

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HERITAGE COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 10, 2026

4:30 PM

**2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Cauley Powell, Chair
Councilor Molly Ellis
Louise Zerba
Kathy Halverson, Alternate (Voting)
Connie Joyce, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:

Megan Fortson, Planner
Don Lussier, Public Works Director

Members Not Present:

Julie Emineth
Marilyn Huston
Acacia Johnston, Vice Chair
Rose Carey
Jill Bouchillon, Alternate

1. Call to Order – Roll Call

Chair Powell called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM. Roll call was conducted. Chair Powell asked alternate members Ms. Joyce and Ms. Halverson to be voting members today.

2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

- A) Regular Meeting – April 8, 2026**
- B) Joint HDC-HC Meeting – May 13, 2026**

Ms. Zerba made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of April 8, 2026 and May 13, 2026. Ms. Halverson seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3. Downtown Infrastructure Project Design Elements - Public Works Director

Chair Powell welcomed Public Works Director Don Lussier to the meeting. Mr. Lussier asked if the HC members have questions about the Downtown Infrastructure Project.

Chair Powell stated that the HC was curious about which elements have remained in the project. She continued that earlier in the process, the HC had been asked to give input into the design process. The HC's feedback was well received, but since then, the costs have gone up and the budget has gone down, so they are not sure where things stand.

Mr. Lussier replied that last time, City Engineer Bryan Ruoff spoke with the HC about the project. He continued that Mr. Ruoff is leading the charge on getting the project built. It has been through the design process, and the City Council has approved it. He is not as familiar as Mr. Ruoff about what the HC discussed last time, but he can say that 95% of what the HC talked about with Mr. Ruoff at that time is still part of the project. Some changes were made for cost reductions. For example, the plan had been to use lighted bollards at the crosswalks at Central Square, but those lighted bollards turned out to be too expensive. They will have decorative metal posts instead. The fountain was going to be replaced with a cast iron bowl type fountain, but that has been removed from the project.

Chair Powell asked if the fountain will remain as is. Mr. Lussier replied yes that the fountain itself will remain as is. He continued that the granite seat wall around it, with the Einbeck engraving, will remain as is. The concrete apron around it will be changed. It will be decorative concrete with some seating outside of the decorative concrete ring. The concrete and gravel walking paths through the Square that they were talking about will stay the same as planned. There will be a modest enlargement of the Square, as they had talked about.

Mr. Lussier continued that other changes are ones that most people will not even notice. For example, the trash receptacles and new park benches were taken out of the contract, and the City will do them in-house instead. The contractors that bid on the project use subcontractors to do work that they do not want to do or do not have the skills to do in-house. Many items in a contract are ones that are a pain for the contractor to do, so they charge accordingly. For example, the contractor will charge more than double for installing a trash receptacle because they do not want to deal with it, and if they have to deal with it, they will make a lot of money doing it. Discussion ensued about trash receptacles.

Chair Powell asked about the granite block benches that had been in early designs. Mr. Lussier replied that there will still be some granite block seating in Railroad Square. He continued that they had planned on having more traditional park benches like the ones in the downtown now, but more of them. Rather than having the contractor install those, the City will do it in-house after the contract is over. Ms. Zerba asked if the granite posts will still go around. Mr. Lussier replied yes that they will reuse most of what is there, but because the Square is getting a little larger, they will add a few more as well. He continued that the chain will be replaced in kind with what is there today. For big patriotic holidays, the Fire Department puts flags behind each post. The project will include installing a metal sleeve to the back of each post, for easier installation of flags. The decorative lighting will be the same as it is today.

Chair Powell stated that there was an ambitious, history-focused design proposed for Railroad Square. She continued that the HC members heard it is off the table. She asked if that is correct. Mr. Lussier replied no, it was not removed. Discussion ensued. HC members said they heard it was removed. Mr. Lussier stated that regarding elements that were removed, they had planned on catenary lighting, which are the string lights across Railroad Square, and they removed that from the contract. They will still install poles at the corners so the lighting can be installed later. A shade structure that was planned for Railroad Square was removed, unfortunately. Regarding the inlay railroad detail where they are trying to recreate the appearance of railroad tracks, that was debated, and Council decided to keep it.

Councilor Ellis asked if they kept the iron arch on both sides. Mr. Lussier replied yes. Chair Powell asked about the farmer's market structure. Mr. Lussier explained that is a separate project, and the City got a grant for it. He continued that it is being funded by the Northern Borders Regional Commission. That project is moving forward in tandem with the downtown project. Currently, it is still in the design process, and hopefully it will be built next summer. It will be a timber frame structure with solar on the roof.

Councilor Ellis asked if the posts for catenary lighting are on both Gilbo Ave. and Railroad Square so the lighting can go across. Mr. Lussier replied that they are doing it in the railroad corridor. He continued that the City owns one side, the transportation center, and they spoke with the owners of Margarita's, who are amenable to the City attaching the lighting to their eaves. Thus, on that side, they will just go from building to building. Councilor Ellis asked if there will also be posts on the railroad side. Mr. Lussier replied yes that is where there will be posts with no lights on them. He continued that they will attach lighting to it. They could not go all the way across Railroad Square from one building to another; that would be too long. There will be some intermediate posts that will be for future connections.

Chair Powell asked about the current pavers in Railroad Square that had been part of a previous fundraising effort. Mr. Lussier replied that those will be used for the arches. He continued that the contractor will carefully lift them up and save as many as possible without breaking them and stockpile them. Then, they will be used to build the bases for the gateway arches. Chair Powell replied that they are happy to hear that.

Ms. Joyce asked about the budget adjustment due to the changes. Mr. Lussier replied that from the first bid to the second bid to the re-bid, the price dropped about \$2 million. He continued that the City thought they had made cuts and found savings worth close to \$4 million, but when the actual bid prices came in, it was about a \$2 million cut, so they still had some ground to make up. Every year, the City does capital projects. Typically, those projects end with some unspent money. Thus, Public Works staff, along with the Finance Director and the City Manager, looked at all the construction projects that the City has done that had various amounts of funds left over, and got Council approval to put those funds toward the Downtown Infrastructure Project. They also used some funds from the unallocated fund balance. By doing it that way, it does not have additional impact on property taxes. It is money that has already been raised for City purposes; it is not new money.

Ms. Joyce asked where construction is starting. Mr. Lussier replied Central Square. Ms. Joyce asked about tree removal. Mr. Lussier replied that only one tree in Central Square will be taken down. He continued that it is a maple tree that needs to come down. There will be eight new trees added to Central Square. Ms. Joyce stated that originally, 60 trees were going to be removed. Mr. Lussier replied that that is the total, up and down Main St. He continued that overall, there will be more trees added than are removed, with a net of about 45 new trees. Most of the ones being taken down will be relocated, because they are in conflict with infrastructure. They will attempt to relocate the healthy trees that have a 4-inch or smaller caliper. Ms. Zerba asked if there is money in the budget for replacing the trees if they die. Mr. Lussier replied that they are warrantied for a year by the contractor. After that, the cost is the City's.

Ms. Joyce asked what will happen to the granite taken out of the median. Mr. Lussier spoke about how most of it will be reused in different areas of the project. He continued that there will be more granite added to the project. Some of the granite will come out and will be broken due to being pulled out, and it is hard to use those little stubs. They will use everything they can. The City pays a different price if they are resetting granite they already have versus purchasing new granite, so they want to reuse as much as possible.

Ms. Fortson asked what happens to the short pieces. Mr. Lussier replied that they go to the Highway Division's stockpile, used for various purposes. He continued that for example, the granite benches staff built, over by the farmer's market, were old curbs that they repurposed.

Chair Powell asked if anyone else had questions for Mr. Lussier. Hearing none, she continued that she will say, in case Mr. Lussier had not heard already, that the Heritage Commission and the Historic District Commission would be happy to, if an opportunity were to arise, champion fundraising towards any elements that might be struggling, if there are grant opportunities related to historical features or features that celebrate or reflect the historic nature of the downtown or the culture of the community they are trying to perpetuate. It is about safety, community, and public investment.

Ms. Joyce asked if the benches they plan to install in Central Square will be permanent or removed seasonally. Mr. Lussier replied that it is a perpetual question he is learning to navigate. He spoke about how the City wants the benches to be for sitting and resting, not lying down and loitering. He spoke about how some of the current benches have to be removed in the winter so the sidewalks can be plowed. The hope is that the new benches installed as part of the downtown project will not be in the way of the plows and can thus be left there over the winter.

Ms. Joyce asked about something that Mr. Lussier replied is a different project, not part of the Downtown Infrastructure Project. Discussion ensued. Chair Powell stated that it is also not in the HC's purview.

