

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES, AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, October 7, 2015

6:00 pm

**City Hall, 2nd Floor, Council
Chambers**

Members Present:

James P. Duffy, Chair
Philip M. Jones, Vice Chair
Janis O. Manwaring
Robert J. O'Connor

Staff Present:

Acting City Manager Medard Kopczynski
Planning Director Rhett Lamb
Planner Tara Germond

Others Present:

Members Absent:

Sheryl A. Redfern

Chair Duffy called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and explained the procedures of the meeting.

1. DRAFT RESOLUTION – R-2015-40: Complete Streets Policy

Tara Germond, City Planner, stated that tonight is the third time Planning staff is meeting with the MSFI Committee with regards to the Complete Streets policy. She continued that tonight is for rehashing the last two meetings to see if the committee feels that the policy, resolution, and guidance documents are ready to be sent to City Council for the first reading. Ms. Germond stated that at a previous meeting the committee talked about the length of the policy and she wanted to address that. She continued that City employees from the Planning and Public Works Departments, and employees from the Southwest Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC) worked together to find a length of the resolution that would be adequate for the City. They wanted to fulfill what was initially identified in the first resolution from 2011, which was for the City to develop a formal Complete Streets policy. They wanted to keep it at a length that was easy to consume and clear for the public, City staff, and elected officials. At first it was eight pages and they have worked it down to 2.5 pages while trying to include the most important elements, like applicability, implementation, and evaluation. The document with the design guidelines will be used internally by City staff as they are working on projects while reviewing consideration of the Complete Streets elements. The resolution is a formal policy document and the guidance document is a companion document to be used by staff. It could also be used as education for the public in how the City is approaching Complete Streets.

Councilor Jones stated that he was the one who questioned the length. He continued that now that he has read it thoroughly he understands why it is the length that it is. He has some changes to propose to it, and some questions.

Chair Duffy stated that the words “policy” and “resolution” have been used interchangeably and that has raised questions and caused confusion. He continued that this is a proposed resolution but it is a policy. In 2011 the City Council adopted a resolution to adopt a Complete Streets policy. For the record, this is a policy, even though it is also called a resolution. He wishes he knew what number the resolution from 2011 is, although that is on the record somewhere. Two weeks ago this issue was brought up using other terms like “inclusiveness.” He thanked Ms. Germond for providing copies of the documents again. On page 4, there is a box at the top with a quote from the Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP) from 2010. He read the first two sentences: *“There is no single design prescription for Complete Streets. Ingredients may include sidewalks, bike lanes, and wide paved shoulders, special bus lanes, accessible public transportation stops, frequent crossing opportunities, median islands, accessible pedestrian signals, curb extensions, and more.”* He continued that when this issue first came up in 2011 it was based on the 2008 community vision process that was part of the initial process of writing the CMP. His understanding is that all along the Public Works and Planning Departments, even without the resolution from 2011 and prior to any possible Complete Streets policy, had been using and incorporating elements of Complete Streets where possible. He remembers Councilor Jones advocating for speed bumps on North Lincoln Street, for example, when there was an accident there – that is a Complete Streets idea. His opinion is that this is the final step at this point to not literally codify, but clarify for the public, staff, and the City Council, what exactly they are trying to do and how. It is not a prescription; it is a policy, in the form of a resolution.

Ms. Germond stated that she would add that the intent of having it institutionalized is so that the good work the City has been doing to meet the needs and safety of all users is part of the institution and culture regardless of who the staff people are. This will ensure the concept of Complete Streets continues even when the current staff members move on.

Councilor Jones stated that when Public Works Director Kürt Blomquist was here at the last meeting he brought up the term “inclusive streets” and he thought that was great concept. He read out loud from the September 23rd MSFI Committee meeting minutes: *“He [Mr. Blomquist] is moving away from the term ‘Complete Streets’ because it is really ‘all-inclusive streets.’”* Councilor Jones continued that nowhere in the resolution is the wording “all inclusive” included. He asked if they should include that terminology. Ms. Germond replied that she recommends keeping it as Complete Streets to maintain consistency with the CMP and the 2011 resolution. She does understand the challenge they have with the term “complete” because it implies that it is as complete as it could be, and “inclusive” could be a better term. She recommends they keep the term “Complete Streets” but the committee can recommend otherwise.

Acting City Manager Medard Kopczynski stated that the third paragraph on page two of the resolution reads: *“It is recognized that designs should reflect and adapt to the context and character of the surrounding built and natural environments and enhance the appearance of such. This Policy recognizes that transportation needs vary and must be balanced in a flexible, safe, and cost effective manner.”* He continued that they could insert the word “inclusive” so it reads *“...balanced in a flexible, safe, inclusive, and cost effective manner.”* Councilor Jones replied that that is a good thought and there was somewhere else he wanted to add it. He continued that this is why he wanted to delay sending this resolution to the City Council right

away; there is more work needed in the drafting process. This is easier, so it does not keep coming back and they do not end up with multiple drafts.

Chair Duffy asked if committee members had questions or comments. Hearing none, he asked if any members of the public had questions or comments.

Toby Tousley, of 499 Washington Street, stated that he is confused about the intent. He asked if the intent is to have streets be done case by case and change as needed, or is the intent to have “one size fits all” for every street. Chair Duffy replied no, it is not “one size fits all.” He continued that it is to be applied “where appropriate and cost effective.” Those things will always be considered. The policy is to incorporate these elements into every design of streets, whether it is a new project or a reconstruction.

Ms. Germond agreed that it is not a “one size fits all” approach. She continued that City staff were very invested in identifying different street types, knowing that Main Street is different from rural or neighborhood streets, which are different from gateway streets. They are each treated differently. The design guidance documents address the differences and address what the Public Works staff and Planning staff would be considering in those different land use contexts and transportation contexts.

Mr. Tousley replied that he is glad to hear it. He continued that they have to be cautious. Everyone running for City Council identified taxes as a problem, and he suggests they not “kick this can further and further down the road.” He wrote the City Council a letter about this. The City portion of the tax is the highest in the state except for that of one small town. The City of Keene tries to justify its spending based on Portsmouth but it is not an “apples to apples” comparison; Portsmouth has much that Keene does not have.

Chair Duffy stated that they do not want to get into a conversation about the tax rate, which is not particularly relevant tonight. He continued that the Complete Streets policy does state that Complete Streets elements will be included the phrase “when cost effective.” The paragraph the Acting City Manager just referenced states that it is designed to be flexible and cost effective. In regards to the budgetary concerns, this policy is a result of a process that began in 2007 and 2008 when members of the public said they would like to see more of this in their community, given the fact that they always have to keep cost in mind.

Councilor Jones stated that the MSFI Committee acknowledged Mr. Tousley’s letter at the last meeting and spoke to the subject matter Mr. Tousley asked them to.

Councilor Jones stated that the second to last paragraph on page one of the Complete Streets resolution reads “*All city-owned transportation facilities in the public right-of-way including, but not limited to, streets, bridges, and all other connecting pathways should be designed, constructed, operated, and maintained to support the concept of Complete Streets.*” He continued that he recommends taking out the period and adding “or inclusive streets, when appropriate or feasible.”

Chair Duffy asked how Councilor Jones feels about putting “inclusive” in the place that the Acting City Manager suggested. Councilor Jones replied that he is okay with it. He continued that they do not need to vote on that unless anyone objects.

Planning Director Rhett Lamb stated that he likes the term “inclusive,” too. He continued that however, it almost seems like with the amendment they are creating two classes, “complete” and “inclusive” streets. That might be confusing, unless they document or define whether there is a difference between the two. He does not disagree with using the term “inclusive” – he just wants to make sure they can answer the public’s questions as they come up. They should be clear about what “inclusive” means.

Councilor Manwaring agreed with Mr. Lamb. She asked if they could include it in the previous paragraph, under the title “Application,” where Complete Streets are defined. It could say “Complete Streets or inclusive streets are streets that are designed...,” so it is tied in and identified. Councilor Jones stated that Councilor Manwaring makes a good point and if they do not know what language they want to use they can ask staff to draft a definition of “inclusive” in the resolution.

Ms. Germond suggested the following wording: “Complete Streets are inclusive streets that are designed...” Chair Duffy and the committee thanked her and agreed.

The Acting City Manager asked if that negates the need to include the wording at the end of the paragraph suggested by Councilor Jones. He continued that that makes it sound like two things, and Ms. Germond’s wording ties it together as one thing. Councilor Jones replied that he thinks it could not hurt to leave his amendment in. The Acting City Manager replied that they always have the background notes should a question arise. He continued that the intention of the Public Works Department is to individually look at each and every street and put in whichever elements A) work, and B) are cost effective. Councilor Jones suggested taking out the words “or inclusive” from his proposed amendment but leaving the rest, so that the sentence reads: “All city-owned transportation facilities in the public right-of-way including, but not limited to, streets, bridges, and all other connecting pathways should be designed, constructed, operated, and maintained to support the concept of Complete Streets, when appropriate or feasible.”

Chair Duffy asked how the committee feels about leaving the word “inclusive” in the place the Acting City Manager suggested – “This Policy recognizes that transportation needs vary and must be balanced in a flexible, safe, inclusive, and cost effective manner.” The Acting City Manager replied that they might not need the word “inclusive” in that sentence anymore. Chair Duffy thanked Councilor Manwaring and Ms. Germond for finding a good place for the word “inclusive.” He continued that he thinks this works well for defining and including the word “inclusive” without causing any confusion.

Councilor Jones asked about the procedure – does this go as a resolution to the City Council and then come back to the MSFI Committee? The Acting City Manager replied yes. He continued that there may be public comments that cause them to think about the resolution further, and/or the City Council might want to make changes. He thinks they accomplished what Councilor Jones wanted – to wordsmith this as much as possible to avoid having too many versions.

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Chair Duffy asked if any members of the public had questions or comments. Hearing none, he asked if committee members had questions or comments or were ready to make a motion.

Councilor Jones made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Manwaring.

On a vote of 4 - 0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee recommends that the City Council direct City staff to introduce Resolution R-2015-40: Complete Streets, with the changes made by the committee.

2. Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Duffy adjourned the meeting at 6:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by
Britta Reida, Minute-taker