

City of Keene  
New Hampshire

AD HOC DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES

**Wednesday, March 29, 2017**

**4:00 PM**

**2nd Floor Conference Room,  
City Hall**

**Members Present:**

Carl Jacobs, Councilor  
Mitch Greenwald, Councilor  
Gary Lamoureux, Councilor  
Jack Dugan  
Shannon Hundley  
Luca Paris  
Cheryl Belair  
Shane Gormley

**Staff Present:**

Medard Kopczynski, City Manager  
Thomas Mullins, City Attorney

**Members Not Present:**

Kevin Dremel  
Katie Sutherland

**Kendall W. Lane, Mayor**

**1) Call to Order**

Mayor Lane called the meeting to order at 4:02 PM.

**2) Approval of Minutes – March 16, 2017**

Councilor Greenwald made a motion to approve the minutes of March 16, 2017, which was seconded by Mr. Dugan and carried unanimously.

**3) Administration – Tom Mullins**

Mayor Lane welcomed the City Attorney to explain the administrative process for a legislative body. This Committee has been appointed by Mayor Lane and the City Council to fulfill a specific charge. As a City Committee, this public body is subject to certain rules and regulations under statute **RS91-A**.

- In accordance with the NH Right to Know law, public notice of this Committee's meeting must be provided by staff 24 hours in advance
- The public has a right to attend Committee meetings and may participate at the Chair's discretion
- A minute taker provides a formal account of meetings, which are kept on file and available to the public
- Beyond communication about meeting attendance, no Committee business should be conducted via email (or outside a publically announced meeting, even if not in Keene); the "Reply All" function should not be used for Committee correspondence and any questions via email should be sent via a staff liaison
- Committee members are subject to a Conflict of Interest requirement and should make the Mayor and the Committee aware of any personal conflicts of interest that come before the Committee; if a matter benefits or harms all citizens, it is not a conflict of interest (for example, sidewalks)

The City Attorney provided Committee members a packet including: Committee Rules of Procedure that members should review and adopt at the next meeting, the City Conflict of Interest requirement, information on and rules for public meetings, and a full copy of statute **RS91-A**.

#### **4) Board Business**

##### **a. Identification of Downtown Boundaries**

To help the Committee identify Downtown boundaries, two large maps were presented at the meeting which displayed Main Street, the surrounding areas, and zoning. Mayor Lane said most of the meeting should be spent on this agenda item because it is a critical decision that will affect future zoning, signage, investment, types of businesses and activities encouraged, landscaping, and maintenance schedules, etc. There is no current City accepted definition of Downtown. The City Manager explained the zones on the map:

- Central Business District – no parking requirements at buildings; specific list of uses permitted
- Central Business Limited – same as Central Business District, but parking required at buildings
- Office District – residential-like light business district
- Commerce District – retail stores
- High Density District – primarily single and multi-family units
- Low Density District – mostly single family units on larger lots

Mayor Lane noted that south of Water Street will be considered for rezoning by Council in the next month. This could result in an entirely new zoning system intended to primarily allow small scale commerce along Marlboro Street and to convert some student housing to housing more suitable for families. The City Manager added that eventually a new Land Use Code will be developed, with recommendations from consultants. If the City chooses to move forward with a form-based code in some districts, Downtown would be a viable candidate for that. Recommendations from this Committee will

influence development of the new code. Looking at existing zoning is useful, but it will change and is not definitive for a definition of Downtown.

Councilor Jacobs noted that one idea from the Marlboro Street redevelopment plan is to better connect Marlboro to Main Street. He said that plan should be considered in developing a definition. Mayor Lane agreed the Planning Board believes the Marlboro/Winchester Street roundabout should be included as a part of Downtown but he does not think the current Central Business District zoning standards would be well accepted there (lack of parking and zero lot line). Mayor Lane said if pedestrians were asked where Downtown is, they would likely say from Central Square to Emerald Street. It is up to this Committee to determine if that is accurate and what the City wants in the future.

Mr. Gormley asked if there is anything not on the map that Committee members think should be included in Downtown. Mayor Lane added the Railroad Street land development; Mr. Dugan noted that was intended to be a part of Downtown.

Mr. Paris asked how designing Downtown will affect maintenance schedules. The City Manager replied because there is no clear definition of Downtown, the Highway Superintendent determines street sweeping based on where they consider Downtown to be. Aesthetic standards are also different Downtown (light poles painted black, etc.). The definition is important to guide what this Committee and the Council think should be redeveloped; the definition could also lead to form-based zoning (not based on use, but the way things look). Mr. Paris noted it would be helpful to know what the original vision for Downtown was and determine how far the City wants to deviate from that vision. Mayor Lane replied this committee has two tasks: 1) by summer 2017, identify concerns in the Downtown this Committee defines, and 2) beginning fall 2017, begin addressing how to resolve those concerns. He said to ignore cost for now and focus on what this Committee wants Downtown to look like in 30 years.

Councilor Greenwald said one way to approach a definition is to start with the Central Business District as the core of Downtown and work outward from there determining what should be included. He added he believes the Colony Mill should be included as the western edge of Downtown. Councilor Lamoureux asked if the Mill should be included since it is being developed into residences. Councilor Greenwald replied he does not think that matters; it could be a large population that supports development Downtown and ties into the development of Gilbo Avenue. Mayor Lane added that the Center at Keene will remain largely retail and ties into Gilbo Avenue which is suitable for development. Councilor Greenwald noted that Gilbo Ave. has more history than Main Street because it was the center of railroad activity. Mayor Lane agreed adding that is why there is so much parking on Gilbo Ave.; when the railroad stopped, vacant warehouses became parking lots, but that was not intended to be a permanent solution.

Mr. Paris asked if Downtown has to be symmetrical when defining boundaries. Mayor Lane replied that it does not have to be symmetrical. The City Manager added that this Committee has a lot of freedom right now and should not box themselves in. It is not

a simple question of just where Downtown is but also what it is. He added though, that defining Downtown at street centers versus a lot lines is much easier to maintain. Councilor Lamoureux agreed it would be helpful to define what Downtown is before defining where it is. He added there could be a Downtown and Downtown-Lite, as Councilor Greenwald suggested. Mr. Gormley said he cannot imagine people walking from the Colony Mill to Downtown; many Committee members noted they and many other citizens do. The City Manager suggested it is perhaps more important to make it comfortable for people to do so; a safe, comfortable, aesthetic place for people to walk. Councilor Greenwald added he hears from many that if they do not quickly find parking Downtown they often leave. Mayor Lane added he moved his office to Mechanic Street last year so he can walk most everywhere. Part of the problem is people do not know where to park to walk many places easily.

Councilor Jacobs suggested creating a list of things that mean Downtown to this Committee. The Committee agreed Downtown should include the following:

- Retail
- Culture (the Colonial, the library, tourism)
- Non-retail business (restaurants)
- Offices (Whitney Brothers, etc.)
- Government offices
- Keene State College (it is important to them to be a part of Downtown)
- Residential space (provides economic vitality)
- Employment
- Social service agencies (housing authority, etc.)
- Recreation

Mr. Gormley questioned the amount of foot traffic from the College to Downtown. Mayor Lane replied the businesses Downtown developed because of the College. Councilor Greenwald disagreed with the opinion that students are the primary market for the tattoo parlors; he said he will inquire with his tenants who run those businesses. Mr. Paris noted his busiest time is during the summer when students are gone. Councilor Greenwald said he is not arguing against the contribution of the College to Downtown, but there are not many truly student-oriented stores. The City Manager urged caution to not determine what Downtown is to each individual Committee member, but what Downtown is; he said addressing it that way could help identify missing links or things that should be promoted in our ideal Downtown. Mayor Lane added it is also important to consider what the City asks of Downtown: a parking lot, a major highway thoroughfare, a transportation center, residential, historic district, tourism; we ask a lot of Downtown.

Mr. Dugan echoed Councilor Greenwald's suggestion to focus on the core of Downtown and then work outward in a periphery around Downtown extending to Beaver Brook and the Ashuelot River, and determine how far north and south. He cautioned there are development restrictions in the Historic District; however increased maintenance could benefit that district. He added as he moves forward past developing Railroad Street, he would like to move east and develop along Gilbo Avenue, if asked. The City Manager asked if the Committee would like a wider map to consider. Mayor Lane replied yes;

from Eastern Avenue to Island Street, north to Mechanic Street and south to the College; this should also have a Historic District overlay as well as the potential Marlboro Street rezoning. The City Manager will prepare a new map for next meeting.

Councilor Greenwald asked Mr. Gormley his observations as someone newer to the City. Mr. Gormley replied perhaps people do not walk as much as he is familiar with because there are not comfortable places to do so without pedestrianizing Main Street. He thinks more comfortable walking spaces Downtown would also be a great effort to reduce the City's carbon footprint and is more attractive for tourism. Ms. Belair added a more walkable Downtown is better for businesses. The City Manager agreed and added he does not think aesthetics were greatly considered in developing the bike path; however, he noted what is aesthetically pleasing is different to everyone. Councilor Jacobs agreed the bike path was developed with start and end points, but few quality stops in between.

Mr. Gormley noted how nice it would be to have a Downtown recreation area, someplace kids can play Downtown safely. Mayor Lane agreed there is little space for active recreation currently. Mr. Gormley added that Downtown Houston, for example, has many active spaces with frequent activities; he suggested something smaller and creative. Mr. Dugan noted better connecting the Ashuelot Park, Colony Mill, and Downtown would be ideal, especially with potential Gilbo Avenue redevelopment. The Committee agreed walkable spaces, and parking garages as well, need to feel safer for people to use them actively and for tourists to feel comfortable. Mayor Lane added there was past discussion of green spaces from Carpenter Field to Whitney Brothers, and better connecting the Mill to Downtown is an interesting idea to keep in mind.

Mr. Gormley asked which schools serve Downtown residents. Ms. Hundley replied Wheelock, Franklin, and Fuller schools. Mr. Gormley said he imagines schools being important to families thinking about living Downtown. There was disagreement among Committee members as to which are the best quality schools in Keene and if they serve Downtown residents. Councilor Greenwald said based on his experience in realty, potential residents are very concerned with schools. Ms. Belair suggested young families would be more likely to move Downtown if there were more greenspaces and activity spaces in walking distance.

Councilor Jacobs said Downtown is important to each person in a different way. Downtown (or living Downtown) does not have to appeal to everyone, but Downtown has to accomplish what the City wants. The City Manager asked if connectivity is the issue and Mayor Lane replied yes. Mr. Paris added without the heart of Downtown and connectivity to the rest of the City, businesses will not be as sustainable. He said it would be great to see a park Downtown. Downtown needs to remain viable but also attractive to many; it should be a place people come not just for dinner or shopping, but somewhere people want to spend the day. Mr. Paris added if Downtown attracts more visitors, it will also attract more businesses.

Mayor Lane noted this conversation will continue at subsequent meetings but it is clear once Downtown is defined, the rest will fall into place more easily.

- b. **Discuss Downtown Strengths and Challenges**
- c. **Identify Stakeholders for Participation**

Mayor Lane asked the Committee to keep thinking about additional stakeholder who should be included in this discussion. He has spoken with Keene State College and will have a response from them soon.

- 5) **New Business**
- 6) **Next Meeting Date**

The next meeting is Wednesday, April 12 at 4:00 PM.

- 7) **Adjournment**

Hearing no further business, Mayor Lane adjourned the meeting at 5:21 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker