

City of Keene
New Hampshire

PLANNING, LICENSES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, July 8, 2026

6:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Philip M. Jones, Vice Chair
Robert C. Williams
Edward J. Haas
Laura E. Ruttle-Miller

Jay V. Kahn, Mayor

Staff Present:

Rebecca Landry, Deputy City Manager
Amanda Palmeira, City Attorney
Brandon Latham, Deputy City Attorney
Paul Andrus, Community Development
Director
Terri Hood, City Clerk

Members Not Present:

Randy L. Filiault, Chair

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

- 1. Let It Shine - Request for Use of City Property - Keene Pumpkin Festival - October 17, 2026**
 - a. Staff Report/Safety Protocol Team - Keene Pumpkin Festival - City Clerk**

Vice Chair Jones welcomed Chairman of the Board of Let It Shine, Michael Giacomo (of 615 Hurricane Road), and Board Member, Michael Remy (of Castle Street).

Mr. Giacomo said they were present to request the use of City property for the Pumpkin Festival this year. They had been working through the Protocol Committee meetings (three or four) and unlike previous years, Protocol made a lot of changes as expected because of the downtown construction project. They felt pretty good that it was already early July and they had a good footprint nailed down and were working on it with a couple of final property owners to solidify some parking lots. The major changes include not using Central Square as that will be the hub of construction, so the footprint of the Festival made up for that lost space as much as possible by extending to the far end of Railroad Square and all that green space that is available for pumpkin carving and family-style events. Mr. Giacomo said they were currently working on some other designs, and the footprints were not completely finalized; they would be sent to the City as for the Fire Department to review them. The top end of the footprint will be the construction zone, just south of the flagpole. They planned to have a three-stage design this year because they want to pull people out of Railroad Square and into all the other businesses downtown. So, they would be putting one main stage as far north as they can, probably in front of Birdies to try to draw people towards the construction. There would be a singer-songwriter stage at the far south end of the footprint near Keene Axe House. The local performance stage—which will be dance troops,

jump roping, and MMA skills show off, etc.—would take place on Gilbo Avenue. Mr. Remy said the big part of that is really spreading everyone out of Railroad Square; Central Square is always very dense during Pumpkin Festival given the location of the tower and Railroad Square is much smaller, so they do not want to pull everyone into that one spot. Hence, the activities spread throughout downtown. Mr. Giacomo said that in 2025 he had some fun with Excel and basically plotted the population density in eight different segments of the whole Festival on intervals throughout the Festival to see how the population density changed. They found that some areas are not as full as they would like, and they hoped to help solve that.

Mr. Giacomo said the final thing they were still working on securing was the parking lot on Cypress Street. There are three property owners who share that lot and the organizers were working through contracts to finalize that. The area will be for kids' games and crafts, so it will be relatively close for walkers from Railroad Square. He said the kids' pumpkins would be in virtually the same location as the past few years in the median down the middle of Main Street. They were working on pushing the shutdown time for Main Street a few hours later because the vendors really did not need four hours in the morning to be waiting for people to show up. So, they would be shrinking the setup time and hopefully saving some money on City services. He said they were looking to change the closure of Cypress Street as well, so rather than being the closure of Cypress and Main Streets the closure would be at Cypress essentially just north of the EV charging station at the Monadnock Food Co-Op. The Spectrum lot would remain open and the lots north of that would be closed except for Co-Op truck traffic in the early morning.

Mr. Giacomo concluded by reporting that in 2025, the Festival polls showed that between nonprofits, the Festival raised about \$45,000; the total impact for the craft vendors and downtown businesses is impossible to measure but in the hundreds of thousands. They still believe it to be a really net-positive event for the City and the City's approval of it is always appreciated. Mr. Remy added that they were not expecting any major changes and fundraising was going well as far as getting sponsorships, but they could always use more to help to put up the expensive tower.

Vice Chair Jones asked for the location of the private lot on Cypress Street. Mr. Remy said that was still under negotiations. It is a parking lot behind Black Cloud Brewing and Clark-Mortenson. Vice Chair Jones said he was thinking about a different one.

Councilor Haas asked for the tower height and footprint. Mr. Giacomo said it would be narrower than the previous two years. The past two years it was 77 segments wide and seven bays wide, with each bay being eight feet. This year would be 40 feet wide vs. 56 feet wide but the same height as the past two years. The other change is they are adding more scaffolding on the back of the tower this year to display pumpkins facing backwards because there will be so much activity without the benefit of trees and a giant statue in the way (i.e., on Central Square), so it will be a lot more visible. They were trying to work on another unique feature but needed to get the engineering drawings. Councilor Haas loved the idea of the tower being visible from both sides. He said the organizers mentioned counting the crowd in 2025 and asked how they did that. Mr. Giacomo said he has a really good board and committee that did all the things they needed to do during the Festival, so that he could walk up and down the street literally with a cell phone, counting one by one or five by five; he used the GIS system to map the square footage of each

area segment and did a block-by-block count of all the people who were there at all the intervals throughout the Festival. In 2025, his calculations totaled about 17,000 people, which they felt was relatively accurate.

Vice Chair Jones asked if the Festival would still be working with nonprofit vendors or whether that had changed with the footprint. Mr. Giacomo said the only thing that had really changed was losing some circumference to work with, but in the past the nonprofits were spaced pretty wide. So, he said they had some ability to compress their footprint and also to use Cypress Street to extend their space, whereas historically they had only gone down Main Street. They were still determining the exact number of nonprofits they could support. There were 14 applicants at this time and they did not want to turn anyone down, in addition to 40 to 50 craft vendor applicants (usually limited to 20 to 25 but they should fit still).

Vice Chair Jones requested staff comments. Community Development Director Paul Andrus did not have anything to add from the Protocol meetings that was not already reported. Deputy City Manager Rebecca Landry added that Police, Fire, and Public Works Departments all come to the Protocol meetings and this is one of the biggest events of the year, if not the biggest. They had worked out with the veteran organizers where all the barricades need to go, how many staff need to be present for how many hours, etc. So, she said staff felt confident that things were moving in a good direction. Councilor Jones noted that community event status was approved for this Festival so it would be receiving City services.

Vice Chair Jones opened the floor to public comments.

Mayor Jay Kahn (of 17 Mountain View Drive) first applauded the organizers of this event, stating we are really fortunate to have their leadership, managerial skills, and experience in planning for this event. Mayor Kahn hoped the Committee would approve this event. He asked a question about dogs at public events given a later agenda item about that topic. As the Mayor understood, the Pumpkin Festival is the only event that has a condition that prohibits animals on leashes. While Mayor Kahn hoped Mr. Giacomo and Mr. Remy could return and speak to Councilor Filiault's later agenda item when he is present, the Mayor wondered if the Chair would allow the petitioners to discuss how well that prohibition works for their event. The Mayor knew he personally brought a dog to the event once and called it a horrible mistake because there were crowds and the dog panicked bumping into people; he said it was not a great scene. So, he appreciates this condition for this Festival but wanted to know how well it works. Vice Chair Jones said he was glad it was already addressed with the Pumpkin Festival. Mr. Remy said that in 2025, he was the person who had to enforce the regulation during the Festival, and he does not plan to ever try that again: he was screamed at by so many people, and someone shredded the Ordinance in his face. He said the Festival tries to communicate ahead of time that dogs are not allowed at the event per City Ordinance, but he said people do not care. He said it is not that the event does not like dogs, but it is hard to have them at the event. Additionally, it is really hard for it to be the event organizers' responsibility to enforce that Ordinance during the event, telling people they must leave and take their pets home, sometimes when they have traveled long distances. They even had the conversation with other City Councilors in the past. Councilor Jones said that was information the Committee did not know. He thought it spoke to

what the Mayor asked about getting the organizers' input when Councilor Filiault's petition about dogs/events returns before the Committee.

Mr. Giacomo continued, stating that the Let It Shine Board likes to keep a smiling face for the public as a Festival; the City makes a better "boogeyman." It is a lot easier in this case to be able to point to a City Ordinance and say it was not the Festival's choice; it is City law. When they ran the first Taste of Keene Food Festival, they learned that the Ordinance only prohibits dogs at Pumpkin Festival. He said it is a problem and he has seen dog fights at two festivals now. He added that it is dangerous for dogs out there during summer festivals on hot pavement and in big crowds that can make dogs anxious or where other dogs may not be friendly. From their perspective, it is good to be able to just say "it is the law, please obey it," vs. making up their own Festival rules. He thought the other festivals would appreciate it as well. Vice Chair Jones said the Pumpkin Festival had always tried to be proactive by listing the prohibition in their advertisements. Mr. Remy said that all the festivals do. He did not want to confuse his dislike of enforcing it himself with his support of the Ordinance and prohibition of dogs at festivals. He said having the Ordinance is a great backup, but he does not want to be the enforcement police either.

Councilor Ruttle-Miller said that as someone who is obsessed with their dog, she felt like she had a leg to stand on when stating she thinks it is pretty inappropriate for people to bring dogs to festivals unless they are service dogs. She said we all love to assume the best of our animals, but it is a lot to put on them. She feels like we have unnaturally high expectations for our dogs a lot of times that we would not expect for people to have to put up with when they are in a crowd of thousands like that. She went to a Farmers' Market last summer and that had a sign at the front "no dogs beyond this point" because of the way it was funneled onto a side street. She wondered if having signs at the front and along the barriers of the footprint of the Festival that said "no dogs allowed past this point" would help, so that police officers could point to them. Mr. Remy said he thought it could help and he would be happy to try, but there are so many entry points to the footprint that it would be impossible to catch them all. Still, having signs at the major entry points might be helpful. Councilor Ruttle-Miller thought about trying to bolster something specific. She added that some people do not pay attention to signs. Mr. Remy noted that the City Communications team may be able to help push the message, reminding people that no dogs are allowed at the event. Vice Chair Jones said to discuss it at upcoming Protocol meetings.

Andrew Madison (of 178 Elm Street) is a dog owner too and said unfortunately there are a lot of people out there who maybe should not have dogs, who do not train their dogs properly, who do not behave properly with their dogs, and who do not take responsibility for their dogs. He said the City does have rules and laws to enforce that. He thinks it is really incumbent upon the City and the City's law enforcement to enforce those rules rather than event planners. He said that unfortunately, no matter how many signs you put up, no matter how many messages you get out on social media, there are going to be a hand full of people who disobey. He cited people disobeying speed limit signs all the time, himself included. So, he encouraged the City's Protocol discussions not to put the onus of enforcing rules regarding dogs at events on the event planners and really have it stay with the City of Keene because we do have people who are paid to enforce laws, and it should really be with event organizers.

Councilor Ruttle-Miller checked the website for this year, noting that there is a Keene, Ontario, Canada, which has a competing pumpkin festival the same weekend this year. Mr. Giacomo said they are delightful people and he had a good phone call with them; their nearest large town is also called Peterborough. It almost felt like another sister City situation to Councilor Ruttle-Miller.

The following motion by Councilor Williams was duly seconded by Councilor Haas.

On a vote of 4 to 0, the Planning, Licenses and Development Committee recommends that the City Council grant a revocable license to Let It Shine to use downtown City rights-of-way to conduct the Keene Pumpkin Festival on Saturday, October 17, 2026, subject to the licensing requirements identified in the staff report, including associated road closures and authorization of free parking. All permissions granted herein are subject to compliance with the City-approved safety protocol document, which becomes a part of this license.

2. Councilor Ruttle-Miller - Request to Reinstate the College City Commission

Vice Chair Jones welcomed comments from Councilor Laura Ruttle-Miller. Councilor Ruttle-Miller thought most people were aware of a few recent articles and some information over the past eight months regarding issues and contention within the University System; specifically, Keene State College and what may come of its future. She did not restate everything in her letter, but said she essentially wanted to bring it up as a topic to talk about what the City can do to partner with the Citizens for Keene State College group that was putting a lot of effort into helping the College. Councilor Ruttle-Miller wanted to ensure the City remains in the efforts and trenches with everyone.

Councilor Haas asked what the College City Commission might actually do and the difference between a Committee and Commission. He asked what kind of resources would go into this Commission the minute it is appointed: suddenly it must have public meetings, room reservations, etc. He was trying to understand the difference between the Commission and interaction with the Citizens for Keene State College group that already exists. Vice Chair Jones stated some things because he was already appointed to the dormant College City Commission (CCC). He said it was a great Committee that accomplished a lot of things and there was still a list of things they wanted to achieve. He became Chair in the middle of Covid and there were never meetings due to two reasons: (1) on the College side, all the department head members who were working on campus had a hard time meeting at the City where the hardware is for City Minute Takers, and (2) some members of the College did not understand compliance with RSA 91-A and that they could not have meetings without notifying the City. Those issues made it hard for the Commission to continue at the time. Vice Chair Jones would like to see it continue but was unsure those issues could be overcome.

The City Attorney replied to Councilor Haas. First, City Attorney Palmeira's understanding was that Citizens for Keene State College is a non-governmental group that exists outside of the City Council and Keene City government. It is not like one of the boards or commissions that would be otherwise formed at the City, with members appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council process. As Vice Chair Jones explained, RSA 91-A very much applies to those

City-formed committees, which require Minute Takers, have quorum restrictions on members having discussions outside of public meetings, etc. However, Citizens for Keene State College were not formed by a government entity, so those restrictions do not apply. Vice Chair Jones asked the difference between a commission and a committee. The City Attorney said it is whatever you name them. Councilor Haas asked to clarify the form of what this would be taking based on what was written in the letter and what was discussed here. Deputy City Manager Rebecca Landry understood the confusion. She said Councilor Ruttle-Miller's letter did reference the CCC, which once existed but had not disbanded or been removed. It still exists but has not met in over five years and all the members' terms have expired; it could still be reconvened. Her understanding was that Citizens for Keene State College is managed by another organization or group of people, and since that overcame some of the challenges referenced by the Vice Chair, there was a recommendation for Councilor Ruttle-Miller to participate in that group instead. Councilor Haas said it was pretty clear the choices were to (1) restart the CCC, which he would think falls under the Mayor's purview to assign or recruit people, or (2) ask Councilor Ruttle-Miller to participate as a semi-representative of the City Council to the Citizens for Keene State College.

Councilor Williams said it seemed like they were discussing Councilor Ruttle-Miller being in some sort of liaison role, which was interesting to Councilor Williams because he was in a liaison role with the Keene Library Board of Trustees and taken out of that position because there is no definition for "liaison" in the City Code. So, that position could not be justified. He still attends the meetings sometimes. Councilor Williams said he thinks there is probably value in actually instituting a "liaison" role. He thought the Library Board of Trustees would appreciate having an actual liaison again. He suggested looking at that in this context. Vice Chair Jones asked if he meant to have Councilor Ruttle-Miller as a liaison to the Citizens for Keene State College and Councilor Williams said yes.

Vice Chair Jones opened the floor to public comments.

Jacob Favolise (of Main Street), Ward One Councilor, which includes the College campus proper, thanked Councilor Ruttle-Miller for introducing this. He thinks it is important, always, that the Council expresses its support for the major educational institution in the region. At the same time, he thinks it is important that all Councilors, as leaders in the Community, are responsible with their language. He reiterated that the Board of Trustees system and College leadership have been very clear that it is the intent of the Board of Trustees to maintain three independent campuses. So, he thought the Council should be thoughtful around language about Keene State being in danger or Keene State closing; he thought that leadership had been clear that is not an option on the table. One question he had was similar to what Councilor Haas had asked. Councilor Favolise said this sounds like a good idea in theory. He wondered if Councilor Ruttle-Miller could speak to whether the College had been approached about this idea of restarting the CCC, as opposed to this conversation that had gone in maybe a different direction than how he interpreted the letter in terms of potentially having a liaison from the Council to the citizens group. It struck him that in his conversations with the College, there did not appear to be a ton of additional bandwidth or a ton of additional human resources to do the job that working at the college requires and to be serving on a restarted Commission, which he thought the last time was evenly divided between the Community Members appointed by the Mayor and folks

appointed by the College President. So, Councilor Favolise said although this sounded like a really good idea, he certainly had some logistics questions and concerns, and he would be interested to hear as a first step what the college thinks about this.

Former Mayor Kendall Lane (of 5 Hastings Avenue) said he was present in two capacities. First, he recalled that the College City Commission was established at a meeting that he and Anne Huot, who was then President of the College, had during their monthly lunch, which they began to discuss formalizing the relationship between the City and College. He explained that the issues that the CCC was established for were disciplinary. There were neighborhood problems that were difficult to deal with. The Commission was established primarily for the purpose of trying to deal with the neighborhood relationship with the College. At that time, the college had close to 5,000 students and extended extensively into the east side neighborhood. The east side neighborhood was dramatically affected by the existence of those students. So, he said the Commission was established to deal with a lot of the conflicts. Mr. Lane noted that he is also one of the original members of Citizens for Keene State College, whose role is very different than the CCC's. He said Citizens for Keene State College are working with the University System Trustees to encourage some activities that will support Keene State College. They want to maintain the liberal arts foundation at the College, they want Keene State College to have its own independent president, and they will be working in the fall with legislators to support this funding for higher education in the State of New Hampshire. He said Citizens for Keene State College had some successes and had a good relationship with the University System Trustees and a lot of support from them. Further, of the three colleges in the University System, Keene is the only one that has a community-based support organization working with the Trustees. At this time, he cited 200 Citizens for Keene State College members and Mr. Lane said that City Councilors would certainly be welcome to participate. Citizens for Keene State College is not a governmental organization subject to RSA 91-A. He said they are tremendously concerned about the relationship between the College and the City of Keene. If the College was not operating as a College, he said Keene could become Claremont and they do not want that to happen. The Citizens for Keene State College have a variety of subcommittees working on various aspects of the relationship, both economic and legislative, and they are working on a call program. He said the CCC is not really an appropriate forum for the type of work that Citizens for Keene State College was doing but the participation of City Councilors and the City would be welcome; Mayor Kahn works closely with Citizens for Keene State College, almost since the beginning and Mr. Lane called that an important relationship. Mr. Lane said Citizens for Keene State College's function is to continue supporting that relationship between the College and the City of Keene, which is vital to the City of Keene's future.

Vice Chair Jones recalled during Mayor Lane's term, when some things came to the CCC, such as learning there were no streetlights on Ralston Street. Nobody knew those things until the Commission pointed them out from the citizens' level. Mr. Lane agreed some legislation that came out of the CCC was very helpful for that neighborhood. For example, the Disorderly Housing legislation the City adopted, which was very productive. Vice Chair Jones also recalled the incident with street crossings in front of the College on Main Street and the CCC decided to split the cost between the College and City for the two new crosswalks in front of the College. He said the CCC did have its benefits. Mr. Lane said he did not want to downplay it; he certainly worked hard during his years as Mayor to make that successful and it served a very real, very

important purpose. Still, it was a very different purpose than Citizens for Keene State College are dealing with today. Vice Chair Jones said that was clear and thanked Mr. Lane for both efforts.

Mayor Jay Kahn (of 17 Mountain View Drive) first supported the suggestion of Citizens for Keene State College as something that all City Councilors, interested people in the City of Keene, and supporters of the College should sign up for: <https://www.CitizensforKeeneStateCollege.com>. He said it had attracted 200 people in about three months and numbers matter. This is an organization that is using its influence to influence the University System Board of Trustees and by virtue of that, having an impact on the State of New Hampshire. The Mayor called that wonderful. He said Councilor Ruttle-Miller was originally confused by the status of the CCC on the City's website, with stale meeting dates and minutes, and meetings that were never held due to lack of quorum or Covid. He noted there may need to be a step for the Council to delete that Commission from the City's Code of Ordinances, which he thought would be a positive action to consider.

Mayor Kahn continued calling Citizens for Keene State College a crucial organization now. He said he believes that the College has never been put in such a question of its permanence in its 117 years. He said the College was definitely getting asked questions about whether it can continue with the enrollments that there are and the funding situation that it faces; this is not just a local question, this is a question that needs to be dealt with by the University System Board of Trustees and by the State Legislature. That is why he said it is very important that a citizens' group exists and that it uses its influence to influence those two decision-making bodies. Mayor Kahn noted that he participates with the Citizens for Keene State College and was glad they invited him to be an active participant. He thinks it is important for the Mayor to play that role and try to direct others to participate in the group. He would like the ability to say there is a City Councilor who is an alum with a very strong interest and willingness to help continue building participation and advocacy through the citizens' group. The Mayor thinks it is important for the City to continue to take interest in what the citizens are doing. He suggested that the Committee might want to ask for periodic reports from the Citizens for Keene State College; the Mayor offered to serve in that role and suggested Dr. Paul Vincent, present Faculty Emeritus for the College, who may speak on the matter. The Mayor thought there were other steps for the Council to consider and did not want this to get buried as "Informational." He said the Committee might want to consider other steps in directing the City to come back with some recommendation: is suspending the CCC the right action? Are there things that can be done administratively to the website to minimize the presence of the CCC in a time when it is not actively meeting? Councilor Jones thanked the Mayor for his work on both Committees.

Dr. Paul Vincent (of 24 Gate Street) said he had been associated with the College for 41 years and when he got to the College it had 2,900 students, and now it had less than that; it had too many at 5,000. He said the Citizens for Keene State College was formed in early December 2025 on the heels of several layoffs and losing President Melinda Treadwell to another university. He noted the College was living now with a shared presidency between both Plymouth State University and Keene State, which had made life remarkably difficult. He saw the tradition of liberal arts that had evolved all the way from 1909 through the present as potentially under attack and certainly there were voices saying to leave the liberal arts behind. He got very frightened by that and saw a change in the institution. He began as Library Director of Keene State and gave an

anecdote he thought was important in talking about the relationship. He has always believed in a strong town–gown relationship. When he was Library Director, he had the experience of walking behind a couple of parents who were taking a tour of the library in 1988/1989 and one of them said to the other: “We just visited a couple of other colleges and their libraries were automated,” meaning that they had no card catalog, that they had moved to a computerized system in order to look up book titles, authors, and subjects. Dr. Vincent took that to a Dean’s Council meeting and said he thought they were in trouble. It turned out that Jane Perlungher was also interested in automating the Keene Public Library as its Director. They had a good relationship and decided to make it easier and less expensive for both sides by coming together and automating both the City’s library and the College’s library at the same time. “Keene-Link” was born, so if you look up a book it lets you know whether it is at the College or Keene Public Library and you can check it out either way. He said that did not happen through a citizen’s group or come other collective organization. It happened by two people that were both librarians who felt the need to bring these things together. Ms. Perlungher brought him into the Rotary, which he has been with since 1990, and he considers it another feature of a town–gown relationship: faculty and administrators from the college being a part of community organizations like that. He felt like that was falling apart a little bit. He was at the Monadnock 250th parade and did not see the College represented with a sign and was really bothered. He said that opportunity was lost because the College does not have a President or a Director or Vice President of Advancement at this time, so nobody was on top of the issue. He said a part of what Citizens for Keene State College is for is to take notice of things. Dr. Vincent said he looked forward to having a new College President and looked forward to that job description including the necessity of having a formalized relationship with the City of Keene. He does not see the citizens doing that and acting as that direct conduit. He said the Citizens for Keene State College are there to ensure the survival of the College as a liberal arts college: one that recognizes that it has a responsibility to also train students to be engaged in trades (e.g., construction, engineering) and still gain a liberal arts education in the process. Dr. Vincent thought he was coordinated with Mr. Lane and Mayor Kahn just from a different perspective. Vice Chair Jones said it was clear that communication is key. He mentioned as he did to Mayor Kahn that there were two student members of the CCC, who were the ones who brought to attention the lack of lights on Ralston Street. So, Vice Chair Jones said things come from all ends of the campus and City.

Deputy City Manager, Rebecca Landry, added that when the current City Manager came on board, she developed a very good working professional relationship with the President at Keene State College, at which point in time a number of these issues were addressed, such as lighting, crosswalks, or events that are mutually beneficial for the College and for the City. Both the former President, Melinda Treadwell, and the current City Manager, formed that very good working relationship and worked out a lot of the things that might have otherwise gone to the CCC. Deputy City Manager Landry thought that mutually beneficial working relationship was unprecedented, and it created a lot of improvements in advancing the mutual goals of both organizations and the community. Vice Chair Jones said Ms. Treadwell was a part of the heart of this community.

Councilor Ruttle-Miller went back to the original intent of her letter, in part because coming onto the Council she noticed a section under the Boards and Commissions for the College City Commission that was largely blank and defunct looking, which was a bit alarming considering

some of the recent events (i.e., layoffs and loss of the President). She said we do not know what Keene looks like without the College. Councilor Ruttle-Miller stated that her language was very deliberate because she also knows the State of the State and that we live in a state that does not seem to have a lot of respect for higher education. So, she spoke of feeling threatened from the perspective of a student who went to a liberal arts college when it was at its peak of enrollment: she was number 867 on the housing wait list her sophomore year and did not get a dorm until almost August and was frankly terrified that she was going to live on Appian Way. She was there at a unique point in the history of the College. She also had a unique experience at Keene State College because she was the Assistant Student Archivist for all four years that she was there. So, she worked hands on with a lot of Keene State's history. She has looked at most copies of *The Equinox*, seen a lot of photos (e.g., kayaking down Main Street during a flood), and was at the statehouse on "Granny D" Day because Keene State's archive holds the Granny D collection. She said she gets emotional when she thinks about what could happen without this, and that is where she was coming from with this letter. She knew Citizens for Keene State College had gained a lot of traction in the time since she wrote the letter. She said the only real goal was not to revive a committee that settled ruffled feathers—she knew things could evolve and change their purpose—but now more than ever the City needs to show that it is behind the College. She said if nothing else, this conversation had shown that all were aligned behind the College and the City would support whatever commission that is. She said she had no specific intention. Councilor Ruttle-Miller wanted to make sure there was no question in anyone's mind about what we see as a critical component of our City. She recalled going to the Statehouse when she was a sophomore to protest talk of increasing state tuition significantly; she came from a normal background and knew her parents could not take on the additional funding. When they protested, she got to go into the Chambers and hear some people make interesting comments about how if some state funding were just cut from Keene State, then University of New Hampshire would have a much nicer football stadium. Again, Councilor Ruttle-Miller stated that she knows where the State of New Hampshire stands with their priorities as far as university funding.

Vice Chair Jones spoke about his opening remarks and said he was not at all recommending abolishing the CCC but saying there would be some kinks to work out before reinstating it.

Mayor Kahn pointed out that Keene State College was one of the organizations that the City gave credit to for helping with the 250th celebration. He was also disappointed that there was no College presence in the parade. However, the parking lots hosted the kid's bikes for the event. As one of the co-chairs of that event, Mayor Kahn greatly appreciated that the College stepped forward and answered that request, which is a part of that partnership that Dr. Vincent was talking about. Next, the Mayor said the College had always been about liberal arts, applied learning, and going forth to serve. He said that is so evident in this community and the economic impact of the college because its students remain: they have internships, they are active in City employment. This region thrives on the College's presence, the students, the parents, the visitors, the events they organize, how it influences the arts and culture of the of the community, and the the service; nearly half of the serving City Councilors were Keene State College graduates at this time. He said that the way that this community outperforms relative to nonprofit organizations is a tribute to the fact that it is populated by Keene State College graduates who volunteer their time and help the nonprofits thrive in this community. Keene has 10% of the nonprofits in the

state and only 6% of the population. It shows that “Go forth and serve” is a part of the mantra of Keene State and its graduates. These are things Citizens for Keene State College would be bringing to the Legislature and the Board of Trustees. So, the opportunity for advocacy from the City Council during the next year to help recruit a qualified President who can value the community's role in the College and can help bring the economic interests of our region to the to these discussions at the legislative level would be a success. He said the Council wants to be a part of the written testimony that can be a part of the City Council’s actions and can help to influence those kinds of actions from others in the region to help advocate during the next legislative cycle. Mayor Kahn thought there were a lot of roles for Councilors like Councilor Ruttle-Miller to bring their ideas forward for all kinds of advocacy during the next year. Vice Chair Jones added that there is nothing stopping individual City Councilors from privately meeting with students, faculty, and administrators on their own, just not as a board of the City. Mayor Kahn cautioned about quorums.

Discussion ensued briefly about accepting this letter as “Informational” as opposed to the recommended motion to appoint Councilor Ruttle-Miller to the Citizens for Keene State College, which Vice Chair Jones did not think was within the Council’s purview.

Councilor Haas wanted to get some specifics on what the Committee could do here. He said the CCC was on the City website with vagaries under it and some kind of statement about positive reinforcement and how the City supports the College. He recommended that the Citizens for Keene State College come up with something and submit it to the City to have on the website to clean it up. Second, Councilor Haas liked the idea of regular connection with the College and having someone from the College regularly update the Committee on what is happening there as a standing monthly item, the way the Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee gets monthly updates on the downtown project. Councilor Ruttle-Miller said to Councilor Haas’ point and back to Councilor Favolise’s comment, that she would be hesitant to make any sort of motion about asking anyone to come and report to the Committee without input from any group first. She suggested that having a more standing report or update from the Citizens for Keene State College group would be more appropriate at this time, with their input first.

Regarding the College City Commission webpage, Deputy City Manager Landry said it was updated after Councilor Haas last reviewed it. City staff would be happy to list something in support of the importance of the College to the local economy and the community as a whole. Vice Chair Jones thought he remembered three or four years prior, when the Chamber of Commerce posted that the College contributes \$562 million per year to the local economy and he was sure that had increased with inflation.

The following motion by Councilor Haas was duly seconded by Councilor Williams.

On a vote of 4 to 0, the Planning, Licenses and Development Committee expresses its deep support for Keene State College and looks forward to working with them in the future, accepts the letter from Councilor Ruttle-Miller with great thanks for directing the Committee in that way, and accepts the letter as Informational.

3. Councilor Williams – Request to Consider Restricting the Sale of 7-Hydroxymitragynine (7-OH) and Concentrated Kratom Products

Vice Chair Jones welcomed opening comments from Councilor Bobby Williams, who talked about these products that are marketed as herbal supplements, not as drugs, which puts them in an entirely different category from what gets regulated, and that is the problem. He explained that there is a range of products but the worst of them is called 7-Hydroxymitragynine (7-OH), which is related to kratom, a product that comes out of a tree that grows in Southeast Asia. For a long time, kratom has been considered to have medicinal properties as a tea. One of the active ingredients in this tea is called mitragynine, and in recent years it has been more exported to the United States and concentrated into botanical products that extract the mitragynine into different botanical mixes. When mitragynine enters the body, it gets processed into a metabolite which is called 7-Hydroxymitragynine (7-OH); the active ingredient of kratom becomes 7-OH after it enters the body. Councilor Williams said chemists figured out that they could turn this product into the metabolite before it goes into the body and it is much stronger. This is what is being sold now as well as a number of other concentrated kratom products. He said they are not regulated as drugs, they are regulated as herbal supplements, which means there is little regulation at all. You can buy them in almost any gas station, convenience store, or smoke shop in Keene. Councilor Williams found that alarming because these products are sold next to energy drinks like Five-Hour Energy. He said it is easy for somebody who does not really know much about these products to think they are no worse than concentrated caffeine. However, he said this has a chemical that affects opiate receptors and so it can be very addictive. There are online forums of people talking about how difficult it is to quit this stuff because it is very addictive. So, Councilor Williams was looking for a conversation of where the Council should go with this because he is worried that it is already in our community.

Councilor Williams continued, explaining that at the federal level there had been an interesting development. The day after he sent his letter to the City Council, and he said after a great deal of delay, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) said it would start the process of putting 7-OH on Schedule I Drugs, which is the hardest of drugs. Councilor Williams said that would presumably lead to far more enforcements on the federal level, which could affect the City. He is worried that one of the things that Schedule I and outlawing possession would do is take a situation where people have a substance abuse problem with this product that they were able to buy legally over the counter and suddenly they are going to be turned into felons for continuing to have this problem. He is worried in part because it might motivate people to find something else they can try. He said if they were to instead maybe move over to kratom leaf, that would not be so bad, but if they decide maybe pressed fentanyl pills or something like that is what they need to prevent the effects of opium withdrawal, that that could be very dangerous. We have seen a situation analogous to that several years ago when Oxycontin was taken off the market. So, Councilor Williams said this is something we need to be very careful about. Ultimately, he said he was very uncomfortable seeing this in gas stations and convenience stores where anybody can get it. He really felt like there was some need to restrict availability, restrict marketing, and make it a lot more difficult for people to get addicted to this stuff in the first place. He said it does not need to be available everywhere. He said it is a matter of figuring out which of these range of substances are appropriate to keep legal and which are appropriate to get rid of entirely. He is a little bit worried about getting rid of them all because there needs to be an avenue for the people

addicted to it, so it may be reasonable to keep the kratom leaf available for sale in some highly regulated context. He asked to hear from his colleagues.

Vice Chair Jones thanked Councilor Williams for always being in touch with societal problems, so the Council can learn from him. The Vice Chair saw a recommended motion to place this on “more time” and asked what action Councilor Williams was seeking; Vice Chair Jones did not want to place it on more time without providing directions to staff. Councilor Williams said his preferred method would be to have an ordinance at the very least. He would like to get the product out of gas stations and convenience stores. However, Councilor Williams thought staff would need more time to consider what the City is allowed to do. He was interested to hear from the City Attorney. He thought there were a lot of options, but the state tends to restrict the City. So, he asked what options would be available. Vice Chair Jones recalled twice in the past that the City Council had recommendations from its City Attorney and ignored them, so it does happen. Deputy City Manager, Rebecca Landry, said one reason for recommending this be placed on more time was to allow staff to try to get someone from the Hospital to come to a meeting to provide more information on some of the local impacts. Vice Chair Jones said that would be a part of the directions to staff if going on More Time.

City Attorney Amanda Palmeira said she still wanted to spend some time looking into this because there were questions. This is a Dillon’s Rule state, so the City must be authorized by state law in order to occupy a regulatory space in law. She agreed that there was the federal law to take into consideration and the state law, and the Controlled Drugs Act. She would want to see what space that leaves for the City, if any, to regulate in this area. She understood that there were other New Hampshire towns who had started regulating the product, but she wanted to double check those authorities for Keene. So, the City Attorney said she would need more time and proposed that between now and the next PLD meeting if she found it was something the City could regulate, she could return with a draft ordinance for review; if the answer were no, she would not bring a draft ordinance after More Time. Vice Chair Jones asked the City Attorney to bring a draft ordinance, not an ordinance for first reading that would require lettered changes.

Councilor Haas hoped the City Attorney would not knock herself out researching what the City could or could not do about this. His understanding was that the State of New Hampshire took this up over the past year and started looking at banning them all, but ended up just banning the synthetics, whereas the naturals are still available under state law. He deferred to the City Attorney. Across the country, it looked to him like nine states had completely banned these products, 21 states impose 18 and older restrictions, and 20 states have not done anything with it yet. He was interested to hear that the feds had classified 7-OH as Schedule I, so he said everything would be moving in this direction; it may happen without the City needing to take any action. Councilor Haas looked forward to some statement from the City Attorney, and he agreed with getting more information from health officials, especially Keene’s own health officer.

Councilor Ruttle-Miller would be interested to hear what the City could or could not do considering it seemed that at least one city and one town in New Hampshire had banned the product. She thought it was a very well-known product but spoke to someone younger who did not know about it, who might have been an outlier, because Councilor Ruttle-Miller thought

most people knew about it at this point. She said the State of New Hampshire does such strange things sometimes, like not even considering the sale of marijuana but thinking this is okay even though we do not know what we are doing as far as long-term addiction. Councilor Ruttle-Miller said she would love to hear from someone at the Hospital as well because she had not heard anything positive about this item. When she was in Georgia in the fall, one of their gas stations had a huge display right in front. She found it very strange and said it felt like walking into a place that sold a weird drug the way they were selling it. She said apparently it is very big in certain other states. So, Councilor Ruttle-Miller said the more information for the Council the better. She said it feels seedy and not a good thing that we are letting people have access to.

Vice Chair Jones said the intention of the Committee was to put this on More Time to get legal and healthcare feedback.

Vice Chair Jones opened the floor to public comments.

Ward One City Councilor Jacob Favolise (of Main Street) said he appreciated Councilor Williams bringing this topic forward for discussion. Councilor Favolise is interested in the exact wording of what some other municipalities have done, as well as what the City Attorney determines about the City of Keene's actual ability to enforce an Ordinance or have that Ordinance survive a challenge. Overall, knowing that there are federal and state statutes and regulations, we should be thoughtful as we move forward in this conversation, we should not hesitate to learn more, including getting perspectives from health and hospital officials. And, we should consider whether the Keene City Council is the appropriate forum for setting drug policy. He said he has no firsthand experience with whatever this product is. Councilor Favolise went on to say that just because the City can do something does not necessarily mean the body should be attempting to wrestle with drug policy and controlled substances.

Councilor Ruttle-Miller thought there was precedence for this Council making it illegal to buy cigarettes in Keene under the age of 21. Vice Chair Jones added that the City Council adopted no smoking in restaurants. Vice Chair Jones added that no vaping under age 21 was enforced. Councilor Ruttle-Miller looked it up and confirmed that this City Council did enforce no tobacco use under age 21 in Keene two years before the state law raised its smoking age.

Councilor Williams pointed out one of the shortcomings of what the federal level was doing right now, he said even with what the State of New Hampshire was considering and did not end up passing synthetic kratom products, was that there are a lot of non-synthetic kratom extract botanical products that functionally do a very similar thing to 7-OH products. He said we can all say we want to get rid of the synthetics but that leaves the door wide open to a specific range of products and its possible those are less harmful but he said he knows that some are still very harmful; they may be less harmful than 7-OH but he does not want to see them in gas stations.

Vice Chair Jones asked what industry is distributing these products: beverage, health and beauty, organic? Councilor Williams said it is a whole new industry that popped up to distribute kratom. He said there are some creative entrepreneurs that have been doing a lot of work.

The following motion by Councilor Ruttle-Miller was duly seconded by Councilor Williams.

On a vote of 4 to 0, the Planning, Licenses and Development Committee recommends that the Request to Consider Restricting the Sale of 7-Hydroxymitragynine (7-OH) and Concentrated Kratom Products be placed on More Time.

4. Councilor Filiault - Request for Consideration of an Ordinance Amendment Regulating Dogs at Downtown Events

Vice Chair Jones noted that Chair Randy Filiault was not present to discuss this and asked that it be placed on More Time.

The following motion by Councilor Williams was duly seconded by Councilor Haas.

On a vote of 4 to 0, the Planning, Licenses and Development Committee recommends that Councilor Filiault's Request for Consideration of an Ordinance Amendment Regulating Dogs at Downtown Events be placed on More Time.

5. Mayor Kahn - Potential Expansion of Permitted Uses in Commerce, Industrial, and Industrial Park Zones

The Committee acknowledged that this was mistakenly on the agenda. This item was referred to the Joint Planning Board / Planning, Licenses and Development Committee at the May 21, 2026 City Council Meeting. City Clerk Terri Hood confirmed that no further action was needed by the Committee.

6. Adjournment

There being no further business, Vice Chair Jones adjourned the meeting at 7:33 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker

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