

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, April 24, 2024

6:00 PM

**Council Chamber,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Mitchell H. Greenwald, Chair
Randy L. Filiault, Vice Chair
Catherine I. Workman
Laura E. Tobin

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager
Thomas P. Mullins, City Attorney
Brett Rusnock, Infrastructure Project Manager

Members Not Present:

Andrew M. Madison

Jay V. Kahn, Mayor

Chair Greenwald called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM and explained the procedures of the meeting.

1) Request for a License to Use City Right-of-Way: Hurricane Road – City Engineer Don Lussier, City Engineer

Chair Greenwald asked to hear from the City Engineer. In the City Engineer's absence, he recognized Lauren Hubele.

Lauren Hubele of 180 Hurricane Rd. stated that she is here representing the Gemmo Forest, a NH nonprofit. She continued that Gemmo Forest leases 12 acres of land from the Filtrine Company under the management of Peter Hansel. She and her family came to NH to start this nonprofit. They are growing native trees, shrubs, and plants for medicinal purposes. After one year of growing, it became clear that they needed irrigation to make this a sustainable project. They applied to the NRCS for funding for the irrigation. The NRCS needs a City official to sign off on a form saying that the conduit that has been in place for over 50 years can be reused.

Chair Greenwald asked if the Committee had questions. Hearing none, he asked to hear from the City Attorney.

City Attorney Tom Mullins stated that he has been working with the Public Works Department and the City Engineer on this. He continued that the City does not have any particular concern with respect to the infrastructure itself. Staff has reached out to the Applicant to request some

specific authority with respect to the property owners on either side of the road, the Filtrine owners, to establish that there is an agreement between the two to allow the property to be used for these purposes. City staff anticipates that coming back. Then, it would be subject to the same licensing requirements as usual. The City does not own the fee under Hurricane Rd. Given that, he would like to see the specific authority for the use.

Chair Greenwald asked if City Attorney wants to do that investigation and then bring it back to the MSFI Committee. The City Attorney replied that the Committee can act on it tonight, because if they do not get it (the requested documentation of the agreement with the Filtrine owners), the City Manager just will not execute it.

Chair Greenwald asked if anyone from the public wanted to speak to this. Hearing none, he asked for comments or questions from the Committee. Hearing none, he asked for a motion.

Councilor Workman made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Filiault.

On a vote of 4-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee recommends the City Manager be authorized to do all things necessary to negotiate and execute a revocable license to install, maintain, and operate an irrigation water supply system across Hurricane Road in the vicinity of 140 and 149 Hurricane Rd.

2) **Relating to Water and Sewer Abatements - Ordinance O-2024-04**

Chair Greenwald asked to hear from the City Manager.

City Manager Elizabeth Dragon stated that this is a follow-up to a conversation from the Rules of Order workshop about a sewer/water abatement request that had come to the Committee multiple times and was still looking to come back. She continued that at that meeting it was suggested that this really should be an administrative process, determined by the Public Works Director, rather than the City Council. Regarding the last sewer abatement request the Committee had, the Public Works Director went through the extensive process that they use to determine whether an abatement is warranted, including testing the meter and replacing the meter to determine if the meter is accurate. If the water has gone through, the money is owed. Thus, this is follow-up from that discussion. This Ordinance makes that change and designates the Public Works Director as the person to hear and decide on abatement requests.

Chair Greenwald stated that when he first became a City Councilor, he was a member of the Health, Safety, and Human Services Committee, which was later rolled into the MSFI Committee. He continued that at that time, the Council had full authority to grant the abatements. Anytime someone did not understand their water bill or left the hose or toilet running, they would come to the Council and try explaining why they should not be billed. As the City Manager said, if the water goes through the meter, the person owes it. It does not matter why the water went through the meter, or what happened. It is very difficult, as a Councilor, to

speak to a neighbor, friend, taxpayer, or constituent and say what that person does not want to hear. But it is what it is. In the beginning, a very long time ago, the MSFI Committee itself had the authority to grant abatements; they did not even get referred to the City Council.

Chair Greenwald continued that he thinks this Ordinance puts the authority where it should be, with the Public Works Department. He fully supports this.

Chair Greenwald asked if there were any further questions from the Committee or public. Hearing none, he asked for a motion.

Councilor Filiault made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Workman.

On a vote of 4-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee recommends the adoption of Ordinance O-2024-04.

3) Downtown Infrastructure Project – Focus Area: Gilbo Ave and Railroad Square

Chair Greenwald stated that to bring everyone up to date, they have had presentations and tonight are discussing the Gilbo Ave and Railroad Street area. He continued that there is also some “clean up work” on the previous discussions about the lower end of Main St. The Committee has a series of questions and discussion items, per his request to staff, so the Committee can give some real advice, make some decisions, and move this along. The intention is for the Council’s work on this project being finished in early July, then handing it over to City staff and consultant to do the drawings and get some shovels moving.

Chair Greenwald asked to hear from staff and the consultants.

Brett Rusnock, Infrastructure Project Manager at the Public Works Department, stated that the Project Manager and Lead Architect for the team from Stantec are with him. He continued that tonight they are focusing the discussion only on Gilbo Ave, Railroad Square, and a few minor, follow-up discussion items from last month’s meeting. As Chair Greenwald mentioned, he and the Stantec representatives have the informal discussion topics to present tonight, outlined in the presentation. To clarify, they are not looking for (the Committee) to make a formal vote, but rather to state their preferences on the (elements), so staff and Stantec can continue the design process and keep it moving forward.

Dave McNamara of Stantec stated that there are three sections to talk about on Main St. – the left-turn pocket onto Emerald St.; some work near The Works for a commercial spot; and some changes to Lamson St., which might be new and have not come up at the last MSFI Committee meeting. In addition, he continued, Stantec put an updated parking total on the top of the table (shown on the screen). In most of the meetings, they have talked about the 167 parking spaces that exist on Main St. and Central Square and then the preferred alternative, which is at 170 spaces in those two corridors. With the Gilbo and Railroad discussion, they wanted to add the

parking totals from those two streets as well. There are another 72 existing on-street parking spaces between Gilbo and Railroad, not counting the parking lots adjacent to those two streets. They are showing 63 spaces going back. They will talk later tonight about changes that could be made to Gilbo Ave to increase the parking totals.

