

City of Keene
New Hampshire

FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, September 24, 2026

6:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Thomas F. Powers, Chair
Bettina A. Chadbourne, Vice Chair
Bryan J. Lake
Kris E. Roberts
Michele A. Chalice

Members Not Present:

All Present

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Ferland, City Manager
Brandon Latham, Deputy City Attorney
Carrah Fisk-Hennessey, Parks and Recreation
Direction
Bryan Ruoff, City Engineer
Paul Andrus, Community Development
Director
Megan Fortson, Planner / Deputy Zoning
Administrator

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

1. Monadnock View Cemetery Expansion Project Funding Allocation - Parks and Recreation Director

Parks and Recreation Director Carrah Fisk-Hennessey and City Engineer Bryan Ruoff addressed the Committee. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated the City has run out of space at Monadnock View Cemetery. She stated the expansion project is included in the CIP as a Trustee-funded project. She stated that staff went before the Trustees last week and presented three funding proposals to the Trustees.

The first option is the current CIP model, which allocates \$150,000 a year for the next seven years. The challenge with that option is the length of time and the ability to secure a contractor for that period of time, it is likely the costs would increase throughout the entirety of the project. The second option that staff presented was a a half-project model which was very flexible, but staff is not sure what half of the project would actually look like. The third and final option that staff presented was a full project model. The Trustees approved spending up to \$1.4 million for the full expansion, which includes infrastructure, irrigation, lots, and plots.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated this item is informational. She stated this would be treated much like a grant and up to that \$1.4 million would be appropriated. The City would cover the costs and the Trustees would reimburse those costs on a regular basis based on the construction of the project.

Councilor Chalice clarified cemetery operations are independently funded, similar to other programs the City has. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey explained there are two trust funds. There is Trust Fund A, which is operational and there is Trust Fund B, which is capital reserves.

The Councilor asked why the Trustees can't pay for the project but the City has to front the money and then be reimbursed for it. The City Manager explained this is a Trust Fund; staff received authorization from the Trustees of the Trust Fund for the full amount. The City will spend the money and then will submit to be reimbursed from the Trust Fund.

Councilor Lake asked what the term length was on the payback plan. City Engineer Bryan Ruoff stated the estimate is that the project would take approximately a year to construct. The City would look at either monthly or bi-monthly payments as they execute the project with the contractor. The City would be made whole by the Trustees at the end of the project. He added they are planning on sending the project out to bid this year.

Councilor Lake asked if staff is comfortable about the longevity of the trust; would the fund still remain healthy when such a large amount has to come out in a single year. Mr. Ruoff stated they believe it would, but the motion at the last Trustees meeting was just to bid the project as one complete project instead of a phased-out project to better describe it in the contract documents.

He went on to explain the City would bid out the project. Identify the lowest responsive bidder, then go back to the Trustees to request permission to award the contract. Mr. Ruoff stated staff is going to work with the City Attorney's office to make sure that the language in the approval satisfies the City.

Councilor Roberts felt the City was in a bind because it is unsure if the Trustees would have enough money over the next seven years. However, if the City waits until there is enough money then the City runs the risk of not having enough cemetery space.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey responded by saying that the City was in a crunch time. She noted Trust Fund B where this money is coming from has sufficient funds to fully reimburse but the money is just being drawn down. In the meantime, where people can be buried, staff has worked with Engineering and GIS Coordinators to make sure that there are additional plots in the existing cemetery map. Those are being exercised right now, as the City has run out of the original setup that existed at Monadnock View Cemetery.

Councilor Roberts clarified about 10 years the City placed restrictions on who can be buried in City cemeteries or was it open to anybody that wants to be buried in Keene. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated it is still open to all. Councilor Robert stated some communities due to space, have restrictions as to who can be buried in their cemeteries. He asked due to space issue whether Keene is looking at such restrictions.

Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated what staff has learned from the Master Plan for the expansion is that it should last the City 65 to 100 years and they are confident about what they are going to be building.

Mr. Ruoff stated with the project they are developing, which is around 10 acres, it will be about 9,000 spaces. There is also the potential for an additional 1,000 spaces of cremation in the center area, and those details are still being worked out and won't be bid as part of this project. He added by fully developing this area they are creating many more spaces fast and are working with Parks and Rec. to lay out additional areas that can be utilized now.

Councilor Chalice asked whether staff knows anything about the demographics; who is being buried in in our cemeteries? How many people are from Keene or have lived in Keene versus the Monadnock region. Is Keene paying for people from other communities utilizing our cemetery. Ms. Fisk-Hennessey stated everyone still has to pay if they are using our cemeteries; there is a different rate for weekly burials compared to weekend burials. There is also a different rate for temperate burials versus winter burials.

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

On a vote of 5 to 0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends accepting the Monadnock View Cemetery Expansion Project Funding Allocation as informational.

2. 2027 Highway Safety Agency Grant - Police Captain

Police Captain Tenney addressed the Committee next. Captain Tenney stated he was before the Committee with another annual grant the Committee has seen over several years. He noted this is the Highway Safety Grant that is awarded each year. The City was awarded \$10,500 this year.

Captain Tenney stated this gives the Department extra money for extra patrols for vehicle enforcement and pedestrian and bicycle enforcement; speed, DWI enforcement, distracted driving, pedestrian bicycle and mobilizations, and seat belt enforcement. He stated there is a match to this grant the City covers through cruiser maintenance and fuel, and the Special Services Lieutenant for his administrative time to put this grant together in the amount of \$2,625.

Councilor Chalice asked whether the extra patrols only run between October 1 through September 30 or is there a public media component as well in order to raise awareness. Captain Tenney stated this money is specific for overtime reimbursement. It is mostly uniform patrols in a cruiser but at times it has been used by undercover vehicles for things like distracted driving and seat belt type issues. He added DWIs are usually easy to enforce whether you are in a marked car or not. He added they mix it up and use it to get the maximum for the money spent.

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

On a vote of 5 to 0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept and expend the grant from the New Hampshire Highway Safety Agency to fund Highway Safety Grant- Keene.

3. In Support of Proposed Amendments to the Keene Community Power Program — Energy & Climate Committee and

4. Proposed Amendments to the Keene Community Power Plan – Community Development Department

Community Development Director Paul Andrus and Planner Megan Fortson were the next two speakers. Mr. Andrus stated they were before the Committee to propose some changes to the Community Power Plan and Electric Service Agreement (ESA). He noted the last time this item was in front of Council, different products and different levels of renewable energy were addressed. There was a lot of concern raised at that time about the added cost to the consumer. He stated this is an effort to address those concerns.

Mr. Andrus stated staff is proposing to amend the Community Power Plan and ESA to change the default product for electric assistance program customers, which there are about 300 in Keene, to change it from Keene Standard to Keene Basic.

Mr. Andrus explained Keene Basic is the least cost option. Keene Standard would remain the default product for all other non-EAP customers. He noted the City's consultants talked to the New Hampshire Consumer Advocate, and they were very enthusiastic and are in support of this. The Climate Committee voted unanimously in favor of this.

Existing EAP customers on Keene Standard will be moved to Keene Basic at the next available meter read. EAP customers who have affirmatively opted into Keene10 or Keene 100 will have their choice honored; the program will not change their product, but they will retain the option to switch to any other product at any time they wish.

Mr. Andrus indicated the other amendments to this is to reflect this change in the plan. On pages 5 and 6 the Equitable Treatment section is updated; distinguishing between EAP customers and other customers by assigning each group a separate product default. Page 31, Exhibit 1 - Historical Overview; there is a new entry documenting being added and there is consultant language which names the specific consultant.

Mr. Andrus stated the next steps is that Council has the authority to be able to adopt these amendments to the Community Power Plan. There is no public hearing required. PUC will however, need to be notified.

Councilor Chalice stated she is glad to see staff taking the initiative to do this and felt as financial issues continue to become even more constrained, more people would be taking advantage of this.

Mr. Andrus stated Mari Brunner has been the champion from Community Development. She stays plugged into this issue but could not attend tonight's meeting and wanted to make sure she was acknowledged for her efforts as well as the City Manager for work in terms of negotiating rates.

Mr. Gordon Leversee Chairman of the Energy and Climate Committee addressed the Committee and stated the Energy and Climate Committee had a good discussion on the proposed amendment at their August meeting and voted unanimously to approve the amendments.

Councilor Favolise stated he would push back on the idea that this is taking some level of initiative. He noted these conversations happened when the Council reauthorized the Community Power Plan. Several Councilors made the argument that it was not just the price of the Community Power Plan going up, but it was the price of groceries, the price of gas, property taxes going up. He noted one of the reasons used at the time to justify moving everybody up to the higher tier, opt in default was that it was easy to opt out. However, what staff is saying is that people who are on the EAP have to take action to get them down to a lower default opt in rate. He questioned how easy it is to opt out and how effective the education around this has been.

The Councilor stated it is a step in the right direction that 300 ratepayers that are on the EAP would be getting some relief but felt there are 22,700 others in Keene who would like to get some relief right now as well. He felt the City raised the cost of living for people when they reauthorized this Power Plan with a higher opt in default. He hoped the committee could have a discussion tonight or perhaps the Council could have a discussion as to whether this change goes far enough; but felt it was a step in the right direction.

The following motion by Councilor Chadbourne was duly seconded by Councilor Roberts.

On a vote of 5 to 0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the report from Energy and Climate Committee in support of proposed amendments to the Keene Community Power program be accepted as informational.

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

On a vote of 5 to 0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends adoption of the amendments to the Keene Community Power Plan.

There being no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 6:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

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