

City of Keene
New Hampshire

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 28, 2016 **4:00 PM** **2nd Floor Conference Room, City Hall**

Members Present:

Co-Chair Chris Cusack
Bettina Chadbourne
Chris Hrynowski
Marcia Kayser
Paula Jessup
Phil Jones, Councilor
Dottie Morris
Darryl Masterson
Robin Picard
Dean Caton
Atticus Rowlands

Staff Present:

Andy Robinson, KSC Liaison
Tara Kessler, Planner

Members Not Present:

Dick Berry
Kelly Ricaurte

1. Call to order

Chair Cusack called the meeting to order at 4:04 PM.

2. Minutes – January 25, 2016

Councilor Jones made a motion to accept the minutes of January 25, 2016. Ms. Hrynowski seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

3. Commission Membership

4. Review of Discussion on the Draft Commission Report

Chair Cusack stated that there are two out of four tasks in the packet for review.

Ms. Germond discussed the brief history of the Commission and noted that it was formed in order for the city and Keene State College to discuss mutual concerns. She continued, stating that

the Commission came up with four areas to focus on and in the previous year the first and third items were discussed. Ms. Germond noted that a forum was held by New Hampshire Listens in March of 2015 and additional themes were requested including communication, citizen engagement and building relationships. She noted that all of the themes had an underlying theme of citizenship. Ms. Germond stated that a report was created in September addressing the recommendations from the forum and additional topics that were discussed in more detail with experts. She continued, stating that the focus of the current meeting's agenda is: Parking/Infrastructure and Property/Tax Base. Ms. Germond stated that the recommendations were last discussed in January and a sub-committee was created to determine suitable language.

Ms. Germond stated that the Commission determined 6 months as an appropriate time to review the initial recommendations and progress reports. She noted that the second phase is to identify new theme areas. Ms. Germond stated that visuals would be a helpful addition to the report and a map will be included.

Ms. Kayser inquired about Gilbo Avenue. Chair Cusack stated that there are no updates at this time. He continued, stating that he will inquire with the president of the college. Councilor Jones asked if the land would revert back to its original owner if it was not developed by a certain time. Mr. Robinson replied yes, but the college president would like to develop something before the deadline. Chair Cusack noted that it is highly unlikely the college will expand aside from the Gilbo Avenue.

Ms. Germond explained the activity with Gilbo Avenue and noted that it was owned by NGM Insurance and they gave Keene State College the option to purchase the property but if it is not utilized in 3 years it would revert back to NGM. Mr. Robinson noted that ideas for the property included a wellness as well as some commercial development. Ms. Kayser stated that the report discussed pedestrian areas as well. She suggested lumping sections out of the report. Ms. Hrynowski noted that this area should connect to the campus.

Ms. Germond noted that the Commission suggested grouping all concerns with Gilbo Avenue together. Councilor Jones stated that when the parcel was first discussed- there were two other possible developers interested in the property. He also noted that 6 students from the University of Amherst presented possible ideas for the area as well.

Ms. Germond stated that she will add information about the overlay district information. Councilor Jones stated that he is unsure if the other two developers are viable.

Ms. Germond stated that she would like input on the recommendation which are categorized as short, medium, and long term with short being 0-6 months, medium as 6 months to a year and long being over a year. Ms. Chadbourne stated that she is interested to hear about shuttle services from Michael Acerno. Mr. Acerno stated that he is interested in helping the Commission in any way. He noted that the shuttle services are sparsely used by the students in the morning and this timeframe could be decreased if the Commission had other suggestions for the shuttle. He noted

that the shuttle's schedule is very tight however. Mr. Acerno stated that he is unsure where the students are located and where they want the bus to go. Councilor Jones stated that students have complained about the shuttle schedule not working with class schedules. Mr. Acerno stated that the shuttle also has bike racks on the front of the bus to suggest commuting from other areas.

Mr. Robinson stated that if the Mayor and President approve the suggested recommendations a sub-committee would be created to work out the details of the report items. Ms. Hrynowski noted that the students need to buy into these recommendations as well. Mr. Acerno noted that many students are not aware of the shuttle services. He continued, stating that an app will be coming out soon as well as an informational video.

