

City of Keene
New Hampshire

JOINT HERITAGE COMMISSION & HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

4:30 PM

**Council Chamber,
City Hall**

HC Members Present:

Cauley Powell, Chair
Molly Ellis, Vice Chair
Marilyn Huston
Rose Carey, Alternate
Louise Zerba, Alternate

Staff Present:

Evan Clements, Planner

HC Members Not Present:

Julie Emineth
Susan DeGidio, Alternate

HDC Members Present:

Sophia Cunha-Vasconcelos, Chair
Hope Benik, Vice Chair
Anthony Ferrantello
Russ Fleming, Alternate

HDC Members Not Present:

Councilor Catt Workman
David Bergeron, Alternate
Peter Poanessa, Alternate

1) Call to Order – Roll Call

Chair Cauley Powell called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM and roll call ensued.

2) Update – Historic District Commission

Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos explained the purpose and responsibilities of the HDC, citing their website landing page, she read, “Created to preserve the heritage and visual character of the City of Keene by regulating the compatibility of alterations to existing building structures and sites within the downtown Historic District and collaboration with city departments and other agencies.” She continued by explaining some of their purposes, to include strengthening the economy of the City by protecting and enhancing the attractiveness of the community to residents, tourists and visitors, promoting the use of the Historic District for education, prosperity

and general welfare of the community. She went on to explain the geographical scope of the Historic District as well as their responsibilities, which include adopting rules and procedures, adopting resource ranking lists, approving or disapproving applications for certificates of appropriateness, and requesting reports and recommendations from city departments and agencies. Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos went on to detail their past projects, such as the creation of outdoor seating, installation of exterior HVAC equipment, installation of cell towers and solar arrays, the replacement of windows and doors, the installation of the ramp on the Senior Center, as well as the demolition of 147 Main Street after the fire. In 2023, the HDC began sending mailings to all of the property owners in the Historic District to inform them of what it means to be in the district. This year, the HDC would rank the unranked properties within the 2011 Historic District expansion.

3) Update – Heritage Commission

Chair Powell stated that the HC is an advisory board and focuses on education and public awareness, and celebrating the heritage of the City’s culture. She went on to explain the two major CLG grants that they had run through their Commission. The first being the 2021 Italian Neighborhood Project where they received funding to build a website as well as a crowdsourcing tool to involve community members in deciding on the story of their own neighborhood. The second CLG grant was the Recovering Black History Project that would add to the unacknowledged history of the area from the early 1800s up to the 1920s.

4) Discussion – Promotion and Preserving Keene’s Historical and Cultural History
A) Mayor’s Proposed Commission Merger

Mayor Jay Kahn stated that one of his rolls was to fill commissions and that he had trouble filling the HDC. He stated, out of practicality, he thought it may be best to merge the two commissions for better sustainability. State statute allows for HCs to take on a Historic District role and vis versa. He believed that both bodies would be sensitive of the needs and understandings of the other. Mr. Fleming stated that creating one body would be more efficient on the regulatory side but that the HC is an advisory board and the HDC is regulatory. He suggested having someone from the HC also sit on the HDC board in order to create more interaction between the two boards. Vice Chair Hope Benik questioned if the two commissions merged, would that ultimately result in HC members being drafted to fill HDC positions. Ms. Cunha-Vasconcelos stated that she had confidence that Mayor Kahn would be able to fill the empty positions, as his term had just begun. Ms. Hutson stated that she believed that there is not enough promotion or education on the two commissions and that they would be able to fill the open positions if the community knew about them. Mayor Kahn stated that the two roles do bleed over, as education and regulation aren’t that dissimilar as there is an opportunity to educate someone who is about to do something where there are regulations. Chair Powell stated that what the HDC does is very specific and bounded by the Historic District’s borders whereas the HC is not limited to certain buildings or structures, but involves the history of the people who have

lived in the City of Keene. Members believed that the two commissions could work together on certain projects while still fulfilling their own individual roles.

B) Keene’s Heritage and the Master Plan Update

The CEO of Future IQ, David Burrell, and the VP of Foresight Research, Heather Branigan, were present at the meeting.

Mr. Burrell explained that they were sitting in on boards and commissions for an exploratory discussion regarding the Master Plan. It was designed to be an open, transparent and inclusive process, and that they intended to have a lot of input from the community, boards and commissions. They were looking at targets of around 1,000 people to take surveys, as it was an important, once-in-a-decade conversation and reset about the direction of the community and where they fit into the world.

Based on the community’s larger aspiration, there were a couple of major phases to the plan. The first, from the time of the meeting through September, they called it the “visioning phase” in which they would explore the future speculation of how the community could evolve and what the preferred or shared vision is. The second phase, from September onward, would be the “chapters” of the Master Plan, where Mr. Burrell stated that the commission members’ expertise would be useful. He stated that it would be an open public process and, therefore, to a degree, they would be governed by whomever turns up, including those who are on boards and commissions. They were designing a lot of different input opportunities so there would be a chance for people to shape a future picture and narrative for the community. The focus would be on this for the next ten months and then it would devolve to groups like the commissions and to the staff to begin implementing it.

To make the new Master Plan, they would look at emerging trends and how the community could evolve, what the different plausible scenarios of the future are and what the implications of those are, and so on. Although the Master Plan is done once every ten years, communities also do intermediary updates as well.

The first step to the process, at the next Master Plan Steering Committee meeting, they would look at the 2010 Master Plan to see what goals were achieved, what was missed, and how they would move forward.

5) New Business

On April 12, the Historical Society would host a Lunch and Learn for the Black History Project where the students would present the work that they had done thus far.

6) Next Meeting – TBD

Chair Powell and Chair Cunha-Vasconcelos would discuss another joint meeting at a later time.

7) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chair Powell adjourned the meeting at 5:47 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Melissa Danneker, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Evan J. Clements, AICP - Planner