CITY OF KEENE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

VISION KEENE 20 FORWARD

CITY OF KEENE NEW HAMPSHIRE

2025 COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLAN

SUMMARY REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2025

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1.0 | KEENE - A COMMUNITY THAT VALUES PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

'Learn from the past, plan for the future!' To learn more about Keene's Community Vision and 2025 Comprehensive Master Plan, please visit: **https://keenemasterplan.com**.

Keene is a community that has long recognized the power of foresight and collective action.

Guided by its new 2025 Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP), the city embraces the principle of "Learn from the past, plan for the future!" as both a reminder of its rich history and a call to action for the years ahead.

Planning is not just a process in Keene - it is a community value, a shared commitment to creating a vibrant, resilient, and forward-looking city.

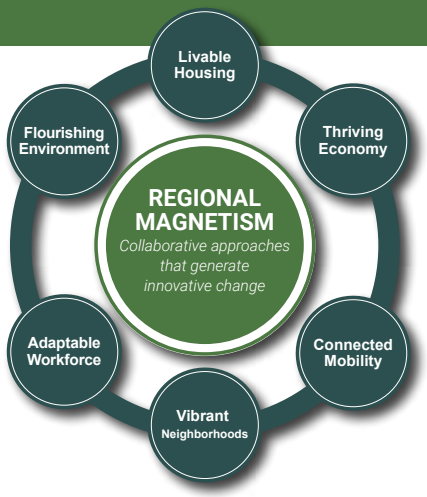
The 2025 Comprehensive Master Plan reflects this spirit by charting a bold course toward 2040. It captures the aspirations of residents, institutions, and businesses alike, weaving together economic opportunity, environmental stewardship, and social well-being. The plan is not static; it is a dynamic framework designed to activate progress, aligning the city's unique character with its vision for growth and innovation.

As the hub of the Monadnock region, Keene's role is both local and regional. It provides leadership in shaping sustainable development, housing opportunities, and business innovation, while also fostering collaboration with surrounding communities. The CMP builds on the city's Community Vision, 'Regional Magnetism' to position Keene as a place where culture, opportunity, and innovation come together to create a thriving future.

In this report, we highlight how the vision and strategies of the Comprehensive Master Plan are coming to life.

By connecting character areas, strengthening the local economy, and championing sustainability, Keene demonstrates what it means to be a community that not only values planning but uses it as a tool to unlock opportunity and ensure long-term success.

2.0 | THE COMMUNITY'S VISION FOR THE FUTURE



Keene's Community Vision, 'Regional Magnetism: Collaborative approaches that generate innovative change,' is a bold vision for the future that embraces change and action looking out to 2040.

The Community Vision celebrates the culture of the city and what makes Keene distinct while recognizing the key pillars of the city's future. Each pillar is supported by goals and actions that enable the community to take the steps necessary to make the community's vision for the future a reality.

Livable Housing

- Boost infill development and redevelopment
- Remove barriers to housing development
- Promote sustainable and healthy housing standards that align with the community's character
- Increase the diversity of housing options and price points
- Address the housing needs of all residents, current and future

Thriving Economy

- Encourage and recruit businesses in targeted industries
- Attract and grow Keene's businesses of all scales, from entrepreneurs to businesses that span internationally
- Strengthen Keene's position as an economic development leader
- Foster an inclusive economy
- Prioritize economic sustainability and resiliency

Connected Mobility

- Create a connected and accessible network of multi-modal transportation infrastructure
- Prioritize vulnerable road users in infrastructure design, operations, and maintenance
- Expand and promote environmentally sustainable mobility options that are convenient and attractive
- Expand Keene's connectivity to support economic growth

Vibrant Neighborhoods

- Support a built environment that encourages social connections and interactions
- Foster community relationship-building and collaboration
- Foster a high quality of life for all residents
- Ensure safe and efficient movement around town
- Create opportunities to encourage the creation of neighborhood businesses

Adaptable Workforce

- Attract talent to grow Keene's workforce
- Expand credential pathways and skill development opportunities
- Play a proactive role in de-siloing efforts, broadening partnerships, and increasing collaboration between partners that serve and support Keene's workforce
- Meet quality of life needs and reduce workforce barriers, such as housing availability, childcare, and transportation
- Prioritize workforce and community health and wellness

Flourishing Environment

- Promote smart land use and development
- Prioritize environmental protection and sustainability
- Integrate green technologies and best practices in Keene's built environment
- Expand community and infrastructure development
- Strengthen Keene's local leadership and collaboration to build resilience at the regional, state, and wider levels

The City of Keene boasts a well-defined land use pattern, guided by its Land Development Code and updated Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP).

The downtown area is a vibrant mix of residential, commercial, educational, and public spaces, serving as the city's main economic hub and a gathering place for residents, workforce, students, and visitors.

The CMP introduces the concept of character areas as a tool to describe and celebrate the various characteristics, conditions, and land use patterns throughout Keene. Keene's seven character areas are spread throughout the city and include the Downtown, Residential Neighborhoods, Neighborhood Business Nodes, Corridor-Oriented Commerce, Conservation and Low-Impact Recreation, Rural Residential and Working Landscapes, and Production and Innovation. Each character area has a unique set of conditions, challenges, and opportunities.

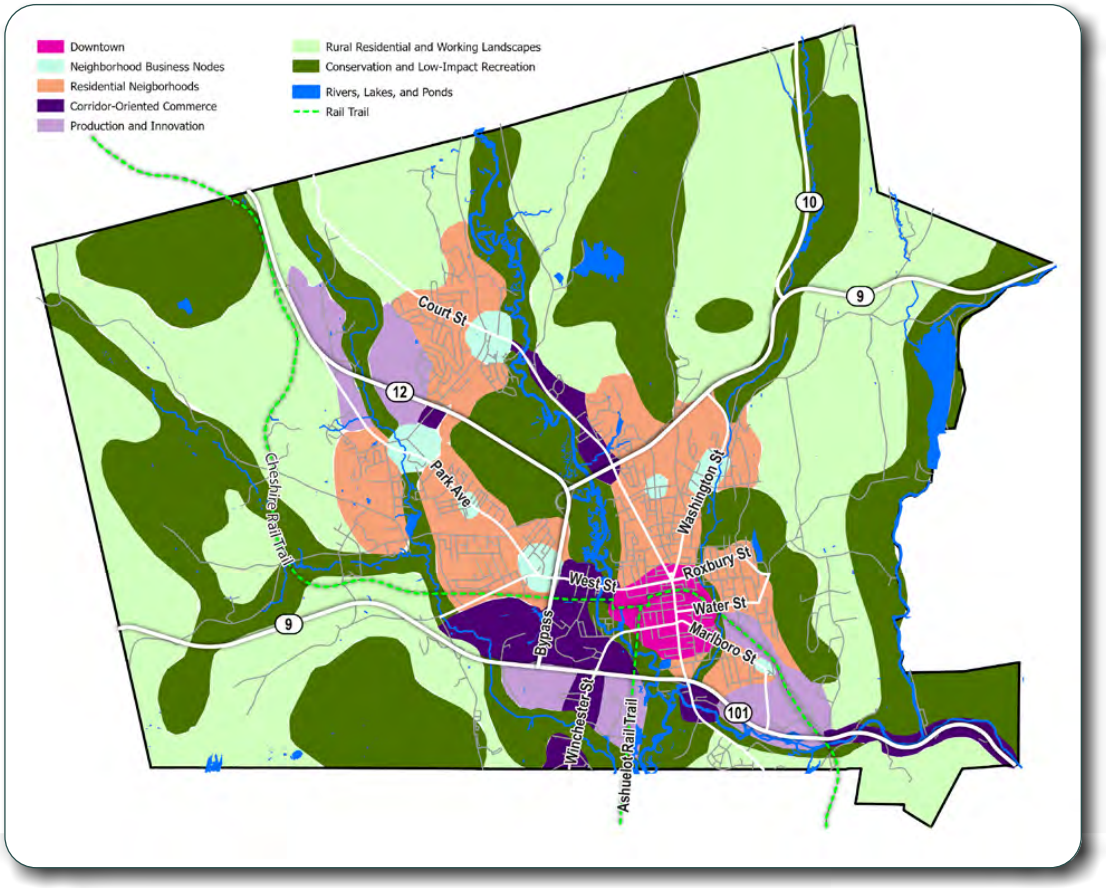
OPPORTUNITY

Keene's character areas provide an opportunity for housing and residential development that fit the desired look and feel in each area. Keene embraces ADUs and recently adopted a Cottage Court Overlay to encourage 'missing middle' housing types. The city also earned statewide recognition as a 'Housing Champion' for leadership in expanding housing opportunities for residents at all income levels.

Character Areas of Keene

	Downtown
	Residential Neighborhoods
	Neighborhood Business Nodes
	Corridor-Oriented Commerce
	Conservation and Low-Impact Recreation
	Rural Residential and Working Landscapes
	Production and Innovation

Future Land Use Map



4.0 | A PROGRESSIVE, VIBRANT, LIVABLE CITY

As a community, Keene has worked hard over many years to build a set of characteristics or core values that help shape how the community works and makes decisions. Combined, this is what makes Keene a progressive, vibrant, and livable city with indefinite opportunities for success.

OPPORTUNITY

Keene's demographic and economic conditions position Keene to be more "livable" than the average city across the country based on AARP's Livability Index, a leading source that helps communities understand how they compare across a broad range of factors that influence community quality.

Distinctly Keene

SUSTAINABILITY

SUSTAINABILITY: The City and Keene community have a long-established approach to local decision-making that integrates economic, environmental, and social considerations into its local decision-making processes.

EDUCATION

EDUCATION: Quality education and life-long learning opportunities are defining elements in Keene's quality of life and value proposition for the community.

ACCESSIBILITY

ACCESSIBILITY: Keene takes an expansive approach to accessibility, prioritizing not only accessible movement but also accessible opportunities and lifestyles across the pillars of Vision Keene.

PUBLIC HEALTH

PUBLIC HEALTH: In line with municipalities nationwide, Keene aims to incorporate health into its long-term goals and strategies to foster better physical and mental health outcomes for its residents.

COLLABORATION

COLLABORATION: Collaboration is a key Keene community behavior and is regarded by many as the 'superpower' that allows Keene to achieve big outcomes.

REGION

REGION: The relationships between Keene and the surrounding communities are critical and mutually beneficial. Keene acts as the hub and heavily influences the 'brand' for the region, and the surrounding areas provide important aspects such as housing and workforce, transportation links, and room for expanded economic development.

LEADERSHIP

LEADERSHIP: The development of effective leadership by example is important in any community, and Keene has a long history of steady, effective and inclusive leadership, both within the community and within the Monadnock region.

5.0 | INDUSTRY AND BUSINESS FRIENDLY

Today, Keene's economy is a story of success from many lenses.

The storefront-lined downtown is filled with restaurants, boutiques, services, and cultural amenities, like the Colonial Theater, that Keene's residents and visitors cherish. Significant institutions, such as Keene State College and Cheshire Medical Center, anchor the city's economy and have historically offered stability to Keene and its region. Keene's industrial base, including advanced manufacturing with the legacy and continued leadership of precision optics, showcases cutting-edge technology and supporting industry that is uncommon in many rural communities.

Keene's thriving economy provides residents with access to jobs and meaningful employment opportunities that support Keene's high quality of life.

OPPORTUNITY

Keene has above-average numbers of people living and working in its community while at the same time drawing jobs and workers into the city, with more than 11,000 people coming into Keene for work.

OPPORTUNITY

Recent trends in remote and hybrid work patterns are shifting traditional inflow-outflow models. Capturing a stronger daytime population, including Keene residents working from home, can help support more local businesses in the community.

OPPORTUNITY

In 2025, over 1,420 businesses call Keene home, and over 19,900 employees work in the city. Keene sits as the densest employment cluster in Cheshire County, accounting for more than half of the jobs in the county overall.

Community Insights

- Two-thirds of Keene's residents believe lifelong learning opportunities are fundamental to the city's continued success, and nearly 60% of residents emphasize the importance of equity and inclusivity principles.
- Approximately 81% of Keene residents identified developing more local employment opportunities as critical to shaping the city's future. Similarly, 84% want to encourage and attract desirable businesses to the city.

6.0 | STEWARDS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Keene has a long history of being a leader in environmental stewardship and climate adaptation.

The City's commitment to sustainability is paving the way for a healthier, more resilient future, with ambitious goals like 100% Renewable Energy and widespread solar adoption.

Keene's sustainability efforts extend beyond energy initiatives such as the rail trail network and food security efforts.

Additional examples include the city's proactive approach to stormwater management, efforts at waste diversion, collaboration with community garden programs, and formal commitment to creating safe streets for everyone, regardless of travel mode.

OPPORTUNITY

Keene's network of trails offers the potential to create a unique layer to the connectivity and mobility equation. The city has been proactive in its adoption of complete streets and building out its bike network.

Community Insights

- Under the Environmental and Landscape topics in the Community Survey, 82% of survey respondents identified preserving lands for habitat and recreation, and 79% identified creating and protecting open and green space as important to shaping the future of Keene.
- Recognizing the importance of recreation and Keene's trails to the community, under the Economic and Built Environment topics in the Community Survey, 63% of survey respondents identified developing recreation trail networks as important to shaping the future of Keene.

OPPORTUNITY

The city has the opportunity to incorporate green infrastructure into future projects to help meet its environmental goals.

7.0 | A NEW PLAN THAT ACTIVATES PROGRESS

Keene's new Comprehensive Master Plan is more than a vision - it is a roadmap for action.

It reflects the values of a community that plans not just for today, but for the opportunities and challenges of tomorrow.

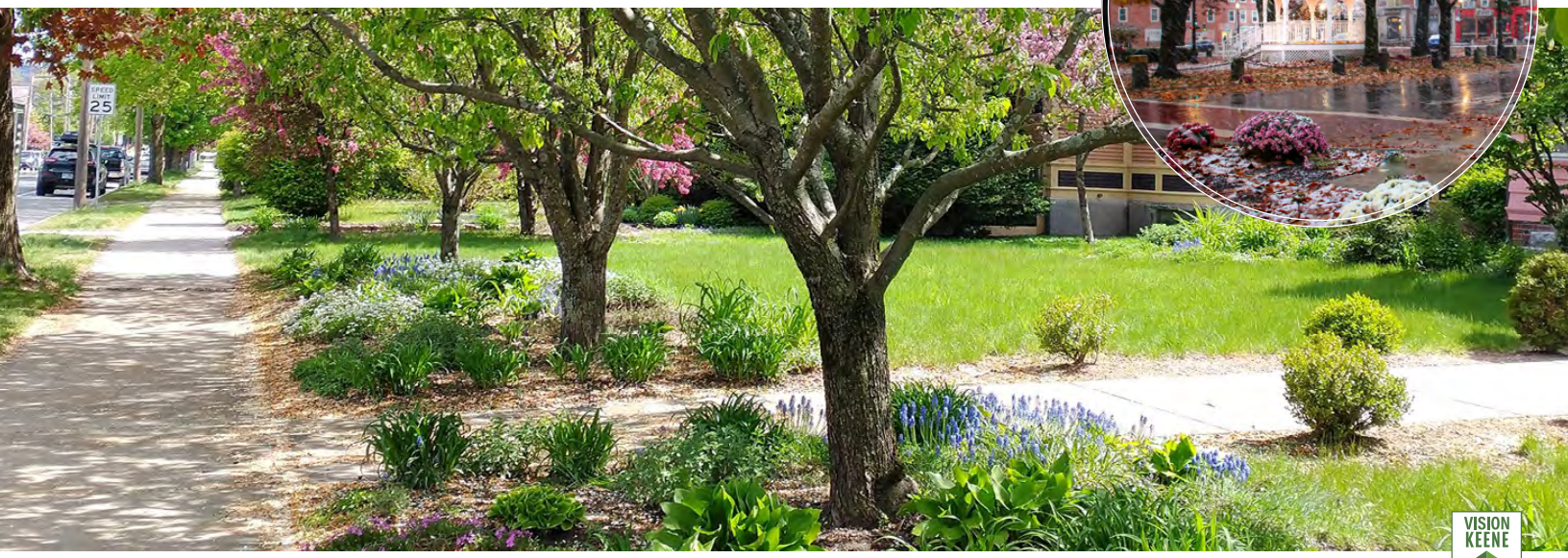
By drawing on deep community engagement, thoughtful research, and bold strategies, the Plan positions Keene as a leader in sustainable growth, regional collaboration, and economic vitality.

The CMP is a plan that connects vision to implementation. It identifies clear goals and actionable steps across housing, economy, mobility, neighborhoods, workforce, and environment. It is designed to be dynamic, ensuring that Keene remains adaptable as new trends emerge and priorities evolve. With its strong framework and community-driven foundation, the Plan empowers the city to move confidently toward 2040.

Above all, the CMP activates progress by linking people, ideas, and resources. It calls on residents, businesses, and regional partners to collaborate and innovate - continuing Keene's long tradition of resilience and forward thinking.

Together, Keene is building a progressive, vibrant, and livable city, one that serves as the heart of the Monadnock Region and a model for communities nationwide.

Keene is not waiting for the future - it is creating it.



8.0 | CONTACT US

For more information on the Vision Keene 20-Forward comprehensive master planning project, please contact the Community Development Department at (603) 352-5440.

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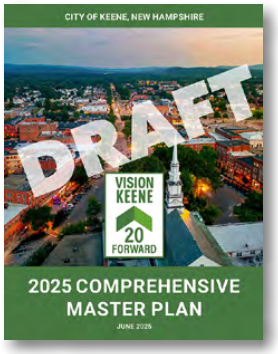
Please stay connected to the Vision Keene 20-Forward Comprehensive Master Plan project at:

keenenh.gov/masterplan



Comprehensive Master Plan

Think-Tank Report

Community Vision Report

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