

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

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

**Thursday, May 19, 2026**

**6:00 PM**

**Council Chambers,  
City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Thomas F. Powers, Chair  
 Bryan J. Lake  
 Michele A. Chalice

**Jay V. Kahn, Mayor**

**Members Not Present:**

Bettina A. Chadbourne, Vice Chair  
 Kris E. Roberts

**Staff Present:**

Elizabeth A. Ferland, City Manager  
 Kari Chamberlain, Finance Director  
 Rebecca Landry, Asst. City Manager  
 Don Lussier, Public Works Director  
 Bryan Ruoff, City Engineer  
 Jim Mountford, Assistant Public Works  
 Director  
 Mitchell Smith, Highway Operations Manager  
 Aaron Costa, Assistant Public Works Director/  
 Wastewater Treatment Plant Manager  
 Andrew Keyser, Laboratory Manager  
 Benjamin Crowder, Water and Sewer  
 Operations Manager  
 Christian Tarr, Utilities Maintenance Manager  
 Ben Hoy, Solid Waste Manager

Chair Powers called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM.

**1. Public Works (pages 165–170)**

Public Works Director Don Lussier addressed the Committee. Mr. Lussier stated he would be reviewing all divisions within Public Works, including administration, engineering, highway, solid waste, water, sewer, utilities, and fleet services. Together, these divisions represent an annual operating budget of about \$32.6 million. He stated he would like to address some of the long-term trends and challenges facing the Public Works community. Mr. Lussier stated last year he had raised concern about recruiting qualified staff, but this year he is pleased to report staff has made a tremendous amount of progress filling vacant positions. Last year in June they had 17 vacancies. Today the department is down to four vacant positions. Mr. Lussier commended Highway Operations Manager Mitchell Smith and his team as well as Mark Allen, Jeff Davis, and Cam LaPointe who went through a tedious process of registering Public Works as an official training provider under the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, which allows the department to complete CDL training in-house. In the past, the City relied on third-party vendors who charged significant training costs. Doing this training in-house gives the department the opportunity to find qualified young employees and grow them into positions with more responsibility.

Unfortunately, a trend that continues is that the department continues to see some experienced mid-career employees leaving to pursue opportunities with other municipalities. Mr. Lussier stated he is continuing to work with the City Manager and the HR Director to improve the City's ability to retain those employees.

Regulatory Environment: Mr. Lussier reminded the Committee last year he talked about regulations and the changing regulatory environment. He stated the Assistant Public Works Director Aaron Costa provided Mr. Lussier with an application to renew the wastewater treatment plants discharge permit, which expires in November 2026. Mr. Lussier stated the City could anticipate the discharge limits will only become more stringent and any significant changes in the current permitting requirements are likely to require additional treatment processes, not just operational improvements. These additional requirements could call for new processes and significant plant upgrades.

Mr. Lussier next addressed costs. He talked about the issue of fuel prices. He noted the fleet services budget was built assuming a \$4.00 per gallon average cost between diesel and gasoline, which seemed like a conservative estimate in December 2025 but in May 2026 that cost is much higher.

Mr. Lussier stated the budget staff will be reviewing tonight reflects efforts to minimize the burden on tax and ratepayers, while ensuring that the City's infrastructure systems and the department operations meet community needs.

For the sewer fund the total supplemental request is 2.75% of their operating budget for the year. The water fund is 3.71%, equipment fund 0.05%, and the general fund is an increase of 1.8%.

Councilor Chalice asked for added clarification on the issue Mr. Lussier addressed regarding the CDL license. Mr. Lussier stated the motor equipment operator position requires someone to have a CDL license as part of his or her job, which can be expensive.

Administrative: Ms. Lussier stated the administration division, which is essentially the public face of Public Works. It is the office manager and administrative assistant. He indicated there is a part-time administrative assistant position that was recently added; transfer from revenue collection to Public Works for the position of Utility Billing Clerk. He added personnel budget for administrative has a significant decrease from last year \$670,000 to \$472,000. He added this is realigning of positions. The Infrastructure Project Manager used to be part of the administration team. That position is now under the City Engineer, since they really oversee all of the Capital Projects.

The other change is Public Works Director Duncan Watson used to bill a portion of his time to administrative. The new Assistant Public Works Director is split between general fund, fleet services, and solid waste. He added it is no real change to the budget. It is moving where the money is accounted for.

Engineering: City Engineer Bryan Ruoff addressed the Committee next. Mr. Ruoff stated his team consist of six employees, City Engineer, Assistant City Engineer, which is a new position, two Civil Engineer Project Managers, Infrastructure Project Manager, Public Works Administrative Assistant, and Engineer Technician. He indicated an intern, usually college or high school age also assists the department with record keeping etc. and one inspector for construction operations. He added currently the Engineer Technician position is not staffed by a full time employee. There are two temporary employees filling that role. He is optimistic in FY27 they will be fully staffed, especially with the many projects they have both in construction and finalizing the design for the downtown project.

Mr. Ruoff went on to say in the personnel budget the only changes he is requesting as part of the operation budget and as the Director alluded to, is the Infrastructure Project Manager will now be funded through the engineering budget. The two civil engineer project managers are funded through the CIP projects that they manage; one is a Highway and Sidewalk Engineer and the other is the Water/Sewer Expert. The Engineer Technician is billed through the Sewer Fund because most of that work has to do with sewer permits.

From an operating budget standpoint, Mr. Ruoff stated they are not asking for any supplemental items and are consistent with last year's budget with the exception of the slight increase for the Fleet.

Mayor Kahn referred to the asphalt sidewalk overlay that was brought forward as a major initiative last year. He said the City completed close to 12,000 square feet of asphalt, but this is projected to be significantly less in the coming year, 3,000 square feet. He asked what the intention is for the coming year. Mr. Lussier stated the Highway team overachieved the goal last year, but there are other programs they are looking to address, for example, concrete sidewalks which are historically sealed with a sealant upon construction. This sealant is good for about a five-year service life. One of the things the highway team will be starting on this spring and on a rotational basis is resealing concrete sidewalks.

Highway and Fleet: Jim Mountford Assistant Public Works Director and Mitchell Smith Highway Operations Manager were the next two speakers. Mr. Smith stated their FY27 budget is mostly unchanged from the FY26 budget. The only supplemental request is for street light repair replacement. Last year, nearly 50 lights were nonfunctional, and the cost is around \$500.00 per light. The request is for \$75,000 supplemental.

He reiterated in FY26 his division as was mentioned by the Public Works Director went a little above and beyond. Sidewalk sealant started last, which will start again this year when the warmer weather arrives. Roadside mowing and tax ditch mowing was also addressed.

Mr. Lussier clarified the supplemental for sidewalk sealing was actually included in last year's budget, which is why they were able to purchase the materials last fall and get started. He added in the highway division there is also a supplemental for street tree planting – additional \$30,000 which he noted is a significant increase. He added street trees are what the community likes and this would increase the plantings from two to three per year to say 20 to 30 per year.

Councilor Powers asked whether the City stills indicates the location of drains with painting of “fish” symbols. Mr. Smith stated this is on the radar to restart.

Councilor Haas stated he was happy to hear about street trees and asked if there could be a presentation as to how trees are selected, how locations are chosen, etc.

Councilor Chalice reminded staff that they had promised to provide a list of the types of trees that are being proposed. She stated she is hoping for a variety and a certain number of native trees as well as a reduction in the caliper size to 2.5 inches so the trees would be more viable. Mr. Smith stated they are usually between 2 to 2.5 inches.

2. **Sewer Fund (pages 214–221)**
3. **Water Fund (pages 228–236)**

The next speakers were Aaron Costa, Assistant Public Works Director/Wastewater Treatment Plant Manager, Andrew Keyser, Laboratory Manager, Benjamin Crowder, Water and Sewer Operations Manager, and Christian Tarr, Utilities Maintenance Manager.

Mr. Costa stated the Water and Sewer Funds are Enterprise Funds and they are financed by user fees. There are approximately 6,200 connections. Additionally, the sewer also serves portions of Marlborough, and the water and sewer also serve portions of Swanzey. Those towns are billed by the City in accordance with the terms of an agreement with the City.

On the Solid Waste side, wastewater is transported from your home or business to the Wastewater plant, where it is treated and then discharged back to the Ashuelot River. Both the water system and the wastewater systems operate 24/7, 365 days of the year. Staff work extremely hard to provide these services and maintain our facilities to the best they can and are proud of these facilities.

Mr. Costa went on to say that they are requesting \$235,800 in supplemental request in the Sewer Fund which is an increase of 2.75%. Some of these requests are a one-time expenditure, \$120,000 would the base moving forward.

