ADOPTED

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HERITAGE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, July 8, 2026 **4:30 PM** **2nd Floor Conference Room, City Hall**

Members Present:
Cauley Powell, Chair
Rose Carey
Marilyn Huston
Karl Sandy, Alternate (Voting)

Staff Present:
Megan Fortson, Planner & Deputy Zoning Administrator

Members Not Present:
Acacia Royce, Vice Chair
Julie Emineth
Councilor Molly Ellis
Louise Zerba
Kathy Halverson, Alternate
Jill Bouchillon, Alternate
Connie Joyce, Alternate

1. Call to Order – Roll Call

Chair Powell called the meeting to order at 4:40 PM.

2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes – June 10, 2026

A motion by Ms. Carey to adopt the June 10, 2026 meeting minutes was duly seconded by Ms. Huston and the motion carried unanimously.

3. Annual Report to City Council

Discussion ensued about the Annual Report to City Council. It is sometimes a presentation in person and sometimes just a letter. Ms. Fortson said the format was optional and the deadline was as soon as possible in July. The reports would be placed in the City Councilors' mailboxes and not placed on any meeting agendas. Chair Powell hoped to finalize details at this meeting and to have another meeting with Ms. Fortson later this week to formalize the letter. Chair Powell said the draft report the Commission (HC) looked at during the last meeting had one typo and that she made some slight grammatical changes, but otherwise there were no substantive changes. She asked if there were any additional thoughts or feelings about what to include.

Ms. Carey noted that she felt like the Commission stumbled and somewhat lost its vision for the Downtown Video Project; they began doing a lot more research into the history of the project and lost focus on the end result and trying to document Central Square and its buildings as they are today. She said she and others got into more history than the present-day uses of the buildings. Ms. Carey said the Commission might want to tweak its findings to fulfill the vision it started with but that is what she felt changed in this project. She said the HC also did not foresee how they would utilize this; they fantasized about what they could do but put too much effort into the research. Ms. Huston agreed that she did not get beyond the research. Ms. Carey said the HC did not switch gears in time to be able to have an appropriate way to present what they found. She did not know if that needed to be in the letter to the City Council, but she thought the Committee should consider whether they wanted to continue that research/project; she would be happy either way. The Committee would be considering how to spend its time in the coming year and considering whether to do another CLG grant. She was unsure if any of this research would support that grant. Chair Powell said they were great points that may be good to include in the Annual Report: some of that unrealized goal as an indication of potential future works. Then, the HC would need to come to some agreement on how to shape actual future work and what to focus energy on.

Ms. Carey said there ended up being no deliverable from the downtown video project, which disturbed her. Ms. Huston suggested that the Committee needs to show those who settled this area and built these beautiful buildings and how it had come forward to today. Ms. Carey thought Chair Powell had done some of that and wrapped some of it up in this Annual Report, realizing that the character and substance of Keene are still here: it is still displayed in the way we utilize downtown. Ms. Carey thought it spoke to the vision of the present day. Ms. Huston thought the HC should show the responsibility of how the downtown was passed on and kept in the quality it is. So, Ms. Carey said the HC has a little responsibility in the stewardship of this community and moving it forward, and Ms. Huston agreed. Ms. Carey thought that was true but had not thought about the HC as stewards before, as much as the educators, but said stewardship is potentially another part of what the HC could be considering. She suggested that the HC should spend some time defining what that means. Chair Powell agreed. She liked the idea of not a reset per se, because the group had grown a lot late, but refocusing and figuring out how the HC is interpreting its bylaws and putting them into practice. She suggested a meeting that is ideas-based and focused on the HC's mission and purpose and how to best serve it. That would help determine what the HC's next projects should be. Ms. Huston said it would even be a fine line of determining the HC's stewardship vs. the Historic District Commission's stewardship.

Chair Powell suggested that a deliverable beyond the summary report would be ideal. She said they could build a specific section of the website. The original idea was more video-based content and said there was no reason not to pursue that but did not think the members of the Committee would be doing that work. Ms. Carey said they had all of the dialogue and documentation to go behind a film and asked if it would be possible to develop a short film or documentary that could be given to the community. She finds that websites are not visited as often and she would rather investigate whether CLG would support the Committee to complete a short documentary on Central Square, specifically, for the community. She said it could be utilized to document what is happening to the community currently, what has been given to us that we want to be stewards of what Keene has as a legacy, and where they are going with it. Ms.

Carey thinks the average person in Keene does not have a clue how much work the City Council and staff put into planning and guiding this community. She said that during the most recent demolition review, the City Staff were bad mouthed; she did not think that people appreciated how much work was going into preserving this town. She felt that the Historic District Commission (HDC) was really pigeonholed to receive a lot of criticism on that. Ms. Carey felt like a good film would be lovely. She said they could take what they have and wrap it into a promotional piece that helps people see the effort that goes into Keene and the beauty of Keene. Chair Powell loved the idea of celebrating the City. Discussion continued briefly.