Mr. McNamara stated that in the March meetings, Stantec had closed off the left-turn pocket onto Emerald St. He continued that it is a rather a light turning movement, but there was a lot of feedback from the public and this Committee about the importance of that and keeping cars' ability to make that move. Stantec added that back in, the same size as what exists today. As part of that, they moved the crosswalk from the south side of the intersection back to the north side of the intersection. Essentially, this intersection would be functionally back to where it is today, with two northbound lanes with the left turn pocket, the crosswalk on the northern side, and the two southbound lanes coming through.

Mr. McNamara continued that the next piece of discussion that came up was getting some sidewalk seating in in front of The Works café. Stantec took the bike lane, which you can see coming south to north across Eagle Ct. and up Main St., and pushed it out into that bump out area to create some more space in front of The Works. This is a raised table intersection, so the crosswalk will be at grade with the sidewalk, whereas today, that crosswalk comes in and you have the tip down in the vicinity of The Works. Everything will be at the same grade, so there will be a bit more room to use in front of that building.

Mr. McNamara continued that the third piece is Lamson St., which has come up as the project has gone on. City staff looked into why Lamson St. is there and the need to keep that vehicular access from Main St. They worked with Police and Fire, too, and determined that vehicular access from Lamson St. to Main St. is not necessary. Thus, they closed that off and were able to pick up a couple more parking spaces in front of Lamson St. Lamson St. will still be there and there will be access from the back, but not from Main St., which allows a little bit more room and flexibility in that vicinity.

Bob Corning of Stantec stated that he knows there is a lot of interest in the U-turn on the north end of Main St. He continued that Stantec is looking at a few different alternatives, running some traffic analyses on that, and will be ready to talk about it as part of the Central Square discussion in a few weeks - both the TRC (Technical Review Committee) next week, the public meeting, and ultimately the MSFI Committee meeting on May [8].

Chair Greenwald stated that that is what he was going to say. He continued that tonight they are focusing on Gilbo Ave. and Railroad Square, not taking in Central Square, which will be a lengthy discussion.

Mr. Corning stated that there is a lot to go through tonight, regarding what he and Mr. McNamara think are exciting opportunities on the Gilbo and Railroad corridor. He continued that this (slide) is an existing tree analysis, looking at the existing tree inventory on Gilbo Ave.

The plan proposes removing two trees, a sugar maple and a callery pear, both in poor condition. Otherwise, they are trying to save the existing trees in this zone. Some of the inspiration for Gilbo, from a goals standpoint, was improving the pedestrian environment, similar to what they are doing on Main St. In addition, they are looking to activate the Gilbo zone, which they see as underutilized, with a great opportunity to improve open space and opportunities for downtown events. They are looking at, for example, permanent and flexible seating, overhead string/catenary lighting for character, and gateways. The Arts Alive group looked at doing a covered, open-air pavilion on the western end of the transportation building over the existing parking. Given that one of the goals Stantec was looking at with the City was to provide solar for the street lighting, Arts Alive's idea was inspiring and it was a great opportunity to look at potentially incorporating a solar field on top of a covered structure. The slides show examples of that, as well as opportunities for events, such as tents, food trucks, farmer's markets, or arts events.

Mr. Corning showed a slide of the current recommended option, and continued that they have some alternative options to show as well. Currently there is a lot of pavement in this area. Gilbo Ave is excessively wide. Thus, Stantec narrowed it to two 12-foot lanes, one in each direction. By doing that, they pulled the angled parking in front of the diner as well as the perpendicular parking west of the transportation building out to the edge of the street. That allows for some additional sidewalk space for pedestrian zones.

Mr. Corning continued that on the eastern end of Gilbo, this plan proposes eliminating three parallel parking spaces on the north side of Gilbo as well as five angled spots on the south side. It is an attempt to increase the pedestrian zones and the areas that are useful to pedestrians in that zone. Regarding the idea of a covered pavilion, they are showing a 30' x 220' structure over the relocated parking. They made the parking stalls a little deeper to accommodate not only passenger vehicles, but also potentially food trucks or other larger vehicles. They also looked at opportunities around the café, the Corner News, and the rail trail, to look at activating those zones with overhead lighting, public art, flexible and permanent seating, and covered bike areas.

Mr. Corning showed a section through the perpendicular parking and continued that they are looking at opportunities for a cantilevered structure, to eliminate the need for posts on the street side of the parking and give more flexibility to that space. That zone is 30 feet deep. There are two 12-foot travel lanes. Pulling this parking out to the street side means gaining some additional space between the rail trail and the proposed structure, which is more pedestrian zone in that area.

Further east, this is through the transportation building or YOLO, you can see some of the ideas of narrowing the street to 24 feet, increasing the sidewalk widths on both sides, and looking at opportunities to activate the zone between the café and Margaritas Restaurant.

Mr. Corning continued that looking at some concepts for programming under that structure in this scenario if there was some kind of arts event, farmer's market, or other event with tables or

tents, you could get upwards of 35 vendors, some tents along the back side in this open space zone. They think it is a great opportunity to provide another location for additional programming in the downtown. Similarly, depending on the layout of how the food trucks are organized, they could fit eight to eleven food trucks in this area.

Mr. Corning stated that concerns Stantec has received from the TRC and the public was the elimination of the parking spaces on the east end of Gilbo. He continued that there are a couple of alternatives. What they just presented was the elimination of the eight spaces. Another scenario is basically replicating what exists now, putting the parallel spaces back on the north side, the angled spaces back on the south side. The third option is something in between, replacing the parallel spaces on the north side but then change the angled spaces to parallel, where they would be able to gain a couple of those back on the south side. Something to mention is that due to the layout of the parallel spaces, they would probably eliminate the two existing trees to accommodate the parallel spaces on the south side. Stantec wants input on that.

Mr. Corning stated that the “no pavilion” alternative is almost the same as what they just showed, except it does not have the pavilion structure and just has standard, 18-foot parking space dimensions for the perpendicular parking. That gives even more open space between the rail trail and the parking.

Mr. Corning continued that they had two sessions of the public workshop, with about 50 people at the first one and 30 people at the second. Generally, the feedback was very positive. Regarding Gilbo, there was positive feedback about the raised intersection, the solar parking structure, the gateway structure, lighting, and bike racks. As mentioned, there were comments about keeping the street parking at the east end of Gilbo. There was also a desire, which came up multiple times, for public bathrooms and activating the area between the buildings for positive use.

Mr. Corning continued that the Committee has a handout from Mr. Rusnock on some of the design discussions they are hoping to have today. He asked Chair Greenwald if they want to go through each individually, and whether to have public comment on each or at the end.

Chair Greenwald suggested they take Gilbo, and have brief public comment, because this has already been discussed at the (public workshop) at the Rec Center. He asked the Committee for their thoughts on Gilbo.

Councilor Filiault stated that the parking issue seems to have brought the most concerns from constituents he has heard from. He continued that he thinks it is important to keep as many spaces as possible. It is not as if they are developing something extraordinary there, it is just a matter of adding a little grass or maneuvering a couple things. In addition, there are a couple of businesses on the corner with many customers who use those spaces.

Chuck Redfern of 9 Colby St. stated that he echoes Councilor Filiault's comments about parking. He continued that parking should be available around Corner News. The parallel parking across the street should be maintained, because those are right up front of the downtown activity. He thinks Corner News would be boxed out of parking if all of those spaces were removed from it.

Dan Scully stated that he has worked some with Arts Alive on the ideas for Gilbo Ave. He continued that he wants to speak to the covered parking and events space. All the efforts for Central Square, they can work as events space, but they cannot work for things that need trucks to arrive, because you are not going to drive trucks on Central Square. Those efforts are fine, but you need a place that is a permanent setup, covered, with power. He applauds the 30-foot deep parking spaces. [We] had proposed and discussed previously covering parking spaces that could be used as metered parking spaces during the day or be closed for events, but the idea Stantec suggests is much more accommodating and he applauds that.

Mr. Scully continued that he is working with the Corner News owners, who are not interested in losing any of those parking spaces. The nature of their business does not need a wider sidewalk for tables or anything of that sort, but their business needs people to be able to stop quickly and get in and out. The Corner News owners definitely support keeping the five diagonal parking spaces and the benefit of keeping the trees. They will try to do a gateway to the west, to Gilbo Ave.

Chair Greenwald stated that the roof on the covered parking area would have solar panels. He continued that that should power the downtown street lighting.

Vicky Morton of 275 Water St. stated that not a lot was spoken about public bathrooms, but in a real desire to lessen what happened last summer and fall, she hopes there is an emphasis on somehow including public bathrooms. She continued that it makes sense that they would be somewhere near the transportation center.

Jessica Gelter of Arts Alive stated that last summer, Arts Alive hosted the Elevate the Arts festival on Commercial St. and along Gilbo Ave. She continued that they had a wonderful turnout, with over 30 vendors and artists, community arts activities, music, and food trucks. The weather was unpredictable, with a surprise downpour mid-day. Artists' wares got wet. The electricity going to the music tent was slightly dangerous. Having a covered space would have prevented some of the harm that occurred during that event. A covered space would be a wonderful asset for vendors in the region coming to downtown Keene to participate in festivals and to sell their work. Our region has over 2,500 independent artists earning a living from their independent artwork, including writing, painting, poetry, and sculpture. This would be an incredible economic asset for that population and would have an economic impact on the downtown with festival events. They saw that this weekend with the Earth Day Festival on Railroad Square.

Chair Greenwald asked if there was any further public comment. Hearing none, he continued that the Committee has this (handout of) decision/comment points from the consultants. They will go through them one at a time, not to vote, but to indicate the Committee's thoughts so the consultants can start making some decisions.

Chair Greenwald asked the Committee if they want to maintain parking spaces near the Main St. intersection or remove them to expand available sidewalk or commerce space. He continued that this is regarding those eight spaces at Corner News.

Councilor Workman stated that she would like to keep the parking spaces closest to Corner News. She continued that the ones on the other side are less (of a concern).

Chair Greenwald stated that for the purposes of disclosure, he owns the building on the north side of Gilbo Ave, with the three parking spaces that are in question. He continued that he asked if that sidewalk could be widened, and the answer was yes. His suggestion is to keep the parking spaces, widen the sidewalk, and everyone wins. Councilor Filiault replied that works for him.

Councilor Tobin asked where the loading zone would be if the parking spaces were removed. She continued that for those two businesses, if one side is the parking lot, she is curious about where the loading zone would be. Chair Greenwald asked if she is asking how Corner News would get deliveries. Councilor Tobin replied yes, and YOLO. Chair Greenwald replied the back alley. Councilor Tobin asked if he means deliveries would come to the back alley and be brought across the street. Chair Greenwald replied that he believes Corner News would have a problem, because there is no parking in front, around the corner, and on Main St., so essentially they are sidewalk locked, as opposed to (having) available parking.

Mr. Corner replied that Stantec does not know where they get their deliveries currently. Chair Greenwald replied off the street, with the angled parking.

Councilor Tobin stated that people expressed concerns to her regarding loading zones. She continued that having worked with ice cream before, she knows what those deliveries are like. She is curious, whether it is parking or sidewalk, how big the loading zone would need to be. If cars parked there, the truck would need to stop on the road itself. Chair Greenwald replied they would stop in front of the transportation center and wheel the deliveries. He continued that alternately, Corner News gets deliveries from small vendors in parking spaces. He asked if that answers the question. Councilor Tobin replied that it still sounds like a question mark. Chair Greenwald replied that they have a choice of three options, and the hope is that the Committee will give the consultants some direction.

Councilor Workman stated that looking at the options, she would be comfortable with the alternative option 1, maintaining existing parking, with the diagonal parking. Councilor Tobin stated that she would choose alternative option 2.

Chair Greenwald stated that the next question is whether they want a covered/parking pavilion for flexible space and solar panel opportunities.

Councilor Filiault stated that he likes that proposal. He continued that they would use the power for the downtown lighting, which would be a win/win. Councilor Workman replied that she agrees. Chair Greenwald stated that he is in favor of the covered parking.

Chair Greenwald stated that the next question is whether they want more permanent seating in public spaces. He continued that this is a throwback to the last discussion. Currently, there is minimal seating downtown. He thinks they need seating, but what type of seating becomes an issue, as well as the seating design. It needs to be durable and not the type of seating people would spend the entire day on, but seating that is functional for shoppers and older folks who need it.

Councilor Filiault stated that he has no problem with that. He continued that (it should be) durable. Location of seating is important. If it will be permanent, they need to consider snow removal. One of the reasons benches were removed was to give staff the ability to plow the sidewalks.

Councilor Tobin stated that she says yes to more permanent seating in public spaces.

Chair Greenwald stated that the next question is whether they want a gateway type structure across the rail trail to Gilbo Ave. He continued that as he understands it, it would be similar to what Ashuelot River Park and Keene State College have.

Councilor Workman stated that she would like to see more information on it, but as of now, she supports it. Councilor Filiault agreed. Councilor Tobin stated that she really likes the gateway idea.

Chair Greenwald stated that the next question is whether they want to provide an option for covered bike parking in the Gilbo Ave space. He asked the consultants to speak to that a little more.

Mr. Corning stated that some of the comments they heard, both through the TRC and the community, are about creating more opportunities for covered bike parking along the rail trail, particularly on both sides of Main St. He continued that Stantec suggests a location somewhere between the café and Margaritas, along the rail trail. The exact location and design are still being looked at.

Councilor Filiault stated that he supports that.

Chair Greenwald stated that the next question is whether they want permanent catenary lighting, suspended lighting, above the rail trail.

Mr. Corning clarified that “catenary lighting” is a fancy term for “string lighting.” He continued that the idea is to activate and animate that space between the café and Margaritas.

Councilor Workman asked if the solar panels on the covered pavilion would power those string lights. Mr. Corning replied that they could.

Chair Greenwald stated that to him, catenary lighting is a “definite maybe.” He continued that would like to see more detail on it but it sounds interesting.

Councilor Workman stated that she thinks it is important, if they are looking at adding the covered bike parking there and talking about possible restrooms in the area, to consider lighting as a safety measure. She continued that she knows it has kind of been a “hot spot” for criminal activity in the past. If they add those structures, it would be smart to consider increased lighting. Chair Greenwald agreed.

Councilor Filiault stated that he agrees, and as they have seen in the past couple of weeks, there are many proposals for new events downtown, a couple each month for the whole summer. He continued that lighting would give a more festive and secure feel. He thinks it is a good idea.

Councilor Tobin stated that she has mixed feelings about the lighting being permanent. She continued that she does not feel strongly one way or the other. Chair Greenwald replied that it sounds like they want more information.

Chair Greenwald stated that they will move to a discussion of Railroad Square on the other side of the street.

Mr. Corning stated that (the Railroad Square presentation begins with) some precedent images Stantec generated, regarding the ideas of:

- additional public art
- fixed and flexible seating, with shade
- some type of trellis or pergola structure
- a way of accommodating various events, such as with tents or food trucks
- opportunities for incorporating interesting furniture, such as standing tables or lit benches
- the potential for the green area to have land forms to provide interest
- opportunities for reinforcing the idea that the railroad actually came through the area, such as recreating the railroad tracks in the paving
- ensuring adequate room for various types of events
- a gateway structure

Mr. Corning continued that Stantec looked at those as “guiding principles” for the design. Regarding a recommended design, Stantec proposals a couple of tree removals, due to the

locations of the existing trees. Just north of the building are two trees in tough shape, and there are four more in difficult locations.

Mr. Corning showed the current recommended plan. He continued that one issue, currently, is the way the rail trail/multi-use path cuts through the middle of the plaza space. In the alternatives and recommended plan, Stantec proposes swapping the sidewalk along the south side of Railroad St. with the shared use path, so the shared use path would come across Main St. then go along the north side of the plaza space, then make its way back down to the existing multi-use path. At some point, the pedestrian sidewalk along the parking would come through and then cross into the plaza space. Pedestrians could use the shared use path as well, but this would give an opportunity to get pedestrians off that shared use path into the plaza and then go north or south on Main St. or across Main St.

Mr. Corning stated that currently, the Hennessy's restaurant has outdoor seating in a fenced in area but it is on grass. They are looking at whether that should be a paved area. They would save the existing tree there. The question is whether the plaza should be expanded to include that space. Another question is whether there is an opportunity to do outdoor commerce on the north side of the building, just north of Local Burger. That building front also has potential opportunities for public art, such as a mural wall. Stantec is framing the plaza space itself with four large trees in planters with integrated seating. It creates an "outdoor room"/space that is framed on all four sides. They will show how that could be programmed.

Mr. Corning continued that similar to on Gilbo Ave, they are also showing some sort of gateway arch. As you are crossing Main St. this would be a gateway into the Railroad Square plaza. As shown in the precedent images, they are showing the opportunity for a pavilion or pergola. As he stated earlier, they could incorporate some of the history by replicating the railroad tracks in some kind of paving pattern. It would help draw people in and connect the space internally. This pavilion could also provide covered bike parking.

Mr. Corning continued that they propose relocating the Walldog signage, the orientation sign that is currently further out on the other side of the sidewalk. The sign is part of the reason there are visibility issues when you are turning from Main St. onto Railroad St. They propose moving it back, to provide more visibility at the intersection.

Mr. Corning continued that regarding the rest of the space, Stantec is looking at relocating the existing multi-use path to provide more green space on the south side. They have some options for the location of that path. They are showing the possibility of a 20' by 180' structure over this parking as well. It is a little challenging because they do not have the depth, the flexibility of the increased step that they have at Gilbo. Since Railroad St. is one-way eastbound, they need to probably have angled parking, which makes it a little more challenging to lay out. Stantec would love the Committee's feedback on whether Railroad or Gilbo is the preferred location for that structure, or both.

Mr. Corning showed a slide of a section and indicated the locations of Railroad St., the travel lane, the parking, the sidewalk, the “outdoor room” he talked about, potential catenary lighting, an example of tents set up for an event, and the potential for an outdoor commerce zone along Local Burger. He then showed a programming diagram, continuing that it shows the opportunity for something like an arts event or farmer’s market with 30 to 40 tents, 40 to 60 vendors, and 400 to 600 people. It would lay out very well for any kind of event they would want to have in that location, with or without the structure over the parking. You could probably get five to eight food trucks there, with 400 to 600 people. You could even, potentially, have food trucks on the plaza. For a performance, there could be a temporary stage, and 400 to 600 people standing or sitting in that area.

Mr. Corning stated that Stantec has a couple of alternative options. Alternative Option 1 – Minimal moves the shared use path to the north, maintains the two existing trees in the plaza, adds two new trees, adds some bike racks along the trail, and adds the outdoor seating/commerce area on the north side of the building. He continued that they also looked at the opportunity for incorporating a pergola/shade structure. In this particular plan, they show it on the north side of the plaza. It could be a place for outdoor seating, potentially bike storage, or other uses. (In Alternative Option 2 – Shade Structure), there could potentially be another pergola along the rail trail. It would still accommodate tents. Alternative Option 3 is Larger Green Space. They looked at relocating the multi-use path to the north as much as possible to maximize the amount of green space in this location. Generally, everyone thought that was a good idea. The problem is that it impacts a number of existing trees. The TRC, in particular, was excited about the increased continuous green space, but Stantec questions the loss of the four or five trees.

Mr. Corning stated that they also wanted to talk about the left turn at Railroad St. He asked if they should do that after discussing the square, or now.

Chair Greenwald stated that he thinks the options are a little confusing, in terms of identifying which are options 1, 2, and 3. Mr. Corning replied that the recommended option is the one they presented first, and the programming options are all based on that recommended option. Chair Greenwald asked which one has the performance space. Mr. Corning replied the recommended option. He continued that all of the diagrams relate to the recommended option.

The City Manager stated that regarding the recommended option, what they saw after that with the stage and the food truck festivals were just programming options using the recommended option. That is, based on the design, what they could do with a temporary stage, how many food trucks they could fit in the shade structure, and how many people they could fit into the space.

Councilor Tobin stated that she is a little confused about how it would work moving the rail trail. She asked if that means the other one across the street would move as well. Mr. Corning replied no. He showed the rail trail on the Gilbo side and stated that they propose a tabled intersection at Main St. and Railroad St. where there is the rail trail crossing as well as pedestrian crossing. He

continued that that would continue along the north side of the shared-use path and then make its way back down to the existing trail.

Councilor Workman stated that the different programming models just shows the versatility of the space.

Chair Greenwald stated that they can talk about the left turn onto Railroad St. now.

Mr. Corning stated that the current plan has no left turn from Main St. southbound onto Railroad St. He continued that they show the green island being extended but it would just be a paved, small raised apron. It would discourage left turns for vehicles, but emergency vehicles could use it to get onto Railroad St. There were concerns raised in the public meeting about the importance of the left turn on Railroad St.

Mr. McNamara stated that the traffic counts vary. He continued that he thinks they are heaviest in the morning. You could also add in the four single cut-throughs. Roughly 50 cars in that peak hour in the morning make that left turn, then the count goes down as the day goes on, to 42 cars in the mid-day peak and approximately 34 in the afternoon peak. Thus, it is not a heavy move, but some vehicles make that left turn. There are other ways to get onto Railroad St. off Roxbury St. from the north side, and coming from the south, the right turn in would still be available.

Mr. Corning stated that he thinks the way they modeled that with no left turn onto Railroad is that they would take a left further down. Mr. McNamara replied yes, they looked at diverting all of the left turns out of there, and whether those vehicles went down to Eagle Ct. and looped around and came back, or went down around the roundabout, it would not have a noticeable effect on any of the other intersections. He thinks people would divert themselves, either by going down Roxbury St. and coming in the backside, using the roundabout and coming back around, or going another way. There are other ways to get onto Railroad St. from the southbound side.

Chair Greenwald stated that eliminating the left turn also eliminates the U-turn, which he is sure Stantec wants to do. Mr. Corning replied yes, with the raised island, the fewer conflicting movements they can have on that tabled intersection the better, from a safety perspective. Chair Greenwald replied that he is not happy but understands why. He continued that there is too much going on there.

Mr. Corning stated that the following is a summary of the public workshop:

- Positive feedback on the event space to promote different activities
- Positive feedback on outdoor dining zones, outdoor commerce areas for surrounding restaurants to help activate the space
- Positive feedback on covered bike parking, pergola, catenary lighting, gateway structure, and solar parking structure

- Support for integrating more art via mural, historic remnant, or sculptures
- Concerns about bicycle/pedestrian conflicts on the shared-use path
- Concerns about bike lane transition from Gilbo through the raised intersection to Railroad
- Concerns about visibility at Main St./Railroad turning (as discussed regarding the Walldogs mural)
- Desire for bollards at raised intersections (which Stantec would incorporate)
- Desire for clear signs of allowed bike zone
- Desire to maintain existing trees in the green space and adding topography where feasible

Chair Greenwald asked for public comment.

Chuck Redfern of 9 Colby St. stated that this all sounds good to him. He continued that his only question is about Railroad Square in the northeast corner. A lot of activity goes on there, where the pedestrians and the shared-use path are. It seems a little stressed. He thinks it would be good to have a two-foot wider quarter circle that would give space for people coming off from the other side of the street, crossing the street, coming down or going up the sidewalk, or transitioning off the shared-use path. Having more room there would help avoid conflict. He talked with one of the consultants, who did not say they would do it, but said it sounds like a good idea.

Dan Scully stated that he thinks the tabled intersection is very good. He continued that he believes that has already been decided on. As the designer of the oval, down the bike path, he learned two things. First, people like to be seen. Expanding Railroad Square is the right thing to do, if you want to make a place for everyone. Second, do not underestimate the difficulty of moving a federally (funded) bike path. If they do a covered event space along Railroad St., they should make sure it is near many parking spaces. People need (parking) to go to those events. He thinks that would make Gilbo Ave a better choice for the covered event space. He is not saying Railroad Square would be a bad location, but it would be second priority.

Nancy Ancharski of 60 School St. stated that she thanks the Committee for continuing this workshop format, which is helpful. She continued that she has previously stated her views quite clearly, especially concerning the downtown trees. She wants to know how many trees located in the Gilbo/Railroad area will be cut down to accommodate the raised crosswalk, the bump outs, and all of the other elements there.

Mr. Corning replied that he thinks two on Gilbo and five on Railroad.

Ms. Ancharski stated that in the clump right around the intersections on both sides of the street, in the Bartlett tree study, she counted about 13 trees. They were listed as “mature” or “semi-mature.” Ten were in “good” condition and three were listed as “fair.” Those are on pages 18-21 in the Bartlett tree study. She does not see as many trees in the drawings, but that might just be the drawings.

Ms. Ancharski continued that she knows this is not completely related to tonight's topic, but at the last meeting, she asked about breaking down the costs of this whole project into its component parts. Somewhere on the website, she found a conceptual estimate of the budget. It listed things such as "excavation and embankment, paving, curbing, signs," which are big categories that do not make much sense to the public. All of that, including some landscaping, added up to \$6,590,099. Then there was "drainage, water quality," and other items like that. The estimated concept budget says the water and sewer part of the project would cost \$3,400,000, but it was excluded from the \$16 million subtotal for some reason. The solar canopy is a great idea, but it will cost \$1,150,000. The other one will probably cost the same amount. She was surprised to see the project totals. The estimate is actually \$20,900,000, which includes the previously excluded sewer and water costs. She thought that replacing sewer and water lines was the original point of this project. There was \$13 million in grants in there and she wonders if the City has received any of those grants, or if those are just proposed. It would be great if they get all of that. It would be very helpful to the public if the estimated costs were broken down into components that made sense.

Ms. Ancharski continued that going through the website, she (saw that) all of Stantec's original drawings from way back are still included. It makes going through the website confusing. It would be helpful to list the current plans, the details of them, and the costs.

Jay Kahn of Darling Rd. stated that he would like to address a couple of items. He continued that first, he will defend the turn lane. He comes down Court St. to get downtown. There is either street parking along the way or the decision to turn left and access the only parking structure currently in the downtown, via the route they are talking about - turning onto Railroad St. from Main St. He does that a lot. The likelihood of traveling down to the roundabout at Winchester St. would probably send him out of downtown. It is not a good alternative, in his opinion. He thinks the left turn there is very useful and he encourages (keeping) it. In addition, it is a good turnaround. For example, if he is at the Colonial Theater parking and wants to go back down Court St., he goes down Railroad St. to turn around at Church St.

Mr. Kahn stated that his second topic is that they do not need the benches against the wall at Railroad Square. He continued that it is an interesting feature, but those venues at that intersection, the bar or the burger restaurant, will make proposals for outdoor spaces, as they should. That can always be added, either by the owners or by the City via negotiations. To him, it is "clutter" (in this project) and presupposes that those locations are going to ask for outdoor space on the Railroad Square side. He thinks they would. There have been outdoor fenced off areas for Hennessy's.

Mr. Kahn continued that his third issue is the performance space, which is very close to Main St. They have seen that performances close to Main St. attract people right there, as opposed to drawing people further into the space as might be closer to where the green space is. He suggests they put electrical utilities along the path, as long as there is conduit, at multiple points. A solo performer would attract a smaller audience, and a larger stage with multiple acts going on

in a day would draw further down toward the green space. That kind of flexibility (would help). Putting it that close to Main St. is inviting a lot of congestion on Main St. that is not useful for pedestrian flow. Preserving whatever kind of trees there are on the trail, moving the trail, he thinks, does not [work]. That is one of the good things about that parkway that has been developed. In addition to asking those owners what they would like to use that space for, they should check in with the marathon folks and the Four on the Fourth folks, as to where their starting and finish lines are, to make sure there are not obstructions that interfere with those kinds of outdoor events.

Autumn DeLaCroix of Court St. stated that there was one mention of widening a curb on the inside of this turn on Railroad St. She continued that it is easy to forget that because it is raised, everything is the same height. There is the sense of the curve that is drawn there meaning something. It does not. It is just level for the whole intersection. That is why she thinks it is important to mention. There was some mention of bollards, too. A bollard on that corner would help prevent someone entering onto the raised intersection in their vehicle and turning into pedestrian spaces. That is important to keep in mind. A confusing element with the raised intersection is exactly why the left turn is so dangerous, because it is open to pedestrian space. There is no way for that to be safe. She loves so much of this; it is beautiful overall. Probably they should not move the bike path in the green space for more green space. It seems like it is just trading some of the north side of the green space for south, and it takes out trees. There is already a lot going on. They should keep it simple on that.

Vicky Morton of 275 Water St. stated that many decades ago, she served on the Planning Board. She continued that the design around the buildings on Railroad St. where there is the curbed wall was to create a display/entertainment area. It is slightly beyond the maps shown tonight. She hopes they would somehow incorporate that space back into the activity space for downtown, especially with Railroad Square.

Ms. Morton continued that she has something else to bring up that she does not think will be on any future agenda. Starting at the Railroad St./Gilbo Ave crosswalk and going south, the median between the north and south traffic lanes is not used for snow storage and there is no parking on either side. However, the issue with that green space from Gilbo/Railroad all the way down to the Winchester St./Marlboro St. roundabout is the traffic light glare coming from the opposite direction. She sees there are trees included on that median all the way down through, but she would also like to see some lower plantings that would help block the glare of oncoming traffic.

Jessica Gelter of Arts Alive stated that she wants to celebrate the wonderful design of Railroad Square. She continued that Arts Alive uses it a lot with Art Walk and presenting music, and they support organizations like Keene Music Festival using it. It is a beautiful space. They have noticed while doing events that shade trees are incredibly important, especially during the summer. Arts Alive's festival last year was in a different location, but breaking down in the parking lot, folks were getting overheated and getting heat stroke, and they could have benefitted from more shade in the area. She supports keeping as many trees as possible. Ms. Gelter

continued that the presentation said potentially 400 to 600 people could attend events. That goes, again, to the importance of having public bathrooms available, especially during hours when not all the stores or restaurants would be open or not necessarily welcome visitors. She is excited about the spaces that could be used for vendors' events. A big need for those events is public wi-fi. Arts Alive has worked out wonderful relationships with the owners of adjoining buildings who occasionally allow the artist vendors to use their wi-fi, but 30 to 40 vendors using a business's wi-fi is excessive. Thus, she advocates for (public wifi).

Bobby Williams, Ward 2 City Councilor, stated that he wants to express a concern he saw regarding the shade structure over the parking spaces. He continued that it is right next to several trees and buildings, so they might not get much solar energy out of it, if that was the intention.

Paula Sousa from Middle St. stated that she moved to Keene in 2001, raised two children here, and has walked up and down Main St. many times over the years. She continued that there are certain areas that she, as a mother of young children, kept her eye on. One such area is the one they are discussing. She understands that left turn is convenient for some people. She has never taken that left turn; she always goes down Roxbury St. to access the parking lot. She even forgot it was there, except for the memories of drivers focusing on trying to cross that and not paying to attention to the people at the crosswalk. That area, along with the area by the circle, was always a concern with young children. She is in favor of not having that left turn. Friends of hers who moved out of Keene and are now looking for housing in ME and MA both said, "There's no place like Keene anywhere." It keeps getting better. She is in awe of these drawings. It is going in the right direction. She loves this "city that acts like a town."

Brent Nolan of 36 Red Oak Dr. stated that he is in favor of widening the shared-use trail where Railroad comes off Main St. He continued that it seems like a pinch point for cyclists, pedestrians, and drivers. Given the flow of traffic, someone on a bike should dismount to move (through that area). Widening it would accommodate pedestrians, cyclists, and visitors.

Chair Greenwald thanked everyone for their comments. He continued that the Committee now has eight topics to discuss regarding Railroad Square. First is the preference for the layout of the shared-use path through Railroad Square. They saw a number of different options for that.

Councilor Filiault stated that the preferred option was what was originally talked about, and even if they say preferred, it can still be tweaked. They would not be locked in. Most of those things are movable. Thus, he (favors) the preferred option, which he thinks was the first one the consultants showed. As a couple people mentioned, there might be a pinch point, which he thinks can easily be taken care of without any major changes to the drawings.

Councilor Workman stated that her favorite option, particularly for the layout of the shared-use path, would be slide 30/option 3. She likes further up on the north side. As someone who has been part of a team that hosts events on Railroad Square, she really likes the idea of having

uninterrupted flow there, yet still being able to attract people from the bike path crossing through, who might stop and participate in the event. They have seen that happen with the Juneteenth events they have held there. She knows it is probably not ideal to move the bike path but she does like that option.

Chair Greenwald asked, for clarity, if it is correct that option 3 is the preferred option, with moving the bike path. Mr. Corning replied that it was an alternative they looked at, but it is not in the recommended option, because losing five trees would be necessary to do that. Chair Greenwald replied that he wants to save the trees, but he also does not want to have the bike path dividing the green space quite like that. He continued that there are choices to make. He thinks he will go with saving the trees.

Councilor Tobin stated that she supposes she would choose the recommended option. She continued that she has heard many people express concerns about safety. Throughout this process as they (the Committee members) are making decisions, she does not think they are necessarily going to be the ones to identify what might affect the risk to another area if they make one change, so she hopes the consultants would let them know as they are going through that. For example, “These two decisions combined could cause a significant safety impact.” Chair Greenwald replied that he completely agrees. He continued that if he has learned anything from this process, it is that making a change in one place affects something in another place and it ripples through the process, and that is the consultants’ task.

Chair Greenwald stated that the next question is whether they want to expand available commerce areas or public event space in Railroad Square.

Councilor Filiault stated that he thinks that is a simple “yes.” Other Committee members agreed.

Chair Greenwald stated that the next question, which they did not really talk about, is (whether they want a) “mounded landscape area.” He continued that it is an interesting design feature. He asked the consultants if they have a slide that shows it. He thinks it is an excellent way to save money.

Mr. Corning showed a slide of “Alternative Option 3 – Larger Green Space” and stated that the lines he is indicating represent a mounded area. He continued that the idea was, in any of the schemes, trying to incorporate a bit of topography. The area is so flat. (Topography) would provide interest.

Councilor Filiault stated that he thinks if they want increased commerce area, it is better to leave it flatter. He continued that this weekend was a “small” event that turned out to be a big event, and people who are putting out tents like that would not want to be on the side of a mound. For increased commerce and potentially concerts, it should remain flat.

Chair Greenwald stated that with all due respect to the landscape designer, he does not want a mound. Councilor Workman agreed.

Chair Greenwald stated that the next question is whether they want a covered pavilion for parking, the flexible space/solar panels. He continued that that would be the panels shown in Option 3. He has concerns. Eventually, they will be talking about money, and he thinks that will be the first thing that goes, unfortunately. Councilor Filiault replied that he agrees. Chair Greenwald continued that Councilor Williams's observation about how effective the solar panels would be is also strong.

Mr. Corning stated that the (Committee's thoughts about the) idea of having a structure in the Railroad area, or the Gilbo area, or both, would be useful input for Stantec to have. He continued that from what he has been hearing, he thinks there is fairly strong support for a structure at Gilbo, and not so much for one at Railroad. Councilor Filiault, Councilor Tobin, Chair Greenwald, and Councilor Workman replied that that is correct.

Councilor Workman stated that she would still like to see, even if they do not do a covered pavilion there at the parking spaces, if they could accommodate and have some power supply so they could possibly still utilize that space for food trucks and whatnot. Chair Greenwald agreed.

Chair Greenwald stated that the next question is whether they want covered bike parking in Railroad Square. He continued that he would like to see what that looks like. If it would not be obnoxious and not take up too much space, he would be fine with it.

Councilor Tobin stated that if they have covered bike parking across the street, it would not be a priority, for her, to build a separate structure on Railroad, especially since this is now more of an open area. There are not structures, so adding a structure might just congest the area. If bicyclists have a different perspective, she is open to hearing it.

Chair Greenwald stated that he would rather see a bathroom. Councilor Tobin agreed.

Michael Conway of 51 Railroad St. stated that the other consideration, which he sees no evidence of having been taken into account, is that a covered structure in that location would throw shade on the residential building across the way and reduce that passive solar.

Chair Greenwald stated that he does not hear a lot of support for covered bike parking on Railroad Square. Councilor Filiault replied that he has no problem with it if it does not take up a lot of room and does not add a lot of extra cost. As Chair Greenwald mentioned, as they get down to the details, they will start looking at costs, and some things will need to be eliminated. That is what happens with every project. He would look at this as more of a cost issue.

Councilor Workman replied that she agrees, and whether they do covered or uncovered, they want to encourage businesses to also provide bike racks. She continued that she would like to see at least a bike rack there. Chair Greenwald agreed.

Chair Greenwald stated that the next question is whether they want permanent seating in Railroad Square. He continued that he thinks Jay Kahn makes a good point, although perhaps premature.

Councilor Filiault stated that he questions what “permanent” would be, and whether they could move it during snow season. He questions how much permanent seating they would need in the middle of winter. If “permanent” means “until Public Works removes it in December or January” and then it is put back in the spring, (that is fine). Chair Greenwald replied that the seating might be large rocks.

Mr. Rusnock stated that some of the seating options they are showing on the north sides of the buildings were more about what would be possible when a business licenses the space, versus what the team proposes to install as part of this project. He continued that what would really be proposed and built by the City would be a paved surface, even concrete, pavers, or some other durable surface, which could be used for seating or some sort of café.

Councilor Workman asked if he means something similar to what is there now with the wall.

The City Manager replied yes, and she would add that what they have been talking about, in terms about adding a “permanent seating option,” would be something like those large stones in different areas. She continued that she thinks Councilor Filiault has good point. If they have them, they would want to have them placed somewhere where they would not become an issue in the winter for snow clearing, or make it difficult to hold events. They would have to be strategically placed. Chair Greenwald replied that it sounds like a “more time” discussion.

Chair Greenwald stated that the final question is whether they want public vehicular access from southbound Main St. to Railroad St. He continued that access for emergency vehicles would absolutely be maintained. The question comes down to the left turn (for the public). He thinks they need more data. He would like to keep it, and thinks it is needed, but he also knows there is a lot going on in that space and (the turn) might be sacrificed.

Councilor Workman stated that she favors removing that left turn, as well as many other left turns on Main St., but they have had this conversation many times. Chair Greenwald replied that this might drift into the conversation they will have next about Central Square and slip lanes, because there has to be a way to reverse direction.

Councilor Tobin stated that she would be comfortable with removing the left turn. She continued that with everything happening in that close space, and their discussion about having activity going on there, with possibly lighting on one side, it is a lot to keep track of. Having

parking where people would also be making turns would add a lot right there. She thinks the left turn could seriously impact safety.

The City Manager stated that (there was also a) question about (whether they want) a gateway structure, similar to what they were talking about with Gilbo, having a similar design as the gateway at Ashuelot River Park.

Councilor Filiault replied that it is, once again, a cost issue. He continued that maybe they could get some donations (for that). Councilor Tobin replied that part of her would say no (to the gateway) because of the bike path. She continued that if there is not a clear path across the street, it would not make sense to her. Chair Greenwald replied that they could hear from the designers about what they could do with it, or not. Councilor Workman stated that she sees the two trees they would be planting there as a natural “gateway structure.” Chair Greenwald stated that he thinks everything could be accommodated there. He continued that he would like to see what the consultants can draw.

Councilor Filiault stated that he has a couple of comments about lighting, which he heard at the (public workshop at the) Rec Center, as well as tonight. With downtown lighting, especially for traffic coming north, you cannot see the crosswalks because of the glare, especially if it has rained. He asked if it is true that the downtown lighting is not “down lighting,” and is instead a more decorative type of lighting. On Central Square, (conditions are) good, with light going out. He asked if it is true that lighting in congested areas should be down lighting, not side lighting, because such side lighting goes into people’s windshields as they are coming up the street. He asked if he is correct to assume that the new lighting, whatever is used, would be strictly down lighting onto the street. [The consultants’ response was inaudible].

Chair Greenwald stated that this concludes the discussion points for tonight. He asked if the Committee had anything further. He asked if the public had anything else to add.

Tim Jordan of 275 Water St. stated that he appreciates all the public discussion and the way the consultants have been so thorough in presenting the options. He continued that he understands why they are doing this piecemeal, because they have many topics to discuss. However, there is a potential problem with approaching it in a piecemeal way. If they consider this piece tonight, another piece a couple weeks from now, and a third piece a little further on, when they get to the fourth piece, they might find that what they liked in the first piece is something they are unable to do because there is something more important in the fourth piece. He suggests having a process, maybe at the end, to talk about the whole project. Even though they are not making decisions right now, they are leaning toward decisions and doing good work and people are getting interested in (items). Perhaps in a month from now they find they are unable to (do the things they were leaning towards earlier). He is not talking about money. He is talking about the process itself and the way in which the decisions they are recommending today could potentially limit them or make it so they have to come back and rehash things again.

Chair Greenwald stated that they will conclude the meeting with a summary of the timeline and process, in terms of grants applied for, next meetings, and when people can expect to see shovels in the ground.

Mr. Rusnock stated that he thanks everyone for the great discussion tonight. He continued that the next planned public engagement for this project is May 1 at the Keene Recreation Center. The focus will be Central Square and some of the turning movements they have been discussing over the past couple of months. May 8 is an MSFI Committee meeting for a discussion similar to the one they had tonight, but focused on Central Square.

He continued that Mr. Jordan has a good point that they probably need a consolidated review of what they have reviewed to date. Regarding Ms. Ancharski's comments earlier about some of the trees proposed to be removed at Gilbo and Railroad, they are also at the Main St. intersection. Thus, it is true that while it is convenient to break it up this way, they cannot completely isolate these areas. That will be part of the process as they wrap up the public discourse. They have tentatively scheduled a City Council workshop in June for this project, which they hope will act as that "wrap up" meeting and discussion. They hope it would be referred back to the MSFI Committee in July or August for full approval.

Mr. Rusnock continued that the RAISE grant the City has applied for from the Federal government throws a bit of uncertainty in the overall schedule. They expect to know by the end of June whether the City has received the grant. However, the timeframe for notifying and executing that agreement has historically been very long for some of the City's other Federally funded projects. It is unlikely that if the City receives the Federal grant they would be ready for construction in calendar year 2025. Part of that is, again, the time it takes to execute that agreement. In addition, when you have Federal funding, you have to go through a much more thorough environmental documentation and permitting process that covers environmental resources, historic resources, and cultural resources. All of those are important factors, but it takes a long time to work through those. Thus, it is still unclear at this time when they could expect to see shovels in the ground. If they are not successful with getting the Federal grant, they would be able to wrap up this public process in July and August and start the detailed design work on the construction documents and potentially be ready for construction in calendar year 2025. There is still some uncertainty involved. By the end of June, they should have a better idea.

Chair Greenwald made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Workman.

On a vote of 4-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee recommends continuing the discussion.

- 4) **More Time Items**
- 5) **Non-Public Session**

6) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Greenwald adjourned the meeting at 7:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Britta Reida, Minute Taker

Edits submitted by,
Terri M. Hood, Assistant City Clerk