted it would be similar to that—a reading, about 50 seconds in length, of a paragraph written by the HC. She noted that each segment would be followed by, "Proudly sponsored by XYZ for the Monadnock 250." The HC would produce the 50 seconds of text, and the radio station would do a one-minute-long radio sponsorship blurb that could be played repeatedly leading up to the 250th Event. She is not sure how many of the one-minute paragraphs they would expect the HC to have, but they could use the write-ups they had already planned to use about each of the blocks they have divided up. Those would be good for the radio station to choose from.

Councilor Ellis stated that the other thing that is similar, but different, is the little A-frame signs they wanted to put outside different buildings with maybe a picture and a couple paragraphs of text and potentially a QR code. She thinks the HC can take what they have written already and just expand it a small amount, if it needs to be expanded at all.

Ms. Zerba replied that that she got a nice picture of the Chamberlain block from the Historical Society. She saw today that Ms. Fortson already got that up on the website. Ms. Carey continued that the text could be short, four or five lines maximum. People love pictures. Councilor Ellis replied that maybe the HC could condense what they have written to just a few lines. She asked Ms. Carey for her thoughts.

Ms. Carey replied that she thinks they need to gather everyone's input, and then have maybe two HC members get together to try and make these paragraphs consistent. Others agreed. Ms. Carey spoke about how the paragraphs need to have a consistent style and contain a certain amount of information, such as "who, what, when, where," that is uniform across all write-ups.

Chair Powell asked Councilor Ellis if she has an estimate of when the HC should aim to have the radio paragraphs ready by. She asked if two months in advance of the event sounds good. Discussion ensued. Councilor Ellis stated that there are four months between now and the event. Ms. Zerba stated that local radio is already talking about Monadnock 250 here and there. Chair Powell suggested that HC members should have their write-ups complete by the April HC meeting. She continued that that leaves time for the write-ups to be collated, as Ms. Carey mentioned, and for that uniformity process to happen. Discussion continued.

Ms. Fortson stated that as Councilor Ellis said, Mr. Rumrill already has the segment on WKBK radio. She asked, if someone were to read whatever narratives the HC has ready, if the HC is expected to make a donation to be a sponsor of that segment. Councilor Ellis replied no, it is more like a perk for sponsors to get their names on the radio as a little bit of advertising.

Ms. Huston asked if the idea with the little historical signs in front of someone's business is to have text about that particular section of town or that building. Chair Powell replied yes, it will be specific to the building. She continued that each historic block would have an A-frame sign, and it sounds like the photo is what will immediately catch people's eyes, with a couple lines of context for the photo. Ms. Zerba stated that she has photos from 1910 tonight that she can pass around for people to see.

Ms. Carey suggested they take a moment to review the components of this project as it stands now. Chair Powell spoke about how there are actually three projects happening at once, which will feed into each other in the end. She continued that the written component is feeding into the Monadnock 250 slightly differently than the video component and the historic memory components are, because she does not think they want to give themselves the same deadline for the video component. They have assigned each block on the common, including Central Square, to an HC member, and each person is doing a write-up of their assigned building(s). The focus is on the building—the history of the construction, the features, and maybe an accompanying anecdote if something remarkable happened there. They will write short paragraphs that are

hopefully a minute long when read aloud, with the idea being that they can make social media videos using the write-ups as a voiceover, with video content and photo content combined. They are thus creating content for the City of Keene's social media, and for the HC website.

Chair Powell went on to state that there is also the additional FACT TV component, which will use the longest version of the write-ups. It sounds like the shortest version will be 20–30 second radio spots, and the longest form would be the half hour-long FACT TV episodes. Her sense is that Ms. Nightingale has been doing a lot of the legwork on that, with the video interviews and the footage she has already shot, which she is excited to see. They should set a time that suits Ms. Nightingale to have her present a bit of what she has been working on for the HC to see.

Chair Powell stated that is her understanding of what is going on. She asked if she had missed anything, or if that all makes sense.

Ms. Carey stated that the plaques on buildings around town, with QR codes, are something they had talked about being part of it previously. Chair Powell asked if they want to make that formally a part of what they are doing. Ms. Carey replied yes. She continued that they have the information. Frequently, they do not finish these projects. Her question is whether they are going to wrap this into a big ball and do it all, because they have all the information, and this is one place they could apply funds if they need to. She continued that Ms. Zerba had also suggested having plaques for buildings that are missing, such as the Cheshire House. Her understanding was that the HC was not doing just Central Square, but other locations, too, some of which she has already researched. Chair Powell replied yes, if they can expand on Main St. in time for the Monadnock 250 Event, she thinks they should try to do that.

Chair Powell stated that regarding the idea of plaques, she was talking with Mr. Rumrill really early on in the HC's project, giving him a general idea of what they were doing, and he mentioned that it sounded similar to something the Historical Society had considered at one point. Years ago, the Keene Downtown Group had mentioned to the Historical Society that they were interested in doing a project with plaques with photos. It fell to the wayside, and Mr. Rumrill said that it would be easy to do today with QR codes. So maybe they should do QR codes. The HC's website is a project in the background that she wants to be working on this year, to get all the past information updated on the website. That could be a natural landing point for QR codes. Her only concern would be how they collaborate with the Historical Society on something like this. For example, should the Historical Society be the ones hosting it? Should the HC undertake this without first having a conversation with the Historical Society?

Ms. Carey replied that she thinks collaborating with the Historical Society is a wonderful idea. She continued that the Historical Society has a mailing list and structure that the HC does not have. Maybe the HC could have an event at the Historical Society that they collaborate on. Ms. Fortson stated that any signage would have to go through a sign permit application process with the Community Development Department, so that is another layer to all of this. She continued that she does not know if the HC wants to go down that avenue, although they certainly can.

Councilor Ellis stated that her thought is that if they can work on creating this content, they can put it on the wooden A-frame signs for now. She continued that the idea of potentially creating

plaques could be a secondary goal. Creating the content is the hardest part. Chair Powell asked, for clarity, if the HC would actually build the signs themselves. Councilor Ellis replied no, the physical signs would exist already, and the HC would just be providing the written information and photos. She continued that she thinks they are almost there already with the content—they just need to make sure it is all in the same voice, as Ms. Carey said. They can choose how many signs they want to do.

Chair Powell asked if anyone has any concerns about the written component, or if it all seems straightforward and everyone understands what they are doing. Others replied that it sounds good. Ms. Joyce stated that she likes the idea of the signs versus the QR codes, because many people do not use QR codes and will appreciate the written text. Others replied that they could have both the written text and the QR code, because QR codes do not take much space.

Chair Powell asked if there is a timeframe for when/how long these A-frame signs would be displayed. Councilor Ellis replied that she does not think that has been decided yet. She continued that it might be something for the HC to decide. Ms. Fortson replied that she can reach out to the Public Works Department, to make sure there will not be any issues with the sidewalk being encumbered for that day with signs and things. Chair Powell stated that that day is when they would expect the most pedestrian activity, but the HC would want the work to be seen and experienced beyond just the one day. Discussion continued about how the Downtown Infrastructure Project will be happening, which is a consideration. Chair Powell stated that if signs on the sidewalks will not work, they could always ask businesses to put big signs in their windows instead. Others agreed.

Chair Powell asked if anyone wanted to share anything about the work they have been doing, give any updates, or share photos. Discussion ensued. Ms. Huston asked if more write-ups are needed, and for which locations. Chair Powell replied that she thinks everything on Central Square was assigned at their last meeting, and then Ms. Carey was just saying she had begun work down Main St. If there are buildings that have not yet been assigned and people have the bandwidth to take those on, that would be welcome. Discussion continued about more buildings that could have write-ups. Chair Powell suggested they update their spreadsheet outside of the meeting. She asked if they would need to have Ms. Fortson help coordinate the volunteers with the assignments, or if they can just collaborate on the Google documents now. Ms. Fortson replied that the spreadsheet is visible to the public now, so HC members can go on and choose which assignments they want to sign up for.

Councilor Ellis asked if Ms. Carey wants to be the one to put all of the write-ups into the same style. Ms. Carey replied yes, she could do that.

Chair Powell stated that they need to just map this out, figure out what the holes are, and how to fill those holes. She asked how far down the street it is appropriate to go. Ms. Carey replied to Railroad St. Brief discussion ensued about the theaters.

Ms. Fortson stated that when the HC has the write-ups in the voice they want, the Community Development Department has a Canva Pro account the HC could use to format their printouts. She continued that they also have the plotter printer the HC could use some of its budget for—it

is \$5 a sheet for large-format prints. They also have several historic photos, digitized, which she can upload. Discussion ensued.

Chair Powell asked if everyone would be comfortable if they set a goal for uploading all of their write-ups to the Google Drive, even if they are just rough drafts. Then they can flip through them and see where more research needs to be done and see who can step in and help as needed. They can include photos, too, even if for now it is just a cell phone photo of a book page. She might create a folder structure for the Google Drive, to keep all the information organized.

Councilor Ellis stated that Monadnock 250 has a Facebook page now. She continued that she encourages anyone on Facebook to connect with the Monadnock 250 page. Discussion continued about potential ways to do outreach and spread the word. Ms. Carey spoke about the Monadnock Shopper. Chair Powell stated that it would be great to pursue that. Discussion continued about submitting something to the Keene Sentinel. Ms. Carey stated that Ms. Nightingale's footage will be shown at the Colonial Theater. Discussion continued.

6) US Sesqui-Centennial 2026 Planning & Preparation Updates

Chair Powell stated that they discussed the Monadnock 250 as part of the previous agenda item. She asked if Councilor Ellis had anything else to add. Councilor Ellis replied no, she covered everything she needed to today.

7) Staff Updates

A) Google Drive

Ms. Fortson stated that she encourages anyone who has not yet checked out the HC's Google Drive to do so, and to let her know if they have any issues with accessing it.

B) Jane's Walk

Ms. Fortson stated that she included a hyperlink to this on the agenda packet. She continued that different communities hold this Jane's Walk, which is an event celebrating local heritage and keeping local heritage alive. The HC has a lot going on already, but they can learn more about this if they want to.

Chair Powell stated that the Jane's Walk is in May, so if they get their feet underneath them for these other projects with enough lead time, they could consider this for this year. Or they could talk about it as something for the future.

8) New Business

Chair Powell asked if there was any new business.

9) Next Meeting – March 11, 2026

Chair Powell stated that the next HC meeting is March 11. She continued that they are looking at having a joint meeting with the Historic District Commission (HDC) in May. Ms. Fortson added that it would potentially be the HC's meeting date that month, May 13, 2026. She spoke with Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, the HDC Chair, and she said the HDC would be happy to attend the regular Heritage Commission meeting.

10) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Powell adjourned the meeting at 5:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Megan A. Fortson, AICP - Planner