

City of Keene
New Hampshire

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, May 3, 2017

4:00 PM

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

Members Present:

Carl Jacobs, Councilor
Mitch Greenwald, Councilor
Gary Lamoureux, Councilor
Shannon Hundley
Shane Gormley (Arrived at 4:20 PM)
Kevin Dremel
Katie Sutherland

Staff Present:

Medard Kopczynski, City Manager

Members Not Present:

Jack Dugan
Cheryl Belair
Luca Paris

Kendall W. Lane, Mayor

1) Call to Order

Mayor Lane called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.

2) Approval of Minutes – March 29, 2017

Councilor Greenwald made a motion to approve the minutes of April 12, 2017, which was seconded by Councilor Jacobs and carried unanimously.

3) Board Business

a. Continue Discussion to Identify Downtown Business District

Mayor Lane noted the consultant will be at the next meeting. At this meeting, Mayor Lane wanted to finalize the Downtown boundaries and continue discussion on what should be included in this Downtown. He said he had a conversation with the Keene Downtown Housing Corporation (KDHC). KDHC has been functioning since 1984 and is funded by sale of limited partnership units from Central Square Terrace. In 1988, KDHC did the preliminary work to map and design Downtown (as this Committee is doing now)

and took those designs to the City, which appropriated \$2 million to revitalize Downtown. KHDC was also responsible for the railroad land purchase and has now evolved to serve as a lender of last resort to desirable Downtown projects that do not qualify for other funding types. They have never lost money on a loan, even with marginal projects. Last year, KHDC contributed \$10,000 for the Downtown Festival, and they have agreed to do so again this year. Mayor Lane and Ms. Sutherland are on the KHDC Board.

The City Manager and Mayor Lane noted there are other City groups discussing the future of Downtown, like the Joint Planning Board/PLD Committee, and to some degree the role of this Committee will be to bring all those groups ideas together to make recommendations. There was discussion about inclusion of more residential areas at the south end of Main Street, but Councilor Jacobs noted these new boundaries do not mean property control. There are many potential use patterns in the new Downtown. Defining these boundaries is not an attempt to change use in these areas, it is more of an organizing principle; this is more in line with a form-based code. Councilor Jacobs continued that not everyone wants to live, work, and play Downtown, but Downtown is the heart of the City and impacts everyone's lives in the City; he said diversity makes Downtown work.

Mayor Lane said the Downtown boundaries matter in terms of City investment, maintenance, and amenities. There was mention of including Kingsbury Street to the east because of the possibility for development there in the next 30 years. Mayor Lane added it is desirable to extend Victoria Street to Marlboro Street because of truck traffic and development possibilities there and there have been discussions about doing so; such an extension, however, would impact wetlands. Councilor Jacobs suggested this Committee make a decision about the future of Victoria Street. Mayor Lane replied what happens on Victoria Street depends on what happens at Kingsbury Street; future development there might make extending Victoria Street practical. Victoria Street is currently more manufacturing and storage which is not included in this Committee's idea of Downtown; though, Mayor Lane said as residence Downtown increases a storage facility Downtown could be viable.

Mr. Gormley asked if Downtown residents pay higher taxes, etc. Mayor Lane replied no. Councilor Jacobs said this exercise is to develop a Downtown with elements that function cohesively. Mayor Lane said a traditional village that developed prior to zoning had multiple uses at the center of the village; zoning changed that. He said to put zoning aside and think about what the Committee wants in the Downtown area. Keene has a distinct, attractive "village center" with multiple uses; the question is how to define that central core and how that impacts how people live their lives

The Committee made the following decisions about Downtown boundaries:

North: To Mechanic Street

South: To Route 101

- Includes the College

- Includes businesses on King Court
- Greenspace on the west side of Main Street
- Exactly one mile from Central Square

East: To Beaver Brook, with extensions to include Carpenter Field and Bentley Commons

- Will include the bike path and facilitate creation of a City Greenway

West: To the Ashuelot River, connecting to the new South Bridge over Route 101

- Including the South Bridge will allow inclusion of KSC athletic fields for events

Mr. Gormley said the question now is how to afford to revitalize this area and maintain it long-term. Mayor Lane said the City's affordability is a separate issue; some federal grants are available and revitalization can be implemented in small phases to limit cost impact. Councilor Jacobs said a positive aspect is that some City areas will not change and that encourages individuals to invest in owning properties there; people like to know where they live will not change drastically in the future. Mayor Lane said nationally, property values increase 20% when historic districts are created, for example. Ms. Sutherland said Keene has not seen those results yet but hopes to in the future; Mr. Dremel said what is considered a historic home is changing. Ms. Sutherland said the center of Keene feels far from the center of Downtown because so much of it is a parking lot. Mr. Dremel agreed adding walks feel longer in parts of Downtown, like Gilbo Avenue, because there is nothing to see or do.

The Committee continued discussion on what uses they would like to see Downtown:

- Retail
- Culture (the Colonial, the library, tourism)
 - There are arts activities in town but no space for small groups to gather for art and many large organizations control spaces
 - Need for more pop-up venues
- Non-retail business
- Offices (Whitney Brothers, etc.)
- Government Offices
- Keene State College
- Residential Space
- Employment
- Social service agencies
- Connectivity
 - Good flow between these important elements
- Recreation
 - More playgrounds with fences
 - Many small parks to stop, sit, and play
 - Not just for children, but the elderly as well
 - Bike-ability is important when promoting spaces for children

- Public restrooms will be important
- Activities for families
- The library, MOCO, the Colonial, the Children's Museum, and Hanna Grimes currently have some activities for young adults
- Large and small performance centers
 - Well-spaced
 - The College-owned property near the skate park is a possibility (has a reverter clause)
- Outdoor amphitheater
- Greenway & Greenspace
 - Near current Farmers Market to create a permanent location for it
 - Greenspaces that encourage passive and active use
 - Need for a more central park, most are on the periphery

Mayor Lane said residential areas do well Downtown now and include a lot of private investments and advantages; he added another housing project is being considered on Railroad Street next to the Marriott. Ms. Sutherland noted the lack of arts and culture Downtown. Councilor Greenwald said he would like to see arts growth that pays taxes, which is uncommon. Councilor Jacobs replied arts and culture are economic drivers; they draw people into the region, and in 2010 supported 471 jobs in the region. Mayor Lane added that arts and culture support restaurants. Mayor Lane said there were once plans for a ballfield Downtown that could also act as a concert venue. Mr. Dremel said a ball field could round out arts and culture Downtown; not only non-profit but arts and culture businesses. Ms. Hundley said flooding is an issue on other fields Downtown; Mr. Gormley suggested the fields behind the college adjacent to Route 101 could be ideal; Mayor Lane agreed that area will be more easily accessible once the South Bridge is open.

Councilor Jacobs said the largely vacant parking lots on Gilbo Avenue have a lot of potential. The City Manager said he has been exploring ways to stimulate use in those areas but this is difficult to plan as traffic patterns change throughout the day and changes in amenities will likely impact traffic patterns. Mr. Gormley said there is a lot of parking Downtown right now, just not in the right places. Ms. Sutherland expressed her desire for a parking garage with businesses on the first floor that can validate parking; she added she does not know who would pay for that. Mayor Lane said he has wanted a transportation center for some times off Gilbo Avenue, near the rail trail, that facilitates bus and bike traffic, park and ride, and Downtown parking. He said it could be successful and provide opportunity to gather parking in a centralized space and free up other areas.

Mr. Gormley suggested including those working on wellness initiatives at the hospital in this discussion. Ms. Sutherland said supporting exercise is a part of Keene's 2020 vision. Mayor Lane suggested inviting Linda Rubin to be involved.

The City Manager will create a new map with the newly designated boundaries.

b. Discuss Downtown Strengths and Challenges

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- 4) **New Business**
- 5) **Next Meeting Date – May 17, 2017**

The consultant will be at the next meeting

- 6) **Adjournment**

Hearing no further business, Mayor Lane adjourned the meeting at 5:11 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker