Historic District Commission

AGENDA

October 21, 2026 4:30 PM City Hall, 2nd Floor Council Chambers

1. **Call to Order and Roll Call**
2. **Minutes:** June 17, 2026
3. **Advice & Comment**
    a) **102 Main St –** Property owner requests advice on proposed maintenance of brick veneer on the rear of 102 Main St. Property is ranked as non-contributing.
4. **Outreach Project Update**
5. **2027 Meeting Schedule**
6. **Staff Updates**
7. **New Business**
8. **Upcoming Dates of Interest:**
    a) Next HDC Meeting: November 18, 2026 – 4:30 pm
    b) HDC Site Visit: November 18, 2026 – 3:30 pm (To be confirmed)
9. **Adjourn**

City of Keene
New Hampshire

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 17, 2026 **4:30 PM** **2nd Floor Conference Room, City Hall**

Members Present:
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Hope Benik, Vice Chair
Louise Zerba
Councilor Edward Haas
Russell Fleming, Alternate

Staff Present:
Evan Clements, Planner / Zoning Administrator

Members Not Present:
Anthony Ferrantello
Peter Poanessa, Alternate
David Bergeron, Alternate

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM. Roll call was conducted. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos designated Mr. Fleming as a voting member tonight.

2. Minutes:

a. May 20, 2026 Regular Meeting
b. May 13, 2026 Joint HC/HDC Meeting

Ms. Zerba made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of May 20, 2026. Councilor Haas seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Ms. Zerba made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of May 13, 2026. Councilor Haas seconded the motion.

Councilor Haas stated that the HDC is approving the joint HC/HDC meeting minutes from the HDC's viewpoint. He asked if they are approved jointly. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she believes they approve them independently, for their own purposes. Mr. Clements replied that the Heritage Commission already approved the draft minutes as written. He continued that if the HDC approves them as written, too, then they become the final minutes.

The motion passed with a vote of 4-0. Mr. Fleming stated that he will abstain, because he was not at the meeting. Mr. Clements replied that Mr. Fleming can vote. He continued that the City Clerk has reminded them that even if someone was not at the meeting, if he is familiar with the minutes, he can still act on them. Mr. Fleming replied that he would not care to.

3. **Public Hearing**
   a. **HDC-26-02 – Major Project Application: Applicant: Keith Marks; Owner: Colonial Theatre Group, Inc.; Proposed installation of a large-scale mural on west façade at 95 Main St. (TMP #575-008-000). Waiver from Section 22.6.1.B for mural size is requested. Property is ranked as a Primary Resource in the DT-C District.**

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked Mr. Clements for his recommendations on completeness.

Mr. Clements stated that the Applicant has requested an exemption from submitting an existing and proposed conditions plan. He continued that after reviewing the application, staff found that granting the exemption would have no bearing on the merits of this application. Staff recommends that the HDC accept the application as complete.

Councilor Haas made a motion to accept the application as complete. Ms. Zerba seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos opened the public hearing and asked to hear from the Applicant.

Keith Marks stated that he is the Executive Director of the Colonial Theatre. He continued that they are proposing a painted mural on the rear wall of the Colonial Theatre, the blank, brick wall facing the Gilbo Ave. parking lot. The image is a classical figure, drawn from the original 1924 decorative panels inside the theatre. It contains no text, no logos, and no identifying information. It is a work of public art, and they believe it will make a meaningful contribution to the civic character of this block. He and his colleague brought, as an example, photographs of the muses that are inside the theatre, just in case someone had not been in the theatre recently. They also brought an article from AAA Explorer Magazine about a tour through New England of murals. It references the Wall Dogs murals in Keene. Thus, he and his colleague believe strongly that a mural of this caliber and quality will continue to draw attention to the region.

Ms. Zerba asked for the photos of the muses and the printout of the AAA Explorer article to be passed around and handed to Mr. Clements to be maintained as part of the record. Other HDC members agreed.

Councilor Haas stated that he is curious about the type of paint that will be used. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she believes there was something in the application about it being appropriate for masonry. Councilor Haas replied yes, it was detailed, with an exact description, and substantial VOC information was provided. He continued that all the good stuff was in there. What he did not see in the application, although he might have missed it, is that this mural faces west. Virtually all the other murals he can think of face north or south or are in an alleyway. Since this one will be facing west, he is curious about the durability of the paint, due to the

extreme solar exposure that will occur. Mr. Marks replied that the muralist has done murals all over the country in all different cardinal directions. He continued that the muralist understands that murals fade over time, and he builds the murals with the fading in mind and builds the color palette accordingly.

Councilor Haas replied that he saw the murals on the artist's website, but he could not identify where many of them actually were. He asked if Mr. Marks knows of any murals that have that western exposure that the public could look at so they get a feeling for how well this will stand up over time. Mr. Marks replied that he is not familiar with all the murals and the directions they are facing. He continued that he does not know how to move forward here with that question. Councilor Haas replied that that is fair enough, and they will leave their judgment based on the reputation of the artist.

Ms. Zerba stated that she assumes they are using all the same materials that have been used for all of the other murals located around the city. Mr. Marks replied that in the application are all the materials they will be using. He continued that they could go through that list if she wants.

Ms. Zerba stated that she has a question regarding the percentage of the wall they will be covering. She asked why the Colonial Theatre felt that for artistic reasons they wanted to include 60% of the wall versus the 40%, which is part of the HDC's standards for coverage. Mr. Marks replied that he thinks there are two pieces here. He continued that one is that the standards for coverage are for historic walls. They felt that the 40% standard exists to protect the masonry of historic buildings, but this mural will be on a wall that was constructed just a few years ago. The second piece is that the composition is designed as a unified work. The scale of the figure and the surrounding field are inseparable from the artistic integrity of the piece, and reducing it would require a fundamental redesign and not just a minor adjustment. As a statement piece, taking up the width of the wall is showcasing the virtuosity of the piece and the intent of what they have and why it is there.

Mr. Fleming stated that Councilor Haas's comment about the north-south exposure made him think, and he thinks at least one mural, the Kingsbury one, is on the east side of the building. He asked if east is less damaging than west. Councilor Haas replied that west would probably be more damaging. He continued that he can think of another one that faces east, the Bicycle Works one. Mr. Fleming replied that he thinks it faces north. Councilor Haas replied that this Colonial Theatre mural will certainly be the largest one in the city, so they do not want it to fade quickly, should they approve it.

Mr. Fleming asked if the artist looked at the interior muse figures before designing them. Mr. Marks replied yes, this artist has been here before and did work internally at the Showroom, the Colonial Theatre's smaller venue. He continued that the artist spent a month here, learning the history, learning the region, speaking with people who were involved with the Wall Dogs murals, and spending plenty of time in the theatre. Thus, he has spent considerable time understanding the fabric of this community. Mr. Fleming asked if the artist did something inside the Showroom. Mr. Marks replied yes, he painted a mural there, a year ago in July, and it takes up the lobby.

Councilor Haas stated that when the Colonial Theatre went into this, they knew they would need to get the HDC's approval to go to the 60% coverage. He continued that that has must have been a consideration in the subject matter and designing the mural. He asked Mr. Marks to describe the process they went through for designing the mural, and who was on that committee. Mr. Marks replied that internally, the board has given him the free reign to do a lot of the new design work. He continued that in regards to the new direction the Colonial and Showroom are going in, he hopes the HDC members have been on the websites in the past six months. The board has entrusted him to take care of the design and the new direction, branding, and marketing. Thus, they worked with this artist who knows the organization, and they went through several conversations. He introduced the colleague with him tonight, Holly Sloane, Engagement Manager. He continued that Ms. Sloane has been handling the project management aspects of it. She has been his right hand in this process, communicating with the artist. They went through several ideation sessions, and felt that bringing the history of the building that is inside to the outside was a direction the HDC would appreciate, and it seemed to be in line with the direction of what the Colonial was looking for.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if the HDC had any other questions. Hearing none, she asked to hear from Mr. Clements.

Mr. Clements replied that before he gets into the Staff Report, he thinks it would be prudent to have the Applicant go through the waiver criteria and explain how the application meets the intent of the waiver criteria.

1. A strict application of these regulations would result in a particular and exceptional difficulty or undue hardship upon the owner of the affected property.

Mr. Marks stated that reducing the composition to 40% requires fundamental redesign, not minor adjustment. He continued that scale is intrinsic to the work's artistic integrity and public impact.

2. An alternative design or materials meet the design objectives stated in the Historic District Regulations of the Land Development Code equally well or better than would strict compliance with these regulations.