Ms. Picard stated that students addresses will be available as well as a GIS map with local neighborhoods. Councilor Jones noted that this can be part of the off campus education process. Mr. Acerno stated that the app is being created because the students do not utilize the brochures but he cannot guarantee the students will download it. Mr. Robinson asked students read the Equinox. Mr. Rowlands stated that he is unsure how many people actually read this.

Councilor Jones brought up short term goal #2- and noted that the Commission should emphasize the section on Island Street to Route 101 because DOT is currently working on the area. Councilor Jones suggested a cross walk across Pearl Street. He noted that engineers from each entity should be meeting with DOT to ensure proper features like sewers and crosswalks be installed before construction. Ms. Jessup stated that the lighting after Butler Court is a problem because of the crosswalk and noted that someone could get hit very easily. Ms. Jessup stated that this area should not be short term but immediate. She noted that the limited lighting in the crosswalk area could be a legal issue if something happens. Councilor Jones agrees that it should be looked at right away. Ms. Germond stated that she will follow up with the Public Works Department and will send out an email on the status.

Ms. Kayser suggested having blinking lights in areas with limited lighting. Ms. Chadbourne suggested lights be put on the sign as well. Ms. Kayser noted that having reflectors put on the crossing signs could be a quick intermediate fix. Ms. Chadbourne noted that community members have concerns with the amount of crosswalks around the roundabout and that they are dangerous. Ms. Morris stated that cars do not have enough time to stop. Chair Cusack agreed. Councilor Jones stated that the crosswalks were added to the roundabout at the college's request.

Ms. Germond noted that pedestrian and bicycle safety around lower Main Street is a goal of the Commission and there is internal discussion about improving the area. Ms. Germond stated that she will discuss this further with staff and suggested a forum to engage the community around this issue. Ms. Germond noted that another item to discuss is identifying funding opportunities. She continued, stating that possible opportunities have been discussed and it is important to prioritize tasks.

Chair Cusack stated that a forum would be best at the beginning of the fall semester when people are refreshed. He noted that this item could be moved to the medium term goal. Councilor Jones asked if the city engineer could meet with the Commission to discuss pedestrian and bicycle safety and have suggestions ready for the public forum. Ms. Jessup suggested a cost analysis as well. The Commission agreed.

Ms. Germond asked if lower Main Street should be the focus. Mr. Masterson suggested grouping this under cross walk safety as a general term.

Ms. Kayser inquired about the Green Bike Program and if it is an official program. Ms. Morris stated that it is sponsored by the college and students can use ID cards to rent bikes. She continued, stating that someone also accepts used bikes and repairs them. The Commission discussed the numerous bike programs around the country.

Ms. Germond stated that a bike sharing program can be added to the long term goals. She noted that there are many activities happening simultaneously and the Commission could encourage groups to coordinate. Ms. Chadbourne suggested a program to donate old bikes. Councilor Jones stated that bike racks are being donated through a program in Keene as well. Ms. Germond noted that a program called Bike Benefits is occurring where individuals get stickers for their helmets and participating businesses give discounts.

Ms. Germond stated that the item referring to property and tax base focuses on property operated by the college and the loss of taxes to the city. Ms. Germond stated that suggestions were discussed. She continued, noting the Commission wanted to look at the economic impacts of the college on the region and the volunteer impact. Ms. Germond stated that Keene State College did an economic impact report but it may need to be updated. Ms. Germond stated that the Commission wanted to review the Municipal Service Agreement as well and compare it to other host college communities. She noted that it is very difficult to compare and contrast due to unique characteristics. Ms. Germond stated that the college has no plans to acquire new property at this time. She continued, stating that the college looked at a few parcels for parking lots which the city had concern with.

Ms. Germond stated that the focus is to better understand the economic impact of the college, renew the municipal service agreement, and review the impacts of students transitioning from the southeast side of Keene to other areas and possibly helping the southeast side transition back to residential homes.

Ms. Picard asked if there are any specific details in reference to the transitioning neighborhoods item. Ms. Germond stated that the Commission is in the draft phase of the report and if adopted they would identify appropriate partners. Chair Cusack asked if the Planning Department can look into the Returning Homes Project. Ms. Germond stated that she reviewed this project but there are no major updates at the moment. Ms. Morris asked if these items tie into Healthy Monadnock. Councilor Jones stated that part of the Marlborough Street Rezoning Project will

focus on workforce housing. He continued, noting that the east side of Keene needs redevelopment as well. Ms. Germond stated that this ties into their work with the quality of life in the built environment.

Ms. Germond stated that the report should have a forward section that emphasizes the key highlights from the past year as a result of the Commission. She continued, stating that many items from the first phase have been implemented or will be implemented in the next year of school. Ms. Germond asked Commission Members to send her information and successful stories about the city-college partnership. She noted that this will be shared with the Mayor and President of Keene State College so they can help craft the forward.

Ms. Picard stated that the off-campus orientation now included the Fire Department. She noted that there will be a meeting with landlords in April and they will have the option to create a landlord association. Ms. Picard noted that a 5 criteria model has been created including non-smoking housing, bike racks, and lease language about communities, large gatherings and alcohol consumption. She noted that if landlords sign up for all five criteria they would be on a preferred list for housing. Ms. Picard stated that there were 20 landlords at the housing fair and noted that the college has invited them to a dinner. She continued, stating that a survey monkey was also sent out with a positive response. Ms. Picard stated that the majority want an association created.

Ms. Germond stated that she will send out an email to remind Members to send ideas and help create a forward for the report. Ms. Kayser stated that Complete Streets would be a great project to highlight.

5. Public Outreach

Chair Cusack asked if a report should be created or if a forum is sufficient for the public outreach. Mr. Robinson stated that an official report discussing past accomplishments would be helpful and should be publicized. Ms. Kayser suggested sending the forward to the Keene Sentinel. Councilor Jones noted that the Commission has discussed outreach in the meeting including the forum about sidewalk safety and the meeting with landlords.

6. Meeting Schedule

Chair Cusack stated the meeting will be the 4th Monday of the month from 4-6 PM. He noted that a second meeting may occur depending on workload. The designated time was agreed upon by the Commission.

7. Other or New Business

Chair Cusack stated that the Commission should revisit the item of reverting student housing back to residential homes. He continued, stating that the neighborhoods have been mapped out and can be available to anyone.

Mr. Acerno noted that students ride the shuttle for free. Ms. Jessup asked if a larger advertisement can go up for shuttle rides in the dorms. Ms. Morris suggested contacting the Sustainability Department for ideas. Ms. Jessup asked if the shuttle can travel to the sporting complex for games and practice. Mr. Acerno stated that additional routes can be added at the Commission's request but things would have to be altered. Ms. Picard suggested students ride the shuttle during orientation to promote awareness. Mr. Masterson suggested including the Keene State College logo as well when advertising the shuttle. Ms. Picard stated that she will contact the Sustainability Department.

Ms. Germond stated that she and Mr. Robinson met with the President and the Mayor about the report and both suggested diversity as a theme of focus. Chair Cusack encourage Members to brainstorm other ideas as well.

Councilor Jones noted that there is one more spot open in the Commission for a student representative.

Mr. Rowland noted that lighting on campus is an issue and that the path under the highway is not safe. Ms. Morris stated that lighting instills a sense of safety. Mr. Rowland stated that shuttle rides during orientation is a great idea.

Ms. Chadbourne inquired about off campus student orientation. Ms. Picard stated that all students who move off campus are mandated to attend off campus orientation. Ms. Picard discussed the various components of off campus orientation. Ms. Chadbourne noted that pets should be addressed with students as well because she had experiences with abandoned pets. Ms. Picard noted that they will discuss this item. Chair Cusack suggested discussing the shuttle services during orientation as well as bicycle programs.

8. Public Comment

9. Adjourn

Chair Cusack adjourned the meeting at 5:34 PM.