

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Thursday, March 26, 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

**Staff Present:**

Elizabeth A. Ferland, City Manager  
Amanda Palmeira, City Attorney  
Don Lussier, Public Works Director  
Steve Tenney, Police Captain  
Bryan Ruoff, City Engineer

**Jay V. Kahn, Mayor**

**Members Not Present:**

*All Present*

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

**1) FY25 DOJ Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program Award - Police Captain**

Police Captain Steve Tenney addressed the Committee and stated this is a grant that the City has partnered with the County on for about 15 years. The grant pays for phones and air cards that are in the department computers and cruisers. Captain Tenney stated this year the grant is \$5,501.

Councilor Chalice stated she is grateful for this grant but asked whether the language of the agreement has been reviewed. She noted the grant is with the County, but the funds are coming from the Federal Government; to make sure new language has not been added that would tie the City into some type of aspect the City is not comfortable with. For example, conversations that may go beyond where the City intends it to go.

Captain Tenney stated the City enters into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the County and that language has not changed. The County is responsible for filling out the grant in its entirety. He added in looking at the MOU, there is no new language. He stated he could not comment on the full grant itself and added they have reviewed other language in the past and have determined that although it is different, the department wouldn't change the way it operates.

The Councilor asked the City Attorney whether the City could be susceptible to a requirement that is not in the agreement with the County, but the County may have agreed to, in order to accept those federal funds. Attorney Palmeira stated she had not reviewed the Agreement, but this could be an option because the City is receiving funds through the County they might want

to control how it's used, but stressed not having seen the agreement she could not determine how this might look. The Manager stated the Attorney could review the Agreement before the next Council meeting.

The following motion by Councilor Chalice 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 co-apply with the County of Cheshire, NH and to accept and expend the U.S. Department of Justice FY25 Byrne JAG in the amount allocated to the City of \$5,501.00.

**2) Written Public Comments - Proposed Capital Improvement Program 2027–2033  
Ken Kost - Recommending the “Portland Loo” as an Alternative Approach to  
Downtown Public Restroom Project**

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 recommend the written public comments for the proposed capital improvement program 2027–2033 be accepted as informational.

**3) Proposed Capital Improvement Program 2027–2033**

The Manager stated the City has received all written communications after the public hearing by the deadline and the Committee has acted on that this evening. She stated that no additional comments will be taken from the public tonight; this meeting is a time for the Committee to ask questions from staff.

The Manager went on to say that the Planning Board reviewed the plan on Monday, March 23, 2026, and voted that it was consistent with the Master Plan. She indicated the reason this document goes to the Planning Board is because there is a statute in New Hampshire, RSA 674:5, that authorizes the municipalities to adopt a Capital Improvement Plan and establishes the Planning Board's role and the Planning Board looks at whether the projects are consistent with the community's Master Plan. Their role is primarily planning and policy alignment and not budgeting. It is now up to the City Council to decide whether or not to amend or adopt the plan as presented.

The Manager noted the letter that is included with the Capital Plan includes a reference to the City's Fiscal Policy. Because the Finance Department had been focused on training an entirely new team, the Finance Director did not bring forward proposed changes this year. Hence, to ensure the review occurs for the upcoming year, staff has already scheduled a Fiscal Policy Workshop for June 30, 2026 at 6:00 PM in Council Chambers.

She stated today staff would be addressing comments or questions from the members of the public raised at the public hearing.

The first is the public bathroom. The Manager stated the Public Works Director has additional information to share regarding public bathrooms in response to the comments. She reminded the Committee that public bathrooms are currently included in the CIP for FY28 (not for the upcoming budget, but the year after). Regardless of the decision made this evening, there will be another year for the Council to evaluate whether to proceed and what type of facility would be appropriate before it would be considered as part of the FY28 operating budget. As always, the CIP is a planning document and does not obligate the Council to undertake any future projects.

The other item the Public Works Director will be talking about tonight is the road construction budget. The Public Works Director will review the funding structure for the downtown infrastructure project. It has been updated several times. This will include the use of FY26 road construction budget, as well as the funding that would otherwise have been allocated to next year's road construction funding.

The Manager stated she has also had a conversation with the Mayor about the possibility of adding \$500,000 to the road construction program for FY27. The Mayor is interested in seeing the plan be amended this evening to add additional funding for additional roadwork. In anticipation of that discussion, the Manager stated she has asked the Public Works Director what they would recommend if the Council chose to add \$500,000 to road construction in FY27. He has identified two options. The first would be to complete Court Street from Route 9 to Central Square at an estimated cost of \$478,000.

Alternatively, if the Council preferred to spread the funding across multiple locations, they would recommend completing a smaller section of Court Street, along with work on Emerald Street. If the Council is interested in doing this, it will require an amendment to the plan to add those additional funds.

The Manager stated she also wanted to discuss the downtown infrastructure project. Bids are coming in mid-April 2026. Because the City is planning to utilize the FY26 budget, the budget that has already been approved, if there is a successful bid, move or reallocate the use of those funds from road construction for the projects that were listed in the CIP to the downtown project.

In regard to the \$500,000 being added to road construction, it would be a placeholder contingent upon Council determining that the resulting tax impact is manageable after the downtown infrastructure projects have been reviewed.

Public Works Director Don Lussier addressed the Committee next. He stated staff had a few comments on the letter the City received from Mr. Kost, what he had suggested was the Portland Loo. He stated this is one of the options staff looked at. He referred to a slide from a presentation DPW staff gave to the Nashua City Council. The first option that Nashua looked at, and that Mr. Lussier stated he would not recommend, is a portable restroom trailer. He did not feel this would be aesthetically appropriate in the downtown. It is not a permanent facility, and the purchase cost is very low.

The next option is the Portland Loo. They are extremely durable, well built, and stainless steel.

They are cheaper than the self-cleaning option. The drawback is the maintenance requirements. The manufacturer's website recommends these units need to be cleaned two to five times per day in order to stay acceptable and hygienic. Mr. Lussier stated he had talked to the Facilities Director, Andy Bohannon, who indicated he does not have the staff that could visit this facility twice a day. In addition, how would this be managed on weekends when City staff are not available for cleaning. Mr. Lussier pointed out this is also an open-air facility. He noted to the vents, there is privacy, but an individual's legs will be visible. Because of the vents, wind will blow through it. They are designed to discourage loitering.

Mr. Lussier stated the option that staff recommend is a self-contained unit. This one is designed by Urban Blue. They are more expensive in the first instance, and the real advantage is that they are self-cleaning. There is a cleaning function that would clean the toilet after every user, and they have a series of jets that will flush any debris on the floor after every 10<sup>th</sup> use.

City will send someone on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to do a full cleaning, replenish the paper supplies, etc. The savings are in the long-term and relate to the operations and maintenance costs. Mr. Lussier stated the other thing he likes about this unit is that it is prefabricated concrete, it is robustly made, and is designed for durability. The electronics have time limits, so after 20 minutes it automatically unlocks itself. It will also send an alert to an official (Police, Public Works, or Parks and Rec.). He added there are many different aesthetic treatments. He referred to the one shown on the slide which is made up of aluminum planks on the top with a stone-like façade, which he felt would be aesthetically appealing for the downtown area. It is also heated.

Mr. Lussier next reviewed the costs. The trailer is the least inexpensive. The Portland Loo is about \$100,000 less than the Urban Blue self-cleaning unit. Both the Portland Loo and Urban Blue units would last about 20 years. The real difference is in the operating costs.

The bathroom trailer has an annual operating cost of almost \$43,000. The assumption is two, 1/2 hour visits each day from staff for maintenance, it could take longer as the smallest trailer unit is three bathrooms. Because it is pretty light-duty construction, a larger amount is budgeted for repairs annually (\$10,000 annually for repairs).

For the Portland Loo and Urban Loo - \$5,000 a year for repairs and maintenance costs. The cleaning expenses for the Portland Loo, which includes two one-hour visits each day for maintenance, Monday through Friday. For the Urban Blue, it is a one-hour visit three times a week for maintenance, Monday, Wednesday, Friday. The Portland Loo is actually a more expensive life cycle cost than the Urban Blue self-cleaning unit. Mr. Lussier added if the community decides to go the route of the Portland Loo because it is less expensive it would mean staffing would be required which would add an extra cost.

Mr. Lussier stated Mr. Kost had raised not in his letter but orally about proprietary parts for the Urban Blue. Mr. Lussier stated he did reach out to the manufacturer this week and they assured him everything in the mechanical room is standard off-the-shelf parts. The proprietary items are the toilet and the sink in the bathroom unit itself. They are constructed for their own specifications. They are precast concrete units that are wrapped with fiberglass to be easily cleaned. This concluded Mr. Lussier's comments.

Councilor Chadbourne felt Urban Blue makes the most sense, but has the highest price tag. She noted one of the other issues that occurred with the traditional bathroom were things being flushed down the toilet that should not be flushed down. She asked whether this could become an issue with this model. Mr. Lussier stated he has heard horror stories about things like sweatshirts ending up in the sewer system, but stated this was something they can handle.

Councilor Chalice asked whether staff has had the opportunity to check with other locations in New England where the Portland Loo is being used to find out how that option is working for them. Mr. Lussier stated he has not had the opportunity to reach out to these communities. The Councilor stated she was unconcerned about people using these toilets being cold, she felt this would be a positive thing; it is not the City's responsibility to make it comfortable for people to use the facilities just to provide a respectable place. She also did not feel one 24-hour bathroom downtown was enough. She indicated she has heard from constituents who have expressed concern that they have not had the opportunity to have public discussion on this issue. Councilor Chalice stated pending reviews from other communities she would vote for the Portland Loo and then a public process for something in the future.

Mr. Lussier noted, as has been mentioned, this is scheduled for 2028 and is likely not the last time this conversation will happen. He indicated in the CIP staff has identified a couple of viable options. If they choose the Portland Loo and can save some money on the construction project that would be something to consider.

Councilor Lake recalls discussing this issue four years ago when a discussion was brought forward about the homelessness issue. He recalled a portable bathroom installed on Gilbo Avenue at that time which did not last too long; Portland Loo was an option that was discussed which was around \$200,000 at that time. He stated the City has offered options and referred to the signs that have been installed directing the public to the Library and City Hall during daytime hours and agreed overnight and Sunday are the time slots that still need discussion. He stated the reviews he has done on Portland Loo has been positive and that is an option that is used across North America and Canada and have been in use for a number of years. They seem to hold up pretty good. He added many of those cities were also much bigger than Keene and have larger budgets dollars to spend. He added he is having a difficult time getting on board spending half a million dollars and not knowing what the construction costs are going to be in two years.

Councilor Roberts stated he has listened to this conversation many times and what he sees is a total lack of responsibility, accountability, and gratitude. Regardless of what the City has done there has been group of people who have found a way to compromise the system. As the City tries to get better and better, it costs more and more. He felt someone in the group is going to find a way to damage this and he does not believe this unit would be indestructible.

Councilor Chalice as a point of clarification stated she had heard on the radio a comment that Hundred Nights Shelter is open 24/7—she noted Hundred Nights closes at 6:00 PM. They were open for a short period of time when they were acting as a winter shelter 24/7 but they are not anymore.

Chair Powers clarified that he had heard during one of the discussions that the downtown bathroom construction might also be part of the electrical system from the pavilion. Mr. Lussier stated there have been discussions undertaken where staff had looked at ordering the structure with an extra-large utility space in order to put the electrical equipment for the solar array in that utility space just to keep it out of the elements. This is not a requirement and could be mounted in the under deck.

The Chair noted many people have been working on a downtown bathroom for many years with different ideas. He felt the bottom line is something needs to be done. He noted looking at the slides the cost is about the same. Blue Urban would cost \$286,000 not \$440,000 but it is the extra utilities that is going to add to the cost. The extra year is going to give Council time to review the cost.

Councilor Lake asked whether the plan is that this work would be aligned with existing work on Gilbo Avenue. Mr. Lussier stated there could be some savings by combining the two projects. He added because the solar pavilion project is federally-funded he was not quite sure of the timing but if everything goes well, it will work out great to start both projects late summer of 2027 (FY28).

Mr. Lussier next called the Committee's attention to Page 92—funding for the downtown with respect to roads; column for current available funds—if you compare this table in the previous version of the book, road preservation and rehab line was not in the previous version.

In FY27, the proposal is that the money that had been planned for regular road paving be used to complete road rehab as part of the downtown project. Staff is suggesting that the FY26 for paving be similarly reallocated to the downtown. There is however, an issue which Mr. Lussier went on to explain. The FY27 funds can be approved by Council as part of approving the CIP next week. However, the FY26 funds have already been approved to use, \$1.4 million for a specific list of roads. Hence, there will need to be a separate Council action to reallocate those funds to the downtown project.

Councilor Roberts stated he is not confident the City would receive the same bid for a project to start in two months. Mr. Lussier stated a war in the Middle East and a global disruption of the petroleum markets was not something he was anticipating when planning this project. He stated on April 16, 2026 the City would know what the answer is.

The Councilor felt it would be not just a yes or no with this project and perhaps further modification could be made to the project so as not to delay it by another year. The Manager stated anything is possible. Staff is always hopeful and optimistic, but won't know until the bids come in.

Councilor Lake raised concern about two full seasons of not doing major rehab. around the City. He asked for some added clarification of the plan for some of the streets. He referred to the section of Court Street to Route 9 and asked when this work was being planned for. City Engineer Bryan Ruoff stated this portion of roadway was planned for FY29. He added based on the condition, staff have been considering moving that work up with unspent funds. However,

with the reshuffling of the two years of planned road rehab. work, it made more sense to pull that forward, allowing the City to backfill with other roads that the City won't be able to complete as part of those two years. The Councilor stated roads in Keene are in extreme condition due to this winter and asked if the \$500,000 should be moved up or \$500,000 should be added into the budget. The Manager stated either one of those suggestions works and added staff would know more as they complete the operating budget.

Chair Powers asked whether the City is going to be able to undertake work on Court Street with everything else going on. Mr. Lussier stated engineering is putting together a contract to do this work in-house. He stated staff would have a better idea on April 16, 2026 about how to move forward.

Councilor Chadbourne stated she wanted to revisit the downtown bathroom. She went on to say that the hospital has a cutting gadget installed in their toilets to prevent items going down the toilets. Mr. Lussier stated that equipment like that does prevent maintenance of the system downstream but increases the need for regular maintenance; he stated he would look into it.

Councilor Lake stressed he would like to not see going two seasons without roadway work but would take the Director's advice and revisit this issue after April 16, 2026.

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

On a vote of 5 to 0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the adoption of the Capital Improvement Program for fiscal year 2027-2033.

#### **4) Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 6:54 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

Edits submitted by,  
Terri Hood, City Clerk and Kathleen Richards, Deputy City Clerk