Mr. Marks stated that the wall is new construction with no historic material. He continued that the preservation purpose of the 40% standard is fully satisfied, regardless of coverage, because there is nothing historic to protect on this wall.

3. The waiver may be granted without substantial detriment to the intent of the Historic District Regulations and the public good.

Mr. Marks stated that no neighboring property, no historic resource, and no character-defining feature of the district is affected. He continued that the mural draws from the building's own 1924 artistic program and strengthens the civic identity of the district.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked to hear from staff.

Mr. Clements stated that the subject property at 95 Main St. is located on the western side of Main St. across the street from the Black Cloud Brewing and contains the Colonial Theatre with the marquee sign located on the building façade above the main entrance to the theatre. He continued that in 2019, the Colonial Theatre received approval from the HDC for an approximately 2,800 square foot addition on the western portion of the building, opposite the Main St. primary façade. The addition utilized a brick veneer as the façade material to complement the existing brick of the original structure.

Mr. Clements continued that to give a little background on the property itself, it was originally the site of Reverand Nathaniel Sprague's home and school room, and the house was sold to Samuel Dinsmoor and later to Laton Martin, who operated the Colonial Inn on this site. In 1923, Charles Baldwin constructed the present structure as a vaudeville/movie house, and the Colonial Theatre opened its doors on January 29, 1924. Over the years, the theatre continues to play an important role in Keene's cultural life, with movie showings, live performances, and other various cultural activities.

He continued that the purpose of this application is to seek approval to install a painted mural on the western façade of the building, facing the rear parking area and Gilbo Ave. The mural will be painted on brick veneer and take up approximately 60% of the façade, with a waiver requested from Section 22.6.1.B of the Historic District Commission regulations, to allow the mural to be 60% where 40% is normally permitted.

Mr. Clements stated that now he will go through the specific regulations related to art on historic properties within the district.

Regulation 1: Artwork shall not conceal or result in the removal of character-defining details or architectural features.

Mr. Clements stated that the mural is proposed to be located on a recent addition between 2019 and 2022 and not the historic façade of the original building. He continued that the mural installation will not result in the concealment or removal of character-defining features. The standard has been met.

Regulation 2: Wall-mounted art such as murals, mosaics, or metal installations shall be located to avoid areas that are important to the overall design or architectural rhythm of the building.

Mr. Clements stated that again, the mural is located on the rear of the building of a new addition, with simple brick veneer. He continued that the prominent architectural features of the building are located on the primary façade that faces Main St. The mural will not impede the architectural rhythm of the building. The standard has been met.

Regulation 3: The art installation shall be installed in such a manner that it can be removed and not damage the associated historic building, structure, or site.

Mr. Clements stated that all products used on the mural will be water-based acrylic paint. He continued that the Applicant states that the paint can be removed with a controlled cleaning and

stripping process without damage to the underlying brick veneer. No mechanical attachments or penetrations are proposed with the mural installation. The standard is met.

Regulation 4: Accessories to the artwork, such as mounting hardware or lighting, should be unobtrusive and screened from view as much as possible. If visible, colors of equipment and accessories shall either be muted or shall match nearby materials and colors.

Mr. Clements stated that the Applicant stated in the narrative that the mural will be positioned to avoid all function elements of the wall, such as surface vents, conduit, and utility penetrations. He continued that any associated hardware for the installation will be unobtrusive and finished to match walls around. No lighting is proposed. The standard has been met.

Regulation 5: Murals proposed for unpainted brick or stone masonry surfaces on a building or structure shall meet all of the following:

A. The mural will enhance or compliment the historic or architectural features of the structure or site.

Mr. Clements stated that as the Applicant has explained, the mural design takes elements from the historic decorative design program of the theatre itself. He continued that in the narrative, the Applicant discusses complementing interior art themes with the design of the proposed exterior art. The HDC will need to determine whether that standard has been met.

B. The mural will enhance or complement the historic character or context of the surrounding area.

Mr. Clements stated that as the Applicant discussed, the proposed mural is located on a blank masonry surface that faces a public parking area as well as a pedestrian corridor. He continued that to quote the narrative, *"The mural is intended to transform a utilitarian façade into a meaningful public amenity. The imagery, a classical allegorical figure moving through a luminous field, contributes to the civic character of the surrounding Historic District without competing with or overwhelming the architectural fabric of neighboring structures."* The HDC will need to determine if that standard has been met.

C. The mural will be designed by a professional artist or signed painter.

Mr. Clements stated that the proposed artist is Shaun Thurston, a professional mural artist with an established portfolio of murals around the country. He continued that Mr. Thurston is experienced with both interior and exterior mural work. The Applicant notes that the Colonial Theatre has used the artist in the past for interior work, and he has direct experience with the architectural setting of the theatre. The standard is met.

D. The mural is not located on a primary elevation of a Primary or Contributing Resource.

Mr. Clements stated that as stated several times already, the proposed location of the mural is the rear of the building along the western façade of the new addition portion of the theatre. He

continued that the primary façade of the Colonial Theatre is the historic façade along Main St. This standard is met.

E. The mural will not cover more than 40% of the surface area of the façade of a building or structure.

Mr. Clements stated that the Applicant has submitted a waiver request to allow for the mural to take up approximately 60% of the surface. He continued that the HDC will need to determine whether to grant that waiver.

F. Surface treatments that are appropriate for historic brick or stone masonry materials shall be used.

Mr. Clements stated that the mural is proposed to be painted with a base coat of Sherman-Williams Loxon Concrete and Masonry Primer, and Sherman-Williams Duration Exterior Acrylic Flat with Montana Gold artist-grade aerosol paint for highlight and detail work. He continued that all of these products are water-based acrylic and are vapor permeable to allow the brick to breathe and they do not trap moisture within the veneer. No sealants or waterproofing coats are proposed. This standard is met.

Mr. Clements stated that the waiver criteria, which he included in the Staff Report, are as follows:

1. A strict application of these regulations would result in a particular and exceptional difficulty or undue hardship upon the owner of the affected property; and
2. An alternative design or materials meet the design objectives stated in the Historic District Regulations of the Land Development Code equally well or better than would strict compliance with these regulations; and
3. The waiver may be granted without substantial detriment to the intent of the Historic District Regulations and the public good.

Mr. Clements continued that the regulations also note that in addition, if the HDC decides to grant the waiver, the HDC may require any mitigation that is reasonable and necessary to ensure that the spirit and intent of the standard being waived will be preserved. Staff is not recommending any conditions related to the waiver or the approval for this application. The Staff Report also has draft motion language, including granting of the waiver, if the HDC chooses, and approving the application as a whole, without conditions, if the HDC chooses. He is happy to answer questions.

Ms. Zerba stated that when all of the murals were done and located throughout the city, they all had some historical value as it relates to Keene. She continued that when people in the community see this proposed mural, they will ask how it relates to the city's historical background. She knows the beauty of art is in the eye of the beholder and it will not necessarily be pleasing to everyone. She asked Mr. Marks to expound a bit more on why this particular piece of art was chosen.

Mr. Marks replied that it is true that art is subjective. He continued that they were very purposeful about connecting the classical architecture, the motifs inside the theatre, to this subject matter. It is taken from Renaissance art, which he feels sends a message of thinking about class and the importance of art. He thinks the subject matter was chosen because it has an internal connection to the theatre. The Colonial Theatre is in a process of reaching out beyond the walls of the theatre to build new audiences. People travel to experience great art. He recognizes that he is speaking to a historic commission, but he thinks limiting the public walls for art to only speak to the history is self-limiting for a community. He just attended a meeting, along with the Mayor, about workforce development and keeping young people in town. Communities that overemphasize their history more than their future have trouble retaining young people. He thinks a mural of this quality is an asset to the community. It will make people feel a sense of vibrancy that maybe a historical informative mural does not quite get to. He thinks the subject matter they have chosen feels very on brand, from the classical nature of what it is, and how it speaks to the building that it is on top of, and he thinks it is a beautiful addition for this city to have as an asset. For decades, this mural will resonate and draw people to an area of the city that is otherwise seen as just a parking lot.

Councilor Haas stated that the HDC is not judging the art. He continued that they are just judging whether it should be allowed to go to 60% of the wall surface. It is hard to separate those two things, of course. A 40% mural of the same image might have a different judgement. He asked if the Colonial Theatre, if they wanted to do a different type of mural within the 60% allowance that the HDC will rule on today, would have to come back and reapply if they changed the subject matter. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied yes, they would.

Mr. Marks asked why 40% is the standard. He continued that the regulations do not give a justification for why, though, and he is curious about how they came up with the 40% figure and what its purpose is. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that no one in this room came up with the 40%. Councilor Haas stated that it is arbitrary. He continued that most likely, somebody wanted 20%, someone else wanted 60%, so they settled on 40%. That is how those things come about. He asked if Mr. Clements had other insight.

Mr. Clements stated that he thinks they touched on the core intent when they talked about the waiver criteria. He continued that in many cases, the regulations are about protecting the historic façade of Main St. and the historic buildings within the district as a whole. Setting a size limit for these murals provides an opportunity to do some public art, while not completely covering over a historic façade of a building that risks obscuring some of the historic features the HDC is looking to preserve. He was not working with the City when the number was decided upon. He does not disagree with Councilor Haas; they probably wanted it to be less than half of a wall but more than 25%, which is probably where 40% came from.

Mr. Marks stated that the muralist says he has never seen a city limit the mural size to 40%. He continued that Keene likes to promote itself as an artistic city and a cultural city. He would ask for a better reasoning of why that 40% limit is there. It makes sense that the HDC wants to preserve Main St. and the historical nature of the downtown's character. Part of the Variance is, this mural will be on new construction and in the back of the building away from Main St., in a parking lot. He offers that information to counter the arbitrary number of 40%.

Councilor Haas stated that he hopes Mr. Marks will submit a proposed Code change for these type of situations. He continued that 40% may have been an arbitrary number. These things need to be reviewed at times, but the only way the City can do that is if someone steps up and proposes a Code change.

Mr. Marks stated that he also wants to say that part of art is in the fact of impact. He continued that if you think about visiting a museum, sometimes the size of a piece of artwork is just as important, if not more important, than the subject matter. This is meant to be a statement. It is meant to draw attention. It is meant to inspire people. It is meant for people to have a sense of pride in it. With modern technology, they technically could just drag a corner and bring it back to 40%, but if you look at the photo he and Ms. Sloane submitted of the proposal, the artist also proposes tying the blue new structure down into the brick. He does that by bringing the blue down into it. He brings these squares that are very contentious in the community that have been placed on the building, down. He is really thinking about the work, less about what is being painted, but unifying this split wall approach. The 60% is purposefully about impact. If you were to shrink this down, it would minimize the impact. The Colonial Theatre is spending a significant amount of money on this. Shrinking it down to 40% to meet this arbitrary number would only weaken and dilute the impact that he thinks it will have. Thinking about the piece not just in terms of what it is, but also the size, is part of the art, and it is very important.

Ms. Zerba stated that she wants to say for the record that she is not asking the Applicant to change the design. She continued that this looks much better than the blank wall. She appreciates Mr. Marks expounding on the various reasons why this piece was chosen. She can see the flow of all the materials and how that adds to the piece of work, which is growing on her.

Mr. Fleming stated that he wanted to address Ms. Zerba's concern about the mural's lack of historical nature. He continued that back when the Wall Dogs were coming to town, the community voted on what the subjects of the various murals would be. There were a lot of sessions to talk about it. He cannot remember if the Colonial Theatre was a topic that did not get a successful vote, but it could have been. It was founded in 1902, which is within eight years of when Kingsbury came around. If Kingsbury were still around and they put a "Kingsbury" sign on the side of Kingsbury, that would have been okay. If the Colonial Theatre had been selected and if they had put up a mural, it might have bene something like this, referencing the nature of the theatre inside. Thus, he thinks it ties together rather well.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that they are slipping into deliberation. She continued that if there are no members of the public present and wishing to speak, they should close the public hearing to deliberate. She asked if staff had anything to say first.

Mr. Clements stated that to clarify the regulations, he understands the conversation about the size. He continued that the reason why there is a waiver process for the regulations is for moments like this. You cannot write regulations that are comprehensive for every potential situation. This conversation would be very different if they were proposing a 60% size mural on the primary façade of the Colonial Theatre on Main St., versus where the mural is proposed to be. He also wants to clarify that the HDC controls its own regulations. Thus, if the HDC wanted

to pursue changes to its regulations, unlike changes to the City Code or Zoning Ordinance where they could be initiated by residents, the HDC could be petitioned to change its regulations, but it would be initiated from the HDC. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that that means Councilor Haas could initiate such a change himself.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if there was any public comment. Hearing none, she closed the public hearing and asked the HDC to deliberate.

Councilor Haas stated that in previous conversations they have had here, they mentioned the wall above. He continued that he remembers it was designed to look like the sky and a cloud going by. He has a printout from his printer, and yes, it looks like the sky and a cloud going by. He thinks the mural will only enhance the way it will become part of the overall sky. He loves the colors. Mr. Fleming replied that he was noting the same thing about the sky. He continued that in the photo on the screen, the lighter areas blend into the sky.

Councilor Haas stated that the subject matter is not for the HDC's consideration. He continued that it will certainly stimulate a conversation. He is curious about who will come up with an appropriate nickname for the muse, and whether she has a halo on her head or not is a question. He heard several people suggest that it looks a little religious, but overall, the community opinions he has heard about it have been overwhelmingly positive. The mural will be great for that space. He can just imagine what further things could happen in that space.

Ms. Zerba made a motion for the Historic District Commission to grant a waiver from Section 22.6.1.B of the Land Development Code to permit the mural to cover 60% of the surface area of the building façade. Mr. Fleming seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Ms. Zerba made a motion for the Historic District Commission to approve HDC-26-2 to allow for a large-scale mural installation for property located at 95 Main St., TMP #575-008-000-000, as shown in the application and supporting materials received on May 14, 2026, with no conditions. Mr. Fleming seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Mr. Marks asked if he can ask some questions. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos agreed.

Mr. Marks asked if this vote is binding in the sense that tomorrow the Colonial Theatre could have someone out there with paintbrushes, or if they need to wait for formal paperwork to go through. Mr. Clements replied that the Colonial Theatre will receive a letter from either himself or someone else from the Community Development Department, documenting this approval. He continued that the approval is technically an appealable land use board decision. Any member of the public meeting the State statute's definition for "abutter" could potentially appeal this decision. That being said, the Colonial Theatre could get started tomorrow at their own risk. There is nothing the City can tell the Colonial Theatre to say that they cannot begin work within the appeal period.

Mr. Marks stated that his second question is probably a conversation he needs to have with Mr. Clements/City staff, but the Colonial Theatre needs access for a lift to get in and there are

parking spaces there in the City lot. Mr. Clements replied that they need to apply for a "public right-of-way encumbrance" permit through the Public Works Department.

Mr. Clements stated that he wants to thank Mr. Marks and Ms. Sloane for their well-thought-out, thorough, detailed application. He continued that Ms. Sloane, especially, was a pleasure to work with and did an excellent job. He thanks them for their efforts.

Councilor Haas asked Mr. Clements to give Mr. Marks more information about where on the City's website to apply for the permit from Public Works. Mr. Clements did so.

4. Staff Updates

a. Downtown Project Update

Mr. Clements stated that the City has issued binders to all the businesses on Main St. and the property owners on Main St. who will be affected by the Downtown Infrastructure Project. He continued that the binder includes contact information for the Project Ombudsman and the Public Works Department, and other information available on keenenh.gov/downtown. The binder includes an overview of the project and the phases at a glance, including Phase I - Central Square to start, mid-July to August. Phase II is the top of the Square down to Emerald St., May to November 2027. Phase III is Emerald St. to just south of Water St., May to November 2028. It includes a very general scope of the project for water, sewer, stormwater lines, gas, electric, and other utilities, bike lanes, aesthetic improvements, and so on and so forth. It includes anticipated impacts. They currently anticipate work to be Monday through Friday from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM, with occasional extended hours on Saturday. Construction crews will be directing traffic through the work areas.

Mr. Clements continued that the City has received a grant for outdoor events and sidewalk events. He thinks the initiative is called something like "Dig in Keene," and it is to keep downtown open for business during construction. The events will be designed to draw foot traffic to Main St. and encourage engagement with Main St. vendors and businesses. That idea and programming was taken from ideas from the Concord project when they redid their Main St. The City of Concord did a unified effort to get people into Main St. and into businesses during construction. They even had a mascot for the initiative, a tiger, since a lot of the project's funding came from a TIGER grant. The City of Keene is trying to do everything they can to partner with local businesses and keep downtown alive during construction.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that it occurs to her that some of it will be incumbent on everyone, as citizens, to make sure that Main St. survives during that time and to still come downtown even if it is not as convenient.

Councilor Haas stated that it was interesting to learn that although the construction is scheduled in that fashion, Liberty Utilities does their own thing. He continued that the City's construction will not begin until mid-July, but they were informed that Liberty Utilities will be digging up their gas line on the west side of the Square at the beginning of July, before the 4th. That was surprising. They will have to be sensitive to how Liberty Utilities interfaces with the City, wherever else they have gas lines through the project.

Mr. Fleming stated that he was wondering if there was a change recently. He continued that every downtown festival and event he has been to over the years has had Main St. closed off in the same way, at the north end of Central Square. For this year's Taste of Keene festival, they kept Central Square open, and closed it off at the south end of the loop so traffic could continue through there. He thought that was a better idea. He asked where that came from, and whether that will be the wave of the future. Mr. Clements replied that he does not know, but that is a good question. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos replied that she noticed it, too, and thought it worked out well in terms of traffic. Discussion ensued as to whether the decision had been made by the event organizers or the City. Mr. Clements stated that at coordination meetings that take place before events, with City staff and the event organizers, they figure out where and how to close the roads. He believes the event layout determines that. There is definitely coordination between the City and the event organizers to decide that layout.

5. New Business

Mr. Clements stated that it is that time of year again for annual reports to the City Council. He continued that they can put this on the HDC's next agenda and discuss what the HDC would like to do. They could create a subgroup to put together a report or write a letter. He would be happy to work with Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos one-on-one to put that together.

Councilor Haas stated that the purpose of the annual report to City Council is for the group to advertise itself, and to make the point of how important it is to have a Historic District Commission. He continued that that ties in with the other promotional activities the HDC was going to do. It could be a great combination. If nothing else, they can use the excuse of the annual report to get in front of the City Council and talk about the great things that the HDC does.

Ms. Benik stated that she knows she promised she would have videos for everyone today, but a major home project came up and required her attention for the past couple of weeks, so she has not made the videos. She continued that she will have them ready for the next meeting.

6. Upcoming Dates of Interest

a. Next HDC Meeting: July 15, 2026 – 4:30 PM
b. HDC Site Visit: July 15, 2026 – 3:30 PM (To be confirmed)

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos asked if they have any applications for July. Mr. Clements replied not yet. He continued that he will let everyone know after the deadline if they get any applications. Maybe the HDC wants to slow down for the summer, or meet again to talk about outreach. Mr. Ferrantello apologizes for not being able to make it today. He is still working with people at Keene State College with the projects he has been coordinating with them. He will pass along any updates he receives from Mr. Ferrantello about that.

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she recommends the HDC meet in July so they can address the report to City Council and any videos Ms. Benik has to share, but if there are no applications for August, she thinks it would make sense to cancel the August meeting. Others agreed.

7. Adjournment

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

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Evan J. Clements, AICP
Planner/Zoning Administrator

Request:

Aesthetic management of brick veneer over cinderblock wall facing Cypress Street parking lot. Proposed to remove brick veneer or other recommended action to re-establish the building as an asset to Cypress Street.

Background:

Building was purchased in 2024. Previously owned for 50 years by the same group; Clark Mortensen Insurance Co. The parking lot entrance facing Cypress Street was historically used by Insurance personnel and clients. In 2025, the insurance company consolidated into the front and second floor of the building. The back 4000 sq ft is currently under renovation to become a Bath House style spa with saunas and lounges.

The current state of the Brick Veneer is cracking and chipped off in places. In other places, patches have been done however, matching the coloration was either not attempted or not possible and the patchwork is evident.

102 Main Street is a Non-Contributing resource. This removal of the veneer does not quite fall into any category under Minor or Major criteria as it is not a change to a structural element nor a replacement.

Documenting Keene's Historic Fabric:

A Student Collaboration

Last year, Keene State College architecture students partnered with the Historic District Commission to document three historic properties on Court Street through technical drawings. The process took students beyond the studio: onsite visits to measure and photograph the homes, meaningful conversations with the homeowners, and a visit to the community development office at city hall to review archival documents tracing each building's history.

Working with modeling software built for contemporary design, students developed creative ways to capture historic detailing, sharpening their technical skills in the process. Many were struck by the intricate craftsmanship and remarkable condition of these century-old homes, and by the generosity of homeowners willing to share their properties' stories — a firsthand encounter with Keene's architectural heritage that sparked a deeper interest in historic preservation and the history of the city's built environment.