

**City of Keene  
New Hampshire**

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

**Thursday, June 25, 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  
Paul Andrus, Community Development  
Director  
Jason Martin, Fire Chief  
Daniel Langille, City Assessor

**Members Not Present:**

*All Present*

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

**1. Acceptance of Donation - Sustainability - Assistant Planner**

Community Development Director, Paul Andrus addressed the Board. Mr. Andrus stated this item is in relation to the Assistant Planner position with sustainability emphasis that Council approved via the budget. This request is to authorize the City to accept the donation that has been put forward to fill the funding gap for three consecutive years at \$25,000 per year.

Councilor Chalice commended staff's work on this item.

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 \$25,000 per year in aggregate for three years beginning in fiscal year 2026-27 from various donors, and that the money is allocated to fund a portion of the annual salary of the Assistant Planner – Sustainability position in the Community Development Department (CDD).

**2. Update on FY26 Fire Department Budget - Fire Chief**

Fire Chief Jason Martin addressed the Committee next and stated this item is an informational update on the Fire Department's FY26 budget. He stated his department budget is separated into two sections; operating and personnel.

On the operating side, the department is projected to be in the positive by \$115,000. On the personnel side, the department is projected to be over budget by approximately \$400,000, which makes the net overage of \$285,000. The Chief stated he would be working with the Finance Department at the end of the fiscal year to look at other areas of the budget where monies could be reallocated.

Chief Martin went on to explain why the personnel line is over budget. The personnel budget has different line items: vacation replacement, sick replacement, personnel replacement – he added there are other line items under personnel, but the ones listed here are the line items that make the difference and cause them to be overbudget.

The Chief stated there is also a line referred to as supplemental replacement. This line item is used for anything other than vacation, sick, or personnel. This line item covers any open slots due to employees attending EMT or firefighter class, vacancies due to retirements and resignations. This year supplemental replacement was over budget by \$323,932. This is mainly driven by the shift vacancies. The Chief noted the budget would see an offset with the new firefighters being hired in July.

The second largest line item that is over budget this year is sick time. This line item is over budget \$319,000. This line is used for sick time, injury leave, and FMLA. his area will also see an offset with the new firefighters starting in July.

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 update on the Fire Department FY26 Operating budget be accepted as informational.

### **3. Property Tax Exemptions and Credits Review - City Assessor**

City Assessor Dan Langille was the next speaker. Mr. Langille stated the City is in the process of going through a revaluation. During a revaluation the City also reviews the exemptions and credits offered to property owners of Keene. This item is in reference to those exemptions and credits. He explained exemptions are a direct reduction in the assessed value of a property and credits are a deduction in the overall tax bill.

Mr. Langille explained he has outlined for the Committee what every other town surrounding Keene is offering as a comparison. However, what is not known is where those towns are in the revaluation cycle.

He stated even though the revaluation has not been completed, staff has an idea where the residential market is going and what kind of increases they are going to be seeing. The City is at an average of a 60% increase on the residential market. Some properties will be higher and some lower. He stated they are concerned with the lower end of the market which will see a greater increase than even the higher market, because of the demand that is out there.

He stated they are still working on the commercial side but are not expecting the same amount of increase there. He explained the reason he is bringing this up is to let the Committee know that they need to consider this when reviewing credits and exemptions. When someone gets an exemption or a credit, someone else has to pick that up. Those dollars still have to be accrued by the City, as the budget doesn't change.

The exemptions the City offers are for deaf, blind, elderly, disabled, solar, and wood. He stated staff is recommending about a 65% increase, and this is to keep people where they are currently; if the value increases the exemption increases, and hopefully that keeps them whole.

He noted the handout and explained the elderly 3 category is highlighted orange as that is slightly higher. The reason for this is as people age you can start to see more medical concerns, more difficulties taking care of properties, etc. He stated if the committee is going to provide a greater exemption, staff's recommendation would be to apply it to this category.

The total proposed exemptions is an increase of about eight million in value.

As far as the solar goes, this is a large amount that is exempted. If someone adds \$20,000 worth of solar to their property, they get an exemption for it and that nets it out. Even though the number is big, it does not have the same necessary impact as the elderly or disabled exemptions. Mr. Langille explained the law has changed for solar installations. When Keene first adopted the solar exemption, it was only for a solar that was attached directly to a building. It is now eligible for net metering. He stated staff is recommending that the Council readopt the solar exemption.