In Water, \$238,500 in supplemental in the sewer fund which is a 3.71% increase in the budget, of which, again, there is someone time expenses, but about \$80,000 will be part of the base moving forward.

4. **Solid Waste Fund (pages 201–206)**

Solid Waste Manager Ben Hoy and Assistant Public Works Director Jim Mountford addressed the Committee next. Mr. Hoy stated the City of Keene Transfer Station operates a 30-year-old business model that is funded entirely outside of property tax revenue. The Keene transfer station is supported by disposal fees charged at the facility, as well as revenue from the sale of recycling commodities. Staff is bailing, shipping and ultimately selling 5,000 tons of recyclables per year.

There is \$2,000,000 in Solid Waste Funds. The site is in year 27 of a required 30-year closed landfill monitoring commitment through NHDES, staff is monitoring for PFAS requirements. The original requirement was 70 parts per trillion. NHDES has evolved that into 12 parts per trillion for detection limit. Staff will be monitoring this throughout the 30-year commitment. The department is managing 24 household hazardous waste events throughout the year and serve dozens of local communities. Mr. Hoy noted Keene is a hub for recycling and a hub for waste management.

Mr. Hoy indicated they are experiencing increased fuel costs; trucking costs have gone up in price but the current financial structure and business model provides for ample support to level fund the budget in the new fiscal year.

The Keene Transfer Station is asking for \$6,789,039 for the operating budget in FY27.

Councilor Chalice asked about the PFAS monitoring and asked whether Mr. Hoy feels Keene has a handle on this. Mr. Hoy stated Keene works closely with a company called Envirotrac which monitors Keene water as well as the landfill operations on a monthly basis. They provide ample support and service to keep track of PFAS and make sure that Keene is doing all it can to limit any PFAS leeching into water supplies that surround the facility. So far, Keene has not seen anything go over the required limits NHDES has set forth.

The Mayor complimented the Solid Waste operation. He asked for clarification of reserves and a plan that not just maintains but looks to the future – minimizing the amount of hauling out of the area. Mr. Hoy agreed and added he recently attended a New Hampshire Recycles Conference and learned important information from compost vendors. He indicated compost represents 48% of our waste. If the City can address this issue, and can work with the right people, we can use compost to heat our buildings. He added there are CIP articles coming up in the near future addressing compost. Compost is certainly something the City is looking hard at and felt the City should encourage addressing the waste issue; produce less waste and use what we can to keep things out of the waste stream.

##### **5. Equipment Fund (Fleet) (pages 242–245)**

Mr. Mountford addressed the topic of Fleet. He stated the Fleet Services has 164 vehicles which they rents to all divisions within the City. Fleet Services does not own fire engines and ladders, but they do own staff cars and ambulances, as well as a few items at the airport.

Four mechanics work on 266 vehicles, but there are seven mechanics in total for the department.

Mr. Mountford stated they are asking for small increases in this budget. This winter was difficult and the department used more fuel than they have in years past. They have a 20,000 gallon tank and in past years during this time of the year there has been 10,000 gallons left in the ground but this year they are down to 6,000 gallons.

Councilor Chalice addressed the repairs line and clarified she has heard during past presentations that staff strives to repair equipment as much as possible and keep it well-maintained rather than

purchase. She stated she would be glad to approve the \$10,000 request. Mr. Mountford talked about a recent repair to a sidewalk tractor, which would have been a cost of \$165,000 to replace, but staff was able to fix it for \$5,000.

Mr. Lussier stated on Thursday night, June 4, 2026, the Council would have a first reading on an Ordinance on the Water and Sewer utility rates. Staff is proposing a 5% increase on most Water and Sewer Fees as part of the Operating Budget. He indicated the last time these rates were updated was in 2022 and over that period of time the City's costs have gone up around 15%. He stated his goal every year with the Operating Budget is to have a small incremental increases to the rates so customers don't see a dramatic jump. It is likely to remain 5% for a couple more years to get caught up with that 15% the City hadn't increased in the past 3 to 4 years.

Chair Powers thanked staff for their efforts with this budget.

Councilor Chalice asked whether there could be some sort of press release that sent out to let the public know the City is playing catch-up for not raising rates in a while. Asst. City Manager Rebecca Landry stated in the last couple years, the City has included information in the utility bills. She felt this is a good way to get that information out.

The Mayor talked about the infrastructure the City needs to maintain and grow and these are things the City needs the departments to address.

## **6. Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 6:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,  
Kathleen Richards, Deputy City Clerk