Ms. Fortson asked if they will reuse any of the existing benches and trash receptacles. Mr. Lussier replied yes, the benches, the barrels, and almost all of the lamp posts/street lighting. He continued that anything that can be reused is getting reused.

Regarding another question, Mr. Lussier replied yes, the gazebo is staying. He continued that it is an octagon, and the design called for opening it up so that the stairs encompassed three sides. They are still planning to do that, but with City staff, instead of as part of the contract.

Chair Powell asked what the timeline is. Mr. Lussier replied that he has breaking news to share, which the City has not even had a press release about, but they talked about it this morning at the Coffee and Hard Hats meeting. He continued that the City has not done a hard schedule from their contractor, Cassella Construction, but they expect that the middle of July is when they will mobilize to the site and set up. The City found out that Liberty Utilities is requesting to come in before them, to do the gas main replacement in advance. That is tentatively scheduled for July 6th. He gave more information about the monthly Coffee and Hard Hats series, which will be

informal meetings where people can ask questions of the construction staff, the contractors, the project manager, himself, and the project ombudsman, and hear updates on what has been done in the past month and what is coming in the next month.

Chair Powell and the HC members thanked Mr. Lussier for the information.

4. National Alliance of Preservation Commissions Membership

Chair Powell stated that in a previous meeting, the HC passed a motion to use HC funds for the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions membership. She continued that the price ended up being different than what the HC had approved in the motion. They had approved \$100, and the cost is \$150.

Ms. Zerba made a motion to approve \$150 for the membership to the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions. Councilor Ellis seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

5. Downtown Video Project Updates

Chair Powell stated that there is a letter for everyone to look at. She continued that they are approaching the 250th celebration, which is the HC's deadline for the downtown video project, inspired by what Councilor Haas said at the joint HC-HDC meeting. It made sense to have the report to the City Council be a good touchstone to do so. Thus, this is a first draft of the letter/report to the Council, which summarizes the downtown video project and what the HC has been doing. She asked the HC members to read it and then give her feedback and let her know if there is anything else they want her to include in it. She is getting feedback from Ms. Carey, too, since Ms. Carey has been spearheading a lot of this project and could not be at today's meeting.

HC members thanked Chair Powell and expressed positive feedback. Chair Powell stated that this month and next month will be winding this down. She continued that she hopes to have a final letter for the next meeting for the HC to approve, and then they can send it to the City Council. Then the HC can discuss what new projects to undertake. It sets them up for a lighter summer, in case people are traveling. The July meeting will be low key, mostly focused on approving the letter, and the next agenda item.

6. Preservation Regional Roundtable Hosted by NHPA & NH DHR – Friday, July 10, 2026 from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM

Ms. Fortson stated that she has been in touch with people from both organizations, the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance (NHPA) and the New Hampshire Department of Historic Resources (NH DHR). She continued that they secured a spot for their event at Heberton Hall at the Library. It will be Friday, July 10th, from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM. The event format will be a presentation followed by a question-and-answer session. She shared with the NHPA and NH DHR the contact information for the Southwest Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC), because SWRPC can invite other municipalities in the region to attend.

Ms. Fortson continued that Ms. Zerba had brought up potentially providing some sort of snack for the event. Chair Powell asked if the HC is officially hosting the event. Ms. Fortson replied no, she learned that City boards and committees can no longer host events to waive the room rental fees at a City facility, but the Library is waiving the fees because it is a public event. Thus, the HC is just invited to attend.

Discussion ensued about making/bringing snacks. Ms. Zerba stated that she will make something. She asked if the HC could spend some of their budget to provide coffee from a local coffee shop. Others agreed and discussion ensued about the needed quantity, potential price, and the logistics.

Chair Powell made a motion for the Heritage Commission to spend up to \$100 on coffee for the Preservation Regional Roundtable event. Ms. Zerba seconded the motion.

Chair Powell stated that the HC can rely on the expertise of the establishment that is providing the coffee to advise the HC on the quantity they will need, based on the number of people who have registered for the event.

The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Powell asked Ms. Fortson to check with the NHDR and NH DHR to see if they are okay with this.

Ms. Zerba asked who will pick up the coffee and bring it to Heberton Hall. Councilor Ellis replied that she can do it. Discussion continued about the details of providing the coffee and related items like cups and cream. Chair Powell stated that she is happy to help Councilor Ellis with the pick-up trip. Ms. Fortson added that she can help, too.

Chair Powell stated that she hopes to attend the event, and hopes that other HC members can come, too. She continued that it will be a good opportunity to think about future projects and talk with other people who are interested in this kind of work. She encourages people to bring to the HC's July meeting any ideas they have or passion projects they want to pitch to the group.

7. Monadnock 250 Celebration

A. Photographer for Event

Councilor Ellis stated that she forgot to get a photographer, but she is now working on it, in her Monadnock 250 event planning capacity. She continued that she has a couple of people to ask. The HC does not need to worry about it. Discussion ensued. Chair Powell stated that the HC had talked about helping with the cost, which is hard to do when they do not know the dollar amount, but they are grateful that Councilor Ellis is trying to find a photographer. She thanked Councilor Ellis for the update and asked if she had anything else to share.

Councilor Ellis replied that the Monadnock 250 group is searching for volunteers, people who can stand around and help give directions and information. She continued that there are two shifts, so that volunteers will not need to be there all day. If anyone knows someone looking for

volunteer hours, they can let her know. Other than that, they are kind of set and just working on the last minute details. She thinks it will be a great day. The parade starts at 11:00 AM, with the reading of the Declaration of Independence before that at 10:45 AM. The festival is from 12:00 to 3:00 PM.

Ms. Joyce asked about the photos and histories. She asked if they were made up and if they are being installed. Chair Powell replied no, the original notion was that this would all be happening more in this area with the buildings the HC was working on, and it is in fact further down, because they were not sure about construction. That ultimately derailed the notion, but the HC, via Ms. Carey and Councilor Ellis, put together all these radio scripts and did all this other stuff. She hopes the HC was helpful in some way and able to support the efforts of Monadnock 250. Councilor Ellis replied yes, absolutely. Chair Powell stated that the HC hopes to use the photos for other things in the future. She continued that they can find different ways to use them, and one way is to get the HC's webpage updated with all of this information that they have pulled. That might be something to talk about in the July meeting. While the immediate July 4th/Monadnock 250 event usage did not pan out, the work is not for naught. Councilor Ellis stated that maybe sometime they could do a walking tour or put it on a story map or do something with the materials. She continued that it is definitely valuable.

Ms. Fortson stated that she wonders if they could piggyback on something like Art Walk that is going on right now, when people are looking at buildings. Councilor Ellis replied that they can put that on their radar for next year, to try it, to maybe approach some group to see if they can collaborate in that way. Chair Powell replied yes, and do some more long-term thinking, because the 250th is so big and covers so much, but if the HC could take the time to individually connect with the business owners in these properties and get each person on board with displaying something, it would be a great boon to the community. Ms. Zerba replied that it would be a good idea to combine it with Art Walk. Chair Powell suggested they talk about this in July.

8. Staff Updates

Ms. Fortson stated that the Bicycle and Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee (BPPAC) is the steering committee for updating the City's bicycle and pedestrian plan. She continued that there is a survey live on the City's website, and she encourages HC members to fill it out by mid-July. The survey findings will be part of the report and eventually used to help identify and prioritize areas for pedestrian and bike infrastructure improvements. They are also doing biking/walking audits around the city, focused on different populations, such as elderly people and people with mobility issues. The City got an AARP grant for that. That work will probably go from mid-July through October.

Chair Powell asked if Ms. Fortson knows how the traffic pattern will be impacted with the construction for the Downtown Infrastructure Project. Ms. Fortson replied no, she does not have that information. Chair Powell stated that the construction and associated road closures might change people's travel patterns. Ms. Fortson replied that it is not so much about travel patterns, as it is about how people travel right now, and it is not just focused on downtown. For example, many college students have expressed concern over the traffic on West St. and the fact that there are so few crossing opportunities. She gave more information about feedback the City got from a

focus group with Keene State College students, particularly in regard to a bridge that connects Martell Court to the KSC athletic fields that has been closed for several years due to it being structurally unsound. Discussion ensued.

9. New Business

Chair Powell asked if there was any new business. Hearing none, she continued that it is nice to imagine a lighter summer for the HC. The HC used to meet every other month, and now they have been meeting monthly for three or four years because they have been so busy. Maybe they can take a break in August, depending on how their July meeting goes.

10. Next Meeting – July 8, 2026

11. Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Powell adjourned the meeting at 5:23 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Megan A. Fortson – AICP, Planner