With respect to deaf, elderly, and disabled, they all have income and asset limitations. They have certain qualifications. Just because you are a certain age doesn't necessarily mean you qualify. He indicated staff looked at averages and the medians for single and married within the county. Cost of living for the average social security amount in New Hampshire over the five years was also reviewed. He added the last time this issue was reviewed was in 2021. The average cost of living is about 25%. Hence, a 25% increase would make sense with married seeing a slightly higher increase.

With reference to credits, Mr. Langille stated there is no requirement for income and asset limits. The credits the City offers are for veteran and all veteran. The difference between the two, is that all veteran did not have to serve active duty during a wartime. This number gets smaller each year the country has not been in wartime for a number of years.

Surviving Spouse – This credit is for a veteran who died during combat. Keene has one.

Mr. Langille noted the surviving spouse credit is already maxed out, so that cannot be increased anymore.

Disabled Veteran – For someone who is totally and permanently disabled as determined by the Veterans Administration. These are not qualifications made by staff. The City receives a letter from the Veterans Administration.

The disabled veteran – during a prior discussion there was some interest in bringing that number up to the maximum of \$4,500.

Councilor Chadbourne asked whether deaf and blind are combined for exemptions. Mr. Langille stated blind does not have income and asset limitations according to state statute. The Councilor asked whether staff has compared these numbers with Portsmouth or Concord. Mr. Langille stated these cities are a completely different market. What someone makes in Portsmouth and the value of a home in Portsmouth is very different compared to Keene. However, surrounding areas of Keene have similar income levels, similar job opportunities, and values seem to be closer.

Councilor Lake clarified on the exemption amounts the tax impact change would be negligible given that the values of the properties will increase and therefore if we just increase the exemption, it would be an offset and not a tax impact necessarily as opposed to the credits. Mr. Langille agreed.

The Councilor asked with reference to veterans credit there is an option that is available that Keene currently does not use; combat service credit- this would be for current active duty members. Mr. Langille stated he would need to look into this.

Ms. Langille added the disabled veteran – they are completely exempt for the total value of the property. You have to be a double amputee, and the house has to be full funded through the Veterans Administration to be eligible.

Councilor Chalice asked as Mr. Langille had previously stated the assumption after the revaluation the residential market would increase by 60% but if it is not 60%, does the City have the ability to adjust what is being discussed tonight. Mr. Langille answered in the affirmative.

Councilor Chalice asked whether there were income limits for elderly exemptions. Mr. Langille answered in the affirmative and added that there is an income level that someone needs to meet to be able to get the exemption; they have to apply and provide proper documentation.

The Committee next reviewed each exemption amongst themselves.

Councilor Roberts reminded the Committee of his conflict was recused from the discussion related to veteran's credits.

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 direct staff to draft resolutions for the following exemptions and credits with the following amounts:

- Deaf severely hearing impaired exemption, \$55,000
- Blind exemption, \$30,000
- Elderly exemption 65 years to 75 years old, \$55,000
- Elderly exemption for 75 to 79 years old, \$75,000
- Elderly exemption 80 years plus, \$100,000

- Disabled exemption, \$55,000
- Income limits for the deaf, elderly, disabled exemptions for single, \$40,000 and married, \$60,000
- Asset limits for the deaf, elderly, disabled exemptions single, \$75,000 and married, \$110,000, and also
- Readopt the solar exemption

Councilor Chalice asked about asset limits for veteran credit. Mr. Langille stated veteran credits do not have an asset limit and this is by law.

Councilor Lake noted there is an additional veteran credit under RSA 72:28C, optional tax credit for combat service - currently in active duty. It can be anywhere from \$50 to \$500.

There are other municipalities in New Hampshire that offer this, and is not something Keene offers and would be something worthwhile offering.

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

On a vote of 4 to 0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager direct staff to draft resolutions for the following exemptions and credits with the following amounts:

- Optional veterans credit \$450
- All veterans credit \$450
- Service connected disabled veteran credit \$4,500

Councilor Roberts abstained from the vote.

Councilor Lake amended the motion to include a Resolution for RSA 72:28C – optional tax credit for combat service. The amendment was seconded by Councilor Chalice.

On a vote of 4 to 0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends amending the motion to include a Resolution for RSA 72:28C – optional tax credit for combat service. Councilor Roberts abstained from the vote.

There being no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 6:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,  
Terri Hood, City Clerk and Kathleen Richards, Deputy City Clerk