

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AD HOC DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, April 12, 2017

4:00 PM

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

Members Present:

Carl Jacobs, Councilor
Jack Dugan
Shannon Hundley
Cheryl Belair
Shane Gormley
Kevin Dremel

Staff Present:

Medard Kopczynski, City Manager

Members Not Present:

Mitch Greenwald, Councilor
Gary Lamoureux, Councilor
Luca Paris
Katie Sutherland

Kendall W. Lane, Mayor

1) Call to Order

Mayor Lane called the meeting to order at 4:12 PM.

The Committee discussed the quorum to approve in the Rules of Procedure. The Committee agreed on six members for a quorum (as opposed to eight written in the Rules of Procedure).

Councilor Jacobs made a motion to adopt the Rules of Procedures as amended, which was seconded by Ms. Belair and carried unanimously.

2) Approval of March 29, 2017 Minutes

Mr. Dugan made a motion to approve the minutes of March 29, 2017, which was seconded by Councilor Jacobs and carried unanimously.

3) Board Business

a. Identification of Downtown Business District

The City Manager presented a new map which included the existing zoning map, the Marlboro rezoning district, and the Historic District.

Mr. Gormley asked which came first, zoning or Downtown. Mayor Lane replied the buildings in Downtown were developed and then zoned based on how it developed. Councilor Jacobs recalled the Committee's charge is to determine what Downtown could be and then zoning will be a tool to accomplish that.

Ms. Belair said what is generally considered Downtown now is the Central Business District and the question is where to spread from there; she is in favor of extending to the Colony Mill to the west as there are already businesses there and room for more. Mayor Lane noted Elm City Brewery will be spreading to the corner of Emerald and School Streets. Councilor Jacobs suggested expanding Downtown west to the Ashuelot River because of the commerce there.

To the east, Mayor Lane noted he is reluctant to extend Downtown past Beaver Brook, with the exception of Carpenter Street because of the sports fields. Mayor Lane questioned what activities on the Beaver Brook side should be included Downtown. The City Manager suggested Keene Ice, the police department, and other businesses. There was discussion as to if residents in that part of town would want to live Downtown. The City Manager said if discussing extending the Central Business District to be Downtown that is one thing, a definition of Downtown that is different than the Central Business District is another. The former is a use-based Downtown and the latter is form-based, connecting things together as Downtown; not all of Downtown has to be a part of the Central Business District. Mayor Lane added zoning is to achieve our goals; our goals are not defined by zoning. Zoning is one of many tools to encourage and achieve certain activities in certain areas.

Councilor Jacobs recalled the list of functions Downtown should provide that the Committee created at the last meeting:

- 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

Councilor Jacobs said those functions are scattered throughout the area on the map and he has difficulty drawing a line. Mayor Lane replied the physical appearance of certain areas

on the map, like the Seed District (zero lot lines and higher buildings), are not the appearance we want on Main Street or other parts of the City, but perhaps the appearance we want Downtown. Ms. Belair replied she does not believe industrial areas are a part of the Downtown ambiance. Mayor Lane replied those industrial areas are more drivable than walkable and other parts of Downtown are more walkable.

Mr. Gormley advocated for restricting the lens of revitalization to what will be sustainable for the next 30 years. He thinks being more restrictive makes it more sustainable when he thinks of promoting Downtown as a destination. He continues to believe in walkability to the Ashuelot River and he is weary of extending too far down Marlboro Street. Ms. Hundley agreed walkability and flow are important Downtown and the further Downtown extends past the Central Business District, the culture of the place changes. The Committee engaged in a discussion about walkability and realized there is a diversity of preferences for different areas on the map.

Ms. Belair recalled the importance of greenspace Downtown. Mr. Dugan demonstrated a "green belt" that extends across the map from the Ashuelot River to the Colony Mill, continuing along Gilbo Ave. to Railroad Street where it connects to the bike path. Mayor Lane said he can easily envision Downtown being from the Ashuelot River to west of Beaver Brook; most everything north of Route 101. Mr. Gormley asked the appeal of leaving historic Downtown to visit the other places on the map being added, like the Mill and College. The City Manager said there are a lot of appealing activities at the College people simply do not know about. Mayor Lane added that walking from Central Square to the College and around the campus is a nice walk. Councilor Jacobs added that economically and culturally, the college is an important part of Downtown and thinks the College should be included, at least to Wayman Way. Mr. Dremel noted when planning events Downtown, including the College would be an enhancement. He continued there is a lot of potential on Marlboro Street but little has been developed.

Councilor Jacobs noted that when promoting walking, park and walk opportunities are important, especially for tourism. Mr. Dremel asked if it is possible to create an environment where you can walk 20 minutes in any direction and accomplish all needs; the Committee agreed that can be done now. The City Manager noted there is no gathering place at the end of Marlboro Street making it attractive for people to walk; he added the need to consider bike traffic. Mayor Lane agreed that although Complete Streets is not a part of this Committee's charge, he envisions only two lanes of vehicle traffic on Main Street, with parking in the center and one designated bike lane; it may encourage more people to bike on the streets Downtown, which is dangerous right now, and would better synergize with the bike path.

Mayor Lane noted that in most cities, there is no center of gravity or clear downtown and therefore no real sense of community. The City Manager noted that can be attributed to modern zoning which is car dependent, though there are exceptions. Mayor Lane said he is told tourists feel a sense of community and center of gravity in our Downtown. Mr. Dugan agreed new businesses are attracted to Keene because Downtown it is so unique. Ms. Belair and Councilor Jacobs agreed that would be enhanced by expansion. Mayor

Lane acknowledged there are development projects in the near future, like Gilbo Ave., which we want to develop as a part of Downtown, not a separate area.

Mr. Gormley echoed the importance of not just a green belt through town, but a physical, designated greenspace Downtown. The Committee agreed a great space is the public lots on the north side of Gilbo Ave. Mayor Lane added the parking lot on Gilbo Ave. owned by the College gets good water and could be an attractive Downtown park; the Committee agreed that is a good, central, walkable location and is important with more people living Downtown. There is also potential to incorporate the farmers market and push cart sales to this greenspace.

The City Manager noted a consultant has been hired for this project and he will invite them to the next meeting so they are aware of progress and ideas. These consultants, McFarland Johnson, used Keene as an example for the Concord Downtown revitalization. The Committee will continue using the current map for discussion with the consultants.

Mayor Lane said now that the Committee has begun to define where Downtown is, they need to return to defining how ideal activities Downtown fit within that space, followed by challenges that will have to be overcome (street widths, etc.). The City Manager noted he will be meeting with the City Engineer to discuss plantings on the narrow sidewalks on the Pedraza's side of Central Square. Many trees Downtown have reached the end of their useful life and need to be slowly removed and replaced. A lot of the planter beds are overgrown and nothing can be done due to the expansive tree roots. This causes many practical problems, like the sprinkler system, but also diminishes aesthetics. This area has the narrowest sidewalks Downtown; people walk through planters to get to businesses, the sidewalk plow does not fit and damages beds, and there are drainage problems along that whole block. The City Engineer is exploring lowering the curbs around the garden beds and adding pavers in some areas to accommodate the snow plow. The City Manager also hopes to remove parking meters along that block and try a kiosk; Mayor Lane is in favor of kiosks because they make sidewalks more passable with sidewalk use by restaurants. Mayor Lane would ultimately like to see all outdoor facilities Downtown not allowed to place tables on the street side of the sidewalk so as to not impede pedestrian traffic (he suggested five feet from the curb to the first table). Ms. Belair noted tables on the street side are also an insurance liability for restaurant owners.

Ms. Hundley asked if the planters could be smaller on the Pedraza's block. The City Manager replied it is possible, but he is making reversible changes right now so as to not interfere with the decisions of this Committee. He said with a well-designed, working scheme later, some areas will be developed with wide sidewalks and planters and others with narrow sidewalks and no planters.

Mayor Lane encouraged not focusing on preserving a wide Main Street but on what the Committee wants to accomplish with that Main Street. Ms. Belair noted all Downtown restaurants want outdoor seating, which is an appeal of Downtown, and should be a priority. Councilor Jacobs said it would be great if Central Square functioned as a rotary

and the traffic lights were removed. Mayor Lane noted a concern with that is ensuring pedestrians can cross safely, as well as parking; though he noted as Central Square is now, there are safety concerns for pedestrians. This is something the consultants can help the Committee explore. Mr. Dremel added the need for gathering space in Central Square for activities and events. Mayor Lane noted Central Square is a great open and public space; people peacefully gather to demonstrate there every Saturday and that is something that makes Keene unique. Mr. Dremel agreed Downtown needs more of those spaces so multiple activities can occur at once without disrupting each other. He added the need for more pedestrian/gathering place seating Downtown; there is little now besides the planters.

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

- 4) **New Business**
- 5) **Next Meeting Date May 3, 2017**

The consultants will be invited to this meeting to discuss the progress the Committee has made.

6) **Adjournment**

Hearing no further business, Mayor Lane adjourned the meeting at 5:12 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler,
Minute Taker