

City of Keene
New Hampshire

FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, April 9, 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
Brandon Latham, Deputy City Attorney
Don Lussier, Public Works Director
Bryan Ruoff, City Engineer
Darcy Newport, Human Resources Director
Aaron Costa, Asst. Public Works Director /
Wastewater Treatment Plant Manager
Kurt Blomquist, Emergency Management
Administrator
Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Parks and Recreation
Director

Members Not Present:

All Present

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

1) Acceptance of Donation - Transportation Heritage Trail - Public Works Director

Public Works Director Don Lussier addressed the Committee first. Mr. Lussier stated he was before the Committee regarding a donation from the Monadnock Conservancy. He noted the Conservancy and Pathways for Keene have together been long-term sponsors of the City and benefactors of the City's trail network. Mr. Lussier noted this donation of \$20,000 and a prior donation from the Conservancy of \$12,000. He indicated work on the trail extension has already started.

Mr. Lussier introduced Amanda Littleton from the Monadnock Conservancy. Ms. Littleton thanked the City for the investment that it makes in public infrastructure, providing an opportunity for people to connect with nature, which she felt was a critical piece of what makes living in this region a good experience.

Mr. Lussier addressed the Committee again and stated due to the timing, staff could not bring forward another donation from Pathways for Keene who have indicated they will be making a similar donation.

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 accept a donation of \$20,000.00 from the Monadnock Conservancy and that the money be allocated for the Transportation Heritage Trail, Phase 1 (65M0008A).

The next item was moved up on the Agenda.

2) Relating to Chapter 30 - Emergency Management Ordinance O-2026-04

Emergency Management Administrator Kurt Blomquist addressed the Committee. Mr. Blomquist stated he was before the Committee to discuss an update to Chapter 30 of City Code; Emergency Management. Mr. Blomquist stated this chapter has not been updated in a while.

Definitions: Update was made to the definition “emergency event” – emergency events are not individually listed anymore. The focus today is on any kind of natural or human emergency event which would be a threat to the community, life safety, and the welfare of the community.

Definition of “emergency management” – definition is focusing on not just response, but everything from pre-planning, mitigation, response, and recovery, etc.

Definitions of “First Responders” - There are two areas for first responders. The first is the lead agencies, such as Fire, Police, EMS, Public Works, and Health. There are also now the support functions, for example the Finance Department who you would call in an emergency to see if there are funds to cover the emergency. This could also include Legal, Human Services, and Youth Services.

Intent and Purposes – Mr. Blomquist stated this has not changed – it has been updated to include safety and resiliency. It was updated to go along with RSA21:P-39 to keep with the State’s update to Homeland Security.

Suspension in Conflict of Ordinances – No Change – for instance during an event such as Covid, it would state if there are any existing ordinances of law – those are suspended for this period of time.

Violations – Straightforward – if someone violates it, they get a ticket.

Organization – This position has been under the City Manager’s office. This section clearly defines that and also defines the responsibilities of emergency management back to the Manager. It gives a little more definition of what the expectations are of the Emergency Management Director. He noted the big change in this area is under the Appointment; when RSA 21:P-39 was created it is actually the City Council who appoints the Emergency Management Director. The City Manager will recommend someone to be appointed as the Emergency Management Director to Council. It also allows for the continuation of assistance or other positions as the Manager works with the Emergency Management Director. Traditionally, there has been an Assistant Emergency Management Director. At the present time, Mike Hagan is the Assistant Emergency Management Director. Mr. Blomquist felt this was important because if the Emergency

Management Director is not available, by code the Assistant would take up the responsibility of Emergency Management Director. If there is no Emergency Management Director by law, it falls to the City Manager.

Updating the Powers of the City Manager – The City has included the charter code of ordinances and state law that provides the outline for Manager’s authority.

Regulations – The Manager has the authority to issue regulations. Mr. Blomquist noted the section has been updated as to how this message is conveyed. The Manager has authority to request support from surrounding communities. The State also gives her the authority to grant support to surrounding communities.

Mr. Blomquist added Section 60 outlines the responsibilities of the Emergency Management Director. He added his role is currently part time but in the future another department head is likely going to be assigned to this position.

Plans – During Covid the City updated its continuing operation plans. Mr. Blomquist stated he is currently in the process of revisiting those with the various departments. During emergencies, the City also has the authority to work with property owners for use of facilities within the City. The City also has an emergency notification system.

Development of a Basic Emergency Plan – This refers to the Emergency Management Director being responsible for providing this Plan, bringing it to Council for approval and keeping it updated.

Liability Section – This section has been updated to match what the State Law says. It outlines liability exemptions how volunteers in an emergency can be used by the City and how private property owners are exempt from liability as a result of their space being used for emergency purposes by the City. This concluded Mr. Blomquist’s presentation.

Councilor Chalice asked whether it is the City Manager who determines an emergency. Mr. Blomquist stated it could happen in number of different ways. A City department could make a request through the Manager or if the state or federal government determines an emergency. The Councilor asked when the Council could expect an updated local emergency plan. Mr. Blomquist stated he is working on this document and will be passing it on to the next person who takes over this position. The one the City has right now dates back to 2018 and he plans to have an updated plan by the end of next year.

The Manager stated the Emergency Management Director position is currently an assignment through a contract for part-time assistance with Mr. Blomquist. Staff will be coming up with plan and will have a recommendation to Council very soon.

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 adoption of Ordinance O-2026-04.

3) Execution of an Engineering Services Agreement for the Robin Hood Improvements Design Project - City Engineer & Parks and Recreation Director

City Engineer Bryan Ruoff and Parks and Recreation Director Carrah Fisk-Hennessey were the next two presenters. Mr. Ruoff stated they are before the Committee tonight to address the Robin Hood Park Improvement Project. He stated the project was advertised for a request for qualifications for engineering services in accordance with the grant funding that the City will be receiving for the project from the Land Water Conservation Fund. Mr. Ruoff stated the City received eight submissions, which were narrowed down to three consultants who were then interviewed. The consensus was from the selection committee to request a scope and fee proposal from CHA Consulting Services from Keene. He noted most of their staff is local and had a local understanding of Council goals and master plan goals which none of other consultants had.

Since the interview, CHA has met with staff on-site to fine-tune their scope. Staff is requesting Council approval to award that contract up to the amount of \$300,000.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated when staff met with CHA they were able to gather a lot of historical information about the pool. They were impressed with what the City has done so far with such aging infrastructure and buildings, and they also understood the entire scope of the project and what the City is looking for.

She stated phase one would be the pool renovation and phase two would be the rest of the park, to include the playground, additional parking and multi-sport court, a renovated public restroom area and the camp building.

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 that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to execute an agreement with CHA Consulting, Inc. for the Robin Hood Improvements Design Project for an amount not to exceed \$300,000.

4) Construction Services - Wastewater Treatment Plant Tank Repair Project Phase 1 - Assistant Public Works Director

Assistant Public Works Director/Wastewater Treatment Plant Manager Aaron Costa addressed the Committee next and stated he was before the Committee for approval to execute a sole source professional services contract with Weston and Sampson for construction phase services for the wastewater tank repair project in an amount not to exceed \$104,000.

Mr. Costa noted the City has worked with Weston and Sampson on a few projects, most recently the 3,000,000-gallon tank rehab project. This proposed project would be very similar in nature to the project they just completed. Weston and Sampson completed the design work for this wastewater tank repair project which includes coatings for the primary clarifier, steel

components, three concrete septic tank repairs, coating systems and repairs to the top of the sludge storage tank. Mr. Costa stated that because this contractor completed the design and bidding phase engineering for this project, staff are recommending that they also perform the construction phase services.

Mr. Costa went on to say that construction services for this type of project could get expensive because it is important when you are doing coding systems that you have a consultant there to monitor the preparation work of these structures' atmospheric conditions and to make sure that the coatings are applied correctly. Of the \$104,000, approximately \$56,000 is for the third-party inspector.

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 City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to negotiate and execute a sole-source professional services contract with Weston and Sampson Engineers, Inc., for construction-phase services for the WWTP Tank Repair Project - Phase 1 for an amount not to exceed \$104,000.00.

5) Execution of a Change Order for Construction Services for the City Hall Parking Garage Project - City Engineer

Mr. Ruoff stated this item is a request to execute a change order for construction phase services for the City Hall parking garage project. He stated this project was sent out about six weeks ago and the City has a good contractor on board. He stated the manner this project was bid was that there was base bid which was a bid for immediate need repairs and then alternates that were would "like to perform repairs". The base bid was only awarded for the reason that the alternates were added after the fact; after the City received competitive pricing which made sense to complete now. For instance, to replace the lights and construct a bar as you come into the under level of the garage which would warn cars of height limitation.

Since this is an increase of greater than 20%, that is why the request is before the Committee. This would be essentially adding back the same amount of contract work that was already going to be awarded and planned in the contract. He added furthermore, as part of the bidding the City included a lesser expensive but also less industrious traffic membrane material for the coating of the deck, which is about a \$20,000 cost to the project. This item is being removed from the project and replaced with a more industrial product, which is an epoxy traffic membrane that lasts about five times longer and is about three times the cost.

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 authorizing the City Manager to do all things necessary to negotiate and execute a contract change order with Structural Preservations Systems, LLC for an amount not to exceed \$120,000 for the City Hall Parking Garage Rehab Project (22M006AA).

6) Relating to Personnel Ordinance - O-2026-06

Human Resources Director Darcy Newport was the next speaker. Ms. Newport stated this Ordinance is relative to the insurance opt-out payment for Keene City employees who are not a part of a collective bargaining unit. She explained when an employee waives the City's health insurance, as an incentive the City gives them an opt out insurance payment provided, they have proof of alternative coverage. The City is requesting to increase that amount from \$3,500 to \$5,000 annually to be more aligned with what is happening with the collective bargaining agreements.

Councilor Chadbourne asked whether it was common or unusual for an employee to opt out of this choice. Ms. Newport stated it is not common, the City does not have a high participation rate, but the City does save a lot of money when somebody opts out. The hope here is that the City can make this change in time for open enrollment, which starts on May 1, 2026 to encourage more people to migrate off the plan. The Chair noted it is a common practice for businesses to offer this opt out incentive to employees. Ms. Newport agreed

Councilor Roberts stated the School Board increased their amount to \$7,000 per person because a family plan is \$26,000 and \$7,000 is a good investment. Ms. Newport noted if the City can get one person to migrate off the plan, it would more than offset the increase in the payout.

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 adoption of Ordinance O-2026-06.

7) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair adjourned the meeting at 6:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

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