

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, May 8, 2019

6:00 PM

Council Chambers

Members Present:

Janis O. Manwaring, Chair
Randy L. Filiault, Vice-Chair
Stephen L. Hooper
Gary P. Lamoureux
Robert B. Sutherland

Staff Present:

Elizabeth A. Dragon, City Manager
Thomas P. Mullins, City Attorney
Elizabeth Fox, HR Director/Assistant City Manager
Andrew Bohannon, Director of Parks, Recreation & Facilities

Members Not Present:

Chair Manwaring called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM, welcomed the public, and explained the rules of procedure.

1) Periodic Report from Standing Committees – Juvenile Conference Committee

Chair Manwaring welcomed the City's Youth Services Manager, Elizabeth Brown, and Director of Parks, Recreation & Facilities, Andrew Bohannon. Ms. Brown said the Juvenile Conference Committee (JCC) is celebrating its 50th anniversary in Keene; it started in the 1970s as a group of volunteer community members who wanted to help youth be accountable for their behaviors and avoid harsh adult criminal consequences. These volunteers worked with the NH Probation Officer in the region. In 1987, a grant funded a full time position in the City of Keene and in 1988, the JCC standing committee was added to the City Code of Ordinances. JCC in Keene has come a long way in the last 32 years; with tremendous committee members and community and Council support, Keene has one of the strongest JCCs in the state (accredited since 2012). Ms. Brown has been on the accreditation committee and Vice Chair of the NH Juvenile Court Diversion Network. She thinks the original volunteers who advocated for youths to have a second chance would be very proud to see the program today. Today, the state recognizes all the diversion programs that have rigorous standards. Over the years, due to funding losses, 39 programs in NH have reduced to 20, only 15 of which are accredited. Throughout these losses over the years, Keene has remained committed and supportive.

Ms. Brown continued explaining the JCC structure. She is the Youth Services Manager and JCC Coordinator. There are still volunteers in the community working for the JCC Committee members; volunteer support has been invaluable. Youth and families have been extremely appreciative of having community members listen and give feedback to

support youth going through bumps in a long road ahead. The purpose of JCC is always to divert youth from court. Court is expensive and a lot of resources are expended on youth committing first time offences; for example, first time youth offenders usually have to appear in court up to 15 times. JCC provides a second chance to youth as well as relief to local courts and law enforcement. Ms. Brown screens youth that come to JCC and presents them to the Committee. The Committee members develop a contract with the youth, which includes accountability for the offence, education, community service, and restitution (when appropriate). Community members are invaluable in helping youth reframe situations to not define them and get past a bad situation and reach their goals.

Ms. Brown said the average success rate of JCC is 97% over the last 10 years. Youth are in the program for 3-6 months depending on their needs. Recidivism is under 20%. She thinks the cases coming to JCC right now are appropriate and make differences. Youth with minor offenses—such as shoplifting, criminal mischief, and simple assault—and with stable, supportive backgrounds can benefit from JCC. Ms. Brown provided examples of success stories that demonstrate how youth can flourish with the Committee.

Ms. Brown explained trends she sees in youth and families. She stressed importantly that JCC not only helps youth to thrive, but helps their families to thrive as well. She is seeing more cases of youth with severe mental illnesses or substance abuse; in other cases, youth are living with caregivers afflicted by these challenges. The current statistics are as follows:

- 30% of youth come to JCC with a drug or alcohol offence.
- 65% of youth have a mental health and/or substance abuse issue.
- 50% of current JCC youth are not living with a biological parent. They live with grandparents, other close relatives, or foster families:
 - 90% of these youth have a biological parent with intense mental health, substance abuse, long-term prison sentence, death from opioids, or they had their rights terminated.

Youth are currently coming to JCC from the criminal justice system, whereas previously they were referred by the mental health and substance abuse system. Thus, JCC is focusing less on the offence and more on helping the youth and families with complex mental health and substance abuse issues. Unfortunately, there are no substance abuse or mental health care options besides outpatient therapy. There is a state hospital and some private hospitals for substance abuse but residential care is very hard to access; there is a large gap in services. This is the first time NH has put youth in their 10-year mental health state plan; while this is progress, Ms. Brown said NH is behind the times because our youth have been in this mental health crisis for a long time. JCC used to focus on youth accountability for juvenile justice offences; now the focus has shifted to serious mental health issues, substance abuse, and complex family dynamics. JCC addresses the offence but many more complicated issues are also considered.

Due to lack of services and increasing mental health and substance abuse, JCC spends the 3-6 months with a youth struggling to find resources outside what the Committee can offer. Beyond counseling, there is a Children in Need of Services (CHINS) petition

through the NH Judicial Branