City of Keene
New Hampshire

FINANCE, ORGANIZATION AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, November 12, 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
Marty Fiske, Library Director
Amy Kraemer, Head of Youth Services and Community Engagement
Ryan Cooley, Library Director
Aaron Costa, Asst. Public Works Director/Operations Manager
Gregory Seymour, Fire Chief

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

1. Acceptance of Donation for Library Makerspace Staffing - Library Director

Library Director Marty Fiske addressed the Committee and introduced Amy Kraemer, Head of Youth Services and Community Engagement. She indicated the Library has received a donation of $22,000 from the Friends of the Keene Public Library to fund the Makerspace staff. The Friends have been paying for this staffing since 2016. She explained Makerspace staff maintain all the equipment and conduct training for community members. They also work with librarians to design and provide the programs and order materials that is used for programming in Makerspace. Makerspace currently has one person on staff who works 25 hours a week.

Ms. Fiske next talked about usage, noting that the total new users to date is 65. Last year new users were 42. Total usage is up by 145%. Makerspace has staff available 93% of the time.

Ms. Kraemer talked about some of the things the community use Makerspace for. There are high school students and middle school students who are learning how to use 3D modeling software and because they don't have the opportunity to print at school, they use Makerspace for printing. There is an individual who does a lot of charitable work, and they come in makes flyers and posters for kids. There is a non-profit that has been using Makerspace to create educational literacy materials for their educational programs.

Councilor Chadbourne commended the success of this program and stated she has used this program for her gardening projects. She asked staff with the program continuing to grow whether they anticipate at some point having to increase the number of staff hours and whether

the Friends of the Library would continue to fund it, or would it have to be semi funded by taxpayers. Ms. Fiske stated they are working on an idea that may allow them to expand the program by not using any taxpayer funding but are not ready to discuss details yet.

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 that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept and expend a donation of $22,000 from the Friends of the Keene Public Library to fund Makerspace staff.

2. Authorization to Negotiate and Execute Agreements with Monadnock Aviation, Inc. - Airport Director

Airport Director, Ryan Cooley was the next speaker. Mr. Cooley stated Monadnock Aviation, the Airport's fixed based operator is looking to extend their lease and operating agreement which are scheduled to expire in 2029. The request involves four agreements covering FBO operations, fueling flights, fuel farm equipment and terminal space. Even though there are three remaining years left on their current agreement, they are looking for greater long-term certainties to support financing future investments and continued business development at the airport. They have requested a five-year extension with two additional five-year renewal options. Mr. Cooley stated staff at this point is not asking the Committee to approve any specific lease terms but are requesting authorization for the City Manager to negotiate and execute extensions or replacement agreements.

Councilor Chalice asked how long Monadnock Aviation has had a lease agreement with the City. Mr. Cooley stated Monadnock Aviation has been the City's FBO for decades and have run the airport operations for many years.

Councilor Chadbourne felt Monadnock Aviation has been instrumental in the success of the airport and has helped grow the airport and felt the City should be supportive of this request.

Councilor Roberts felt the City should wholeheartedly support this request and noted when he first started on the City Council there were quite few issues with other groups operating out of the airport. The City has not had any of those problems in the last 10 or 15 years with the current operator.

Councilor Favolise stated he would like to make a general statement about the importance of having stable operations and a stable FBO at the airport if the City is trying to move forward on many development and investment projects at the airport.

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

On a vote of 5 to 0, the Finance, Organization and Personnel Committee recommends the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to negotiate and execute extensions of, or replacement agreements for the Terminal Lease, Operating Rights Agreement for FBO Services,

Fuel Operating Rights Agreement, and Refueling Equipment Lease with Monadnock Aviation, Inc. at Dillant-Hopkins Airport.

3. **Relating to an Appropriation of Funds for Water Supply Technical Services Resolution R-2026-56**
4. **Sole Source - Professional services contract with Aries Engineering - Asst. Public Works Director/Operations Manager**

Asst. Public Works Director/Operations Manager Aaron Costa addressed the Committee next.

Mr. Costa stated the City has three production wells located off Court Street and many monitoring wells around those wells. The Public Works Department collects and analyzes samples from these wells on a regular basis.

In 2026, low-level detections of various compounds were identified. The City has been working with New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services on this issue and keeping them up to date through this process and DES has provided the City with a scope of work that they would like the City to complete to better understand how those compounds are moving through the groundwater. This would require additional installation of more monitoring wells.

Mr. Costa stated there is potential for DES grant funds through the Local Source Water Protection Grant. Staff has applied for those grant funds but won't know if they are successful with those grant funds until sometime in the spring. The $30,000 of grants funds would go toward the installation of those additional monitoring wells.

City staff contacted Aries Engineering and received a proposal for the recommended scope of work and staff is recommending sole sourcing Aries because of their understanding of the well field. They have done work for the City in the past and they have the technical expertise necessary to complete this work.

Mr. Costa noted partial funding for this work is available in the existing Water Supply Protection Program. However, the additional funding of $75,000 is requested in Resolution R-2026-56.

In all, this work would cost around $160,000; approximately $120,000 for Aries Engineering, and $40,000 for additional testing which the City will be responsible for. He added the $30,000 is not factored in the $160,000 being requested.

Councilor Chalice stated she is appreciative the City can work with DES to address these contaminants in the groundwater. She went on to say she has not heard mention anything about a discussion with the Bretwood Golf Course or Green Wagon Farm as to whether their action can be stopped. She noted the City is spending an additional $100,000 which seems like a good investment into the future for other potential contaminant sources but questioned whether the two entities have been contacted.

Mr. Costa stated the City met with Bretwood Golf Course last year and they were made aware of the findings. DES has also been working in conjunction with the Division of Pesticides to come

up with a site management plan for Bretwood and how they apply and do their work for pesticide applications. With respect to Green Wagon Farm, Mr. Costa stated he was not sure to the extent that they have been involved with this discussion at this point. The Chair clarified much of their growing is done off site. Mr. Costa stated he was not sure but added that the land they lease is owned by Bretwood and felt in talking to Bretwood about this issue, they understand that it doesn't matter if it's from the golf course or from the farm that those pesticides applications would be of concern to the City. He stressed the City is working with regulatory individuals to continue to protect the water source in the future.

Councilor Chadbourne stated she is glad this item is being handled as this has been an issue for many years.

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 adoption of Resolution R-2026-56.

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 City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to sole source procure a professional services contract with Aries Engineering in an amount not to exceed $120,000.00.

5. Acceptance and Expenditure of FY2025 FEMA SAFER Grant – Fire Department

The Manager stated since 2022 there has been a City Manager staffing committee that includes City Councilors in its membership. Several recommendations related to fire staffing has been brought to the Committee and to Council, and several changes have been made. In the FY24 budget, four firefighters were added to increase staffing by one per shift above the previous minimum. In FY 26, four firefighters were added to support a third ambulance and establish a twelve-person minimum. In FY 27, four more firefighters were added to improve shift coverage, reduce overtime and strengthen operational capacity. In addition, the City expanded fire prevention staffing adding two inspectors in FY24 and added part-time administrative support, strengthening inspection, code enforcement and public education. Since 2022, fire fighters have been added (three members) per shift.

The Manager stated the Safer Grant, would bring the City to 20 fire fighters, eight additional firefighters at two per shift. The 12 firefighters to date that have been added represents $1.5 million. In addition, tonight there is consideration being given to an additional amount of $1.8 million. She noted the Fire Chief has prepared a presentation to provide reasons as to why the City is looking to get to a staffing level of 15. She explained this does not mean there will be 15 individuals all the time because there are times when people are out sick, on family medical leave, vacation, etc. However, it will add to the available firefighters by adding eight more positions to the department.

The Manager explained the Resolution from the Fire Chief would need to go before the full Council twice. The Resolution is for the matching amount for the first year of the grant, as well as operating expenses. Operating expenses such as gear expenses and training expenses.

She indicated the Chief has calculated what is needed for the remainder of this fiscal year (FY27) and has adjusted those numbers accordingly.

Fire Chief Seymour addressed the Committee next.

Chief Seymour with the help of a PowerPoint presentation stated the department is currently at a shift strength of 13 individuals with a minimum of 12 individuals between two firehouses. The Chief stated Keene is pretty insulated from the rest of the State and have to take on all responsibilities, such as paramedic, structural fire response, aircraft response, trench collapse, hazmat response (covering 38 communities), surface water rescue, emergency and non-emergency standby, and more.

The City's closest career fire department or staffed fire station is 30 minutes away.

The Chief continued that the total estimated calls from 2012 were 4115 per year and now in 2026 they are approaching 6,700 per year. He referred to a slide, which showed overlapping incidents which are now at about 47% of calls. He stated this is why it is important to retain the proper staffing level in order to keep those different apparatus moving around the City covering those multiple calls. Overlapping incidents cause the need for overtime hours because of our current staffing level. He mentioned as a for instance, there were seven or eight incidents at one time last weekend and that is common.

The Chief stated in 2025 the department had members working almost two full-time jobs worth of hours at 3,800 hours a year. A typical 42-hour workweek for the fire department staff is about 2,184 hours a year. The Chief explained this type of overtime affects the staff members effectiveness on the job, is not good for work-life balance, leads to injury, leads to illness, and more.

The Chief next talked about standards the department must follow: NFPA 1710, which are the staffing standards for career fire departments; NIST, the National Institute for Standards of Technology assist with post injury and post death investigations. Often, it comes back to staffing, communication and command.

The Chief continued by discussing response and staffing standards that are required to abide by. Those are National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) which relates to staffing standards, National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST) which relates to research about injuries and post-death investigations, and Insurance Services Office (ISO) which relates to insurance rates related to fire.

The two areas the City has suffered the most in are training and staffing. For staffing, the City receives less than half the allotted points, which drives the score down. The Chief noted once

staffing is brought back to the expected number, he will be reaching back to ISO for a rescore to see if the insurance rates can be improved.

Chief Seymour continued that NFPA 1710 recommends 15 firefighters minimum (but have already moved that number to 17 firefighters) be onsite at a low hazard residential structure fire inside of eight minutes in order to do all functions of firefighting. They recommend 28 firefighters for medium hazard garden-style apartment housing fires. We have many of these types of apartment buildings in West Keene. For high hazard medium- or mid- to high-rise buildings, such as the Cleveland Building, they recommend 43 firefighters. The City of Keene fire department cannot meet the standards for the medium and high hazard fires but are trying to meet the standards for the low hazard residential house fires of 15 firefighters minimum onsite within eight minutes.

The Chief referred to a slide and explained that Keene is 12th in the State for population and are currently fifth in the State for call volume behind Manchester, Nashua, Concord, and Dover. Much larger cities and towns fall behind Keene that don't complete the volume of work that Keene does; Keene is currently ninth in staffing. In Keene, we currently have the minimum 12 per shift and other cities with less volume have minimums of 15 or 17 per shift.

The Chief showed the Committee a video that helped to illustrate why the number of firefighters on each shift is so important. The video illustrated the dangers of using lithium-ion batteries. There were 40 related deaths from lithium-ion batteries between 2017-2023. These batteries are used in E-bikes, E-scooters, toothbrushes, laptops, earbuds, and many such household products. One of the main causes of these fires are the use of incorrect charging stations. But, there are other reasons for these fires which could be a battery is punctured, overheats, or is manufactured poorly. The Chief explained that fires that used to take 10 minutes to build now have fires with many more toxins from the Lithium-Ion batteries and have an instant fire build.

The Chief continued by explaining a long list of Fireground Functions that are necessary to be successful when fighting a fire from obtaining the water supply to establishing your crews to controlling utilities, and much more.

He next talked about position assignments of the 12 personnel on each shift. There is one person staffing the back of a fire engine. It is that person's job to get that hose line (can weight up to 250 pounds) up to a fire, whether it is the 1st floor, the 4th floor, or the 6th floor. The further it is, the heavier it is and the longer it takes.

He explained that related to the A1 - Ambulance Crews - People on the ambulance are also firefighters. Their job is to search, get to the scene of the fire, get in the building, get between the fire and any potential victims. They have 4 minutes to complete this task. The rate of survival is as great as 75% if someone can be taken out of a building within four minutes of arrival. For every minute after that, it drops off substantially. After eight minutes, the chance of survival is less than 20%.

He went on to talk about Ladder 2 - Coming out of Station 2. Their job is to gain access to the home, vent the roof, get rid of the smoke and gases, and search above the fire, which is one of

the more dangerous places in the fire to be located. A3 - If they are available, they move over to Engine 2. Their job is to connect to a fire hydrant, get water to that first fire engine, grab another line, and go in the building as backup.

The Chief noted that so far in 2026, the department has responded to 5,776 incidents. 48% of those have been overlapping. He added there were 29 structure fires and they were not just in the City of Keene. About 16 were in the City of Keene. The department has responded to six room and contents fires, nine vehicle fires, four chimney fires, 4,000 medical emergencies, 131 motor vehicle crashes as well as carbon monoxide incidents. The busiest day was 42 calls and 30 cardiac arrests.

The Chief next talked about the fire on 18 Elliot Street on November 6, 2025 with initial dispatch being at 8:11 a.m. and explained that at one point three firefighters were trapped on the second floor of that fire. He indicated that the fire spread quickly due to turn-of-the century non-modern building construction and the lack of fire stops, which allowed the fire to spread vertically and horizontally unchecked. 16 firefighters responded when normally it would have been 12 because four firefighters who responded were still sleeping from night shift. The Chief explained the timeline of what the firefighters had to deal with and explained wind conditions worked against them.

The Chief next showed an image of the fire at 8:15 a.m., and you could see that the A-1 crew arrived and were geared up to do the primary search. They rapidly accessed the unburned area and searched for victims and performed the get between victims and the fire operations. They located and removed the victims within the two to six minutes window giving a 60-75% chance of survival. He explained that this crew does not have the protection of a hose line but has a small water can. This is a firefighters' most dangerous moments.

The next image is of 8:22 a.m. when Engine 1 had already arrived and had knocked down the bulk of the fire on the outside of the building and everyone was transitioning inside. Another image of 8:23 a.m. shows that wind condition had changed and the wind pushed against the building and pushed the fire into the void spaces causing and moved horizontally and vertically.

The next image is 8:26 a.m. when a MAYDAY was declared. That was because three of the firefighters who moved to the second floor were not aware that that fire had burnt through a door on the first floor and moved up the stairwell toward the second floor turning the stairwell into a chimney. The three fighters did not have sufficient hose line to protect themselves. He explained the gear that the crews have on to protect themselves starts becoming a hazard as it is rapidly satured by heat and the firefighters feel what is like 1000 bee stings all over their body, and they cannot see anything, cannot hear, and fight or flight response goes into overdrive. The Chief further explained in a situation like this, the firefighters have no gross or a fine motor function and they can't coherently speak to each other.

At one point, a doorway collapsed and the three firefighters were scattered in three different directions. The Chief showed images of hand marks that are of those three firefighters trying to find their way out of the building. The Chief stated what they did was incredible, getting themselves to a position of safety. One of the firefighters did break open a window and was able

to self-extricate out the front onto the porch roof, where he was taken off through a ground ladder. The second firefighter found a window on the backside, got himself in a position to self-rescue, and the third firefighter was pulled out of the hallway by members of Ladder 2 and he was brought to safety. All three members were taken to Cheshire Medical Center and treated for minor burns and cyanide poisoning.

The Chief stated what he is trying to emphasize is that they are always against the clock. He added it took 17 minutes since the first firefighter was trapped for mutual aid to arrive at the scene. And, from the time of the tone, it took mutual aid 28 minutes to arrive.

The Chief explained that they are always fighting the clock. During the fire at the Cobblestone on Main Street, the first company arrived must be in less than 4 minutes, the full assignment arrival must be in eight minutes, the first water on the fire must be in three to five minutes, the back-up hose line must be in place in seven minutes, the primary search completed must be in under eight minutes and ventilation established must be at eight minutes. The Chief added in this fire, one of the firefighters who has since passed, Lieutenant Aaron Cooper did find a victim on the second floor and brought him to safety. There were reports of a second person who was later determined was never in the building.

The Chief next addressed the Safer Grant Funding indicating that the Safer Grant funds 75% for the first year, 75% for the second year, and 35% for the third year. 100% is funded by the City for the fourth year. Year one and year two for FEMA the number is $679,634.34. The City portion is $226,544.78 and year one would have a supplemental of $130,000 for gear, training, and all the other associated expenses. Year three FEMA numbers are $317,162.69, the City portion for year three is $589,016.43.

The current performance period for the grant would run from March 24, 2027 and the City is looking to adjust the beginning of the performance period to as early as January 2027 which would permit funding for six months in this fiscal year and six months in the next fiscal year.

Lastly, the operational impact would increase the daily minimum staffing from 12 to 13. The 13th person will be assigned to Ladder 2 and they will schedule Ladder 2 with a third member all the time, improving its staffing. The additional staffing, even though they won't be working every day, will help the department to augment its specialty teams increasing operational depth in reducing workload on current members, reducing overtime that they are currently asked to work. This concluded the Chief's comments.

Councilor Chalice stated she is happy the department has already started to reduce the overtime these committed professionals are working and is happy the City is able to receive this grant. She further stated she knows what it is like to be laid off and noted the City is going to do its best to come up with a million dollars in year four, which she felt was a lot of money and felt the City needs to make aware the people it hires what the circumstances are.

She further stated with the City is providing mutual aid to 38 communities, does the City have financial agreements with these communities. The Chief stated for the HAZMAT team, the City is working on this issue right now, as this is not something that has been done in the past. As far

as mutual aid, the Chief stated there is no financial understanding. The City provides help when needed and they provide help when the City needs it. He added for example the City received assistance from 27 fire trucks. The City might send out a single fire engine out, but when there is a need in the City, the City would receive much more in assistance.

The Councilor asked what the City could do to raise public awareness about lithium-ion batteries. The Chief in response stated the NFPA has done a great job trying to get on the national news to explain some of these issues. He stated he could work with City staff and send out public announcements. He stated this is a problem that is growing faster than they can keep up with. The Chair stated this is something that is being covered in the national news daily, but the public might not be taking those cautions seriously.

Councilor Chadbourne stated the public was sent out cautions about lithium batteries in the mail from the City. She also suggested public news clips on social media.

She thanked the Chief for his presentation, and stated this presentation is not just about addressing fires and the health of our community, but it is also about the safety and welfare of our existing fire fighters.

Councilor Lake asked whether staff has investigated themes of certain injuries or medical instances that are happening, or places where the City is experiencing more crashes and conduct preventative campaigns or actions. The Chief stated at the present time they do not have the resources to undertake such a task and roadway accidents are beyond his purview. With respect to medical emergencies, there are things they may be able to do in the future, looking at MIH programs, community risk reduction etc. and could look at securing funding for that.

The Manager stated in addition to that, the City recently completed a road safety audit and the road safety audit did look at where crashes are happening and what the potential causes were; some of it was related to distracted drivers. She stated the City does have some of that data and it has helped the City to inform its projects throughout the City such as capital planning. She felt the medical data the Chief is talking about is something that would be worth pursuing.

Councilor Roberts talked about a fire at his neighbor's house on Grove Street and added if the crew arrived at this property five minutes later his house probably would have been caught in this fire as well. He agreed these fires could move very fast. He stated as a City he would not want to be the one telling a parent or child their loved one could not be saved due to lack of funding or services. He felt the City sometimes has to make very crucial calls and hence will be supporting this request.

The City Manager stated she has discussed with the Chief the model used in Keene and in the State and stated this is not a model the City can keep up with. Trying to achieve the requirements of the NFPA Standards is not affordable for most communities. She indicated some of the things the Chief has talked about is responding to lower-level emergency calls through perhaps a community medicine program or some other initiatives. She stated at the present time increasing the number of fire fighters was important because the City is in somewhat of an island but felt there needs to be other avenues the City should be looking at in the future. She felt this is a much

bigger question and a statewide question. How is the mutual aid system working or sometimes doesn't. She stated these are things the Chief is looking into.

Councilor Favolise felt the priority for government at all levels is the protection of people and property and hence spending money on this would mean other things cannot be prioritized. With respect to, lithium-ion batteries - around fire prevention week, there was a one-page fact sheet that was circulated to the community which he stated was very helpful.

In response to what the City Manager stated about lower emergency calls, the Councilor stated the reason the City is having to deal with this issue is because providers locally have closed and the burden for certain types of calls has shifted to the Keene Fire Department in a way that previously that burden was more evenly spread around a number of other providers in the City. The City might not be able to get assistance from full-time career departments like Concord or Claremont on a timely basis but there also does not seem to be help coming from within Keene and within the region in other ways and wanted the City to think about this as well.

Councilor Filiault stated related to layoffs in the future in the Fire Department, as far as he is concerned, he will not be in support of it. He stressed the importance of funding but also the importance of having the required number of personnel. He felt the standards indicate this number of personnel are necessary and four years down the road, the City will make every effort the find the funding necessary to support these positions.

Mr. Rob Skrocki, President of Professional Firefighters of Keene thanked the Chief for his presentation. On behalf of the Professional firefighters of Keene, he wanted to bring to the Committee's attention both from the Safer Grant application and from the Keene Fire Department's Strategic Plan that was adopted last year, why the members feel strongly about increasing the minimum staffing of the Fire Department.

Throughout the Safer Grant application, the City repeatedly identified increased on duty staffing and improved initial response capabilities as the primary objectives of adding eight firefighters. In fact, the application explicitly states, "*their purpose is to increase safe staffing on first arriving fire apparatus and improve initial company capability*." It goes on to state exactly how that would happen – By increasing Ladder 2 and Engine 2 from two person to three person companies. The application further states that these firefighters would be part of the initial alarm response not delayed callback staffing. He stated these are not simply the opinions or requests of the Union, but these are the City's own representations to the federal government about what this funding would accomplish.

Furthermore, the Keene Fire Department Strategic Plan identifies the need to ensure adequate crew size, effective shift coverage, and reliable shift capabilities. Mr. Skrocki stressed that the department needs more firefighters immediately available to respond to emergencies, yet the proposal to schedule 15 firefighters while maintaining a minimum staffing 13 does not guarantee those improvements. It allows the department to revert to the very staffing model this grant was intended to improve.

Mr. Skrocki stated their advocacy for increased staffing is not about making the job easier for firefighters. It is about making emergency services more effective for the people they are sworn to protect.

He noted members understand the demands and inherent risks of this profession and know those risks when taking on these positions. But when there is inadequate staffing, it is the community that bears the consequences.

Mr. Skrocki stated members continue to be asked to do more with less every day. As was indicated by the Chief, almost 50% of the time they are called to emergencies happening simultaneously.

Mr. Skrocki added they continue to be the only department in the state providing paramedic level ALS Fire response, technician level technical rescue response in all disciplines and a staffed Hazmat team that is available 24/7/365. Other departments having less responsibility with less call volume have no less than a minimum of 15 firefighters on shift at all times, and they have neighboring municipalities that have immediately available professional fire departments.

This City is continuing to grow and our call volume will continue to grow with it. The taxpayers of Keene already shoulder a significant property tax burden, and they have every right to expect that the homes, businesses, schools and other critical infrastructure, their tax dollars support are adequately protected. He stated the current minimum staffing levels fall short of the response capabilities the community reasonably expects and deserves.

Mr. Skrocki felt this grant provides an opportunity to make a meaningful investment in public safety without immediately placing the entire financial burden of eight firefighters on local taxpayers. He felt the success of this grant should be measured not by the number of firefighters added to the payroll, but by the additional emergency response capabilities delivered to our community.

Mr. Skrocki went on to say if the City accepts the federal funding specifically intended to improve the adequacy of our emergency response yet continues to allow our department to operate at the same minimal staffing level the City should look at whether it is fulfilling the purpose of that investment. On behalf of the Professional Fire Fighters of Keene, Mr. Skrocki asked that this Committee recommend establishing a minimum staffing level of 15 firefighters, ensuring that the operational improvements described by the City's own Safer Grant application become a consistent and dependable benefit to the citizens of Keene.

Mr. Skrocki asked the Chief for a breakdown of the $1,000,000 the City is going to be responsible for at the end of the grant period; what the taxpayer impact that would be. The Manager in response stated for the firefighters that have currently been added to-date it is $0.65 on the tax rate. The additional $1.6 million would be another .47 on the tax rate. She added on a $300,000 home it would be $300.

He also asked how often the Fire Department is unable to meet standards. The Chief stated because of the overlapping calls and the districts, he calculates that to be close to 40% of the time they are unable to meet staffing requirements for a multi-piece response.

The Manager explained the Safer Grant adds eight additional firefighters which brings the number to 15 firefighters available per shift, but as was mentioned earlier 40% of the time people are out on some sort of leave. The issue with having the ability to hire 15 firefighters per shift and then keeping your minimum at 15 means every single call is on overtime when someone is out on sick leave, vacation etc. Those numbers have not been calculated but what has been calculated in the $1.6 million is adding eight firefighters to the department and bringing the available number to 15 per shift.

Ms. Jodi Newell of 32 Leverett Street addressed the Committee about a fire she had experienced in her home and because of the fire department's close proximity to her home, the response time was very quick. She recalled having to exit her home in the midst of black smoke with her son not being able to see and stated she had great respect for the danger fire fighters are place in every day.

Mr. Roger Weinreich of 51 Railroad Street stated he supported adding more than 15 firefighters. He has experience working as a firefighter for Cambridge, Massachusetts. He stated even many years ago they always arrived with 20 people for every call, which meant there could be two search teams of two people each. He stated response time of 15 minutes for Mutual Aid to respond is too long and felt an additional $300 on someone's tax bill was worth the investment to protect your home.

Councilor Roberts stated he has confidence that the Fire Chief will be looking for grants to support this funding. He stated he was not making any commitment for three or four years out from now unless he constantly gets more input from the Fire Chief with more numbers, new presentations, and details on what the City would have to give up to support this funding.

Councilor Lake stated that he supports this request and felt the Fire Department was the best place the City could invest in but wanted the Council to keep in mind going into the next budget season what the impact is going to be in four years.

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 that the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to accept, execute, and expend the FY2025 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant, Award No. EMW-2025-FF-01440, in the amount of $1,676,431 in federal funding, for the purpose of hiring eight (8) additional firefighters for the Keene Fire Department, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the grant award.

6. Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Powers adjourned the meeting at 7:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

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