Ms. Fortson talked about the City's social media. She discussed the various types of posts that are most successful, such as employees talking about their tenures or showing how long it takes to walk from various places in the City. She said that the public interacts well with that type of content, and she could see them interacting well with short form content related to what the HC had already compiled. Ms. Carey agreed that short form content could be another way to go. Chair Powell liked that idea. Ms. Fortson cautioned about scope creep on the project as well.

The HC returned to the topic of the Annual Report letter. They agreed that it was sufficient and Chair Powell could put in a comment about the HC still deciding what it is doing for the downtown video project deliverable. Ms. Carey was unsure how any of this fit in with the CLG grant. Chair Powell thought that could be a topic during her meeting later that week with Ms. Fortson. Chair Powell would incorporate Ms. Carey's feedback and connect with Ms. Fortson to submit the letter before the next meeting.

A motion by Ms. Huston for Chair Powell to submit the Annual Report letter to the City Council with said corrections was duly seconded by Mr. Sandy and the motion carried unanimously.

4. Downtown Video Project – Close Out and Next Steps

Chair Powell said the notion of closing out the project for her was the idea of still doing research, which had been completed, and could independently exist as an online collection of information. The HC was left of the question of what to do with that information. Ms. Carey raised the idea of video content, whether long or short form. Chair Powell was curious about opportunities to see video content through with CLG funding. Because of that, she discussed agenda item 7 next.

5. Preservation Regional Roundtable Hosted by NHPA & NH DHR – Friday July 10, 2026 from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Chair Powell shared this event at the Keene Public Library. Registration would be required to attend. Ms. Fortson would resend the registration link to the Committee. Chair Powell hoped to attend. At the Committee's prior meeting, the HC agreed to expend funds to provide some refreshments for the event. Ms. Zerba intended to provide some baked goods. In general, Chair Powell thought it would be a good opportunity to connect with similarly minded people and groups in the community, and spark ideas for future projects or collaborations that could be really beneficial. Ms. Fortson agreed that they are willing to talk through potential project ideas.

Ms. Huston provided a form for another grant to Ms. Fortson: DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) offers historic grants ranging from $500 to $10,000. The Committee agreed that if there is money out there, they could be ambitious. Chair Powell said they would review the grant policies and see where the HC's ideas fit the guidelines. Ms. Fortson cited some of the projects considered for funding: "restoration of historic buildings, digitization, or preservation of historic documents and preservation of historic objects or artifacts, restoration, rededication, or relocation of existing historical site markers and cemetery headstone and monument conservation." Ms. Carey said those are things that are not covered by the CLG grant. So, Chair Powell said the Commission could really dream big.

6. Monadnock 250 Celebration Recap

Because Vice Chair Ellis was such a large part of this event, Chair Powell decided to table this topic until she was present at the August 2026 meeting.

7. 2026 Certified Local Government (CLG) Grant Round

Chair Powell noted that information from the Division of Historic Resources was included in the meeting packet and unfortunately their timeline is not ideal for the HC's timeline. Chair Powell recalled receiving a presentation from them that was helpful. She also recalled that the HC has completed a number of CLG grants over the years and been successful with them. Through the program, the HC has completed a number of property inventories, hosted educational events, and developed different tools and resources for the community. She said it would make sense to try to do one. However, it can be a lot of work for the City staff because the grant needs to be administered and the City would be the administrator. Before continuing the conversation, knowing there was a lot going on in the City, Chair Powell asked Ms. Fortson whether a CLG Grant would be reasonable to expect the City to take on if the grant were to be awarded in a December 2026 timeline. Ms. Fortson said she thought it would be fine because there would be another grant wrapping up in December. She thought she would have the ability as Staff Liaison.

Ms. Carey said the CLG letter of intent would be due August 14, 2026. From Chair Powell's past experience, she believed the HC could submit multiple ideas in that letter and they would help to narrow them down. Ms. Fortson added that the Division of Historic Resources would be having two informational sessions on July 13 and 16, 2026, which she thought would be another good opportunity to discuss ideas. Chair Powell noted that the HC's next meeting would be two days before the letter of intent deadline, and the goal was not to meet in August. She said one option today would be to cast a very wide net and approve a letter of intent that covers many different areas and narrow those down when the Committee meets on August 12, 2026. The second option would be to admit that the timing does not work. Ms. Carey suggested a working group meeting, noting that she would love to draw Councilor Ellis into the idea phase of where to go with this. She did not feel prepared to look at all possibilities today. Discussion continued about the idea of a separate meeting specifically for the CLG ideas. Chair Powell thought a work group was interesting. Ms. Fortson explained the concept of a work group meeting separately without a quorum of members and reporting out what is discussed at the next regular meeting, so it is included in the minutes. Ms. Carey thought the CLG letter of intent could be accomplished in a working group setting in addition to a meeting with Ms. Fortson about presenting the letter of intent at the next meeting. There was consensus to have a work group. The whole Commission would be notified by Ms. Fortson that the working group was looking for volunteers. If there were four (quorum) or more volunteers they would need to hold this as a Special HC meeting.

It had been Ms. Carey's understanding that members had not really expressed a clear direction of where they want to go next. Chair Powell thought that was what the next few meetings would become. Chair Powell said they were creating the work group to focus on CLG grant development ideas with the intention of meeting one time between now and the August 2026 regular HC meeting to brainstorm the letter of intent (which to her memory could be informal and minimal: i.e., three to five sentences). Discussion continued on the format of the work group. Individual members could also meet independently before the work group meeting. Discussion ensued on what deliverable would come from the work group: a draft letter of intent with CLG grant ideas that the Committee can narrow down further if needed, in addition to any edits needed, to meet the August 14, 2026 deadline. The HC would provide the letter to staff to submit on the HC's behalf. Ms. Fortson did not think it would be difficult to come up with the form letter. After submitting the letter of intent, Ms. Fortson suggested meeting with Brandy via Teams to tease the ideas out more clearly.

8. Staff Updates

Ms. Fortson said the City Council, as a part of their recent Budget, approved creating a new position within the Community Development Department: Assistant Sustainability Planner. Fifty percent of that position will be related to energy goals like the Community Power Program and implementing the Master Plan and other long term planning projects; 50% of the position will be regular planning, development review, and other planning tasks. The hope is that person will take Ms. Fortson's role as the Energy and Climate Committee Staff Liaison and she can be more dedicated to this Committee. Chair Powell said Ms. Fortson had been wonderful with her dual burdens, so she would be welcome full-time. Ms. Fortson noted that the topics of this Commission are of her own personal interest. Discussion continued. She noted that the Assistant Sustainability Planner position had been posted for about two weeks and there were about 50 applicants. Chair Powell was happy the City Council was making that move into the next generation of thinking about those things.

Ms. Carey asked if anyone in the City would be filming the Central Square groundbreaking. Ms. Fortson said she would not be surprised if it was filmed by the City's AV Department. She would find out and report to the HC. Ms. Carey said that is a part of the footage the HC would like to have and they had not arranged to film it. Chair Powell thought there might be permits or releases for public filming. Discussion continued about the groundbreaking.

9. New Business

Chair Powell said this was slightly outside the HC's purview but was on her mind when thinking about the downtown being developed. It was on her mind every time she drove up and down Main Street that the Domino's site (now an empty lot with a fence) where the fire happened just does not fit. She was surprised it had remained unattended for so long. She was curious enough as a person to ask the City Council what was going on with that. Ms. Fortson did not even think it was necessarily a City Council question; the site being allowed to be vacant for that long was more of a Code Enforcement question. She understood that they had to stabilize the site and by the time of at least one year since the fire happened and seed/loam. Ms. Fortson said there were preliminary discussions with the new property owner about potentially redeveloping the site, but none of those came to fruition. She did not know what would happen; she called when the fence would come down a valid question, stating that it may not comply with the Property and Housing Maintenance Standards. Discussion continued.

Chair Powell also heard that the NGM insurance building downtown was for sale. She thought it was historically protected. She thought the repurposing of such a big downtown building would be of interest to the HC. Ms. Fortson said that building is a part of the downtown Historic District, so if someone purchased it and wanted to change it they would have to go through the HDC for review. So, the building itself is protected in a way. She also knew NGM owned a building across the street that they once tried to sell that was also in the Historic District and both would be protected for architecture and visual appearance. Ms. Fortson had not heard anything about the building's change of use. Discussion ensued about the building. Chair Powell could not recall the new owner's name from the newspaper, but it said they were working with the City.

Mr. Sandy introduced himself, his background in political science, and interest in City government. This is his 13th or 14th year in Keene. The Committee welcomed him.

Ms. Huston asked about permission to clean cemeteries. Ms. Fortson directed her to the Department of Parks and Recreation, who maintain all cemeteries. Discussion ensued about replacement of veteran's head stones by the government and permission needed. Ms. Fortson believed that would be a question for the Parks and Recreation Director, Carrah Fisk-Hennessey. Discussion continued about Ms. Huston's efforts to protect headstones. Chair Powell thought that ideas for cemeteries would fit into the CLG as well. Discussion ensued about Keene's beautiful cemeteries. Ms. Huston described her efforts to find headstones that have been unearthed through the Daughters of the American Revolution.

10. Next Meeting – August 12, 2026

11. Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Powell adjourned the meeting at 5:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Megan Fortson, AICP – Planner & Deputy Zoning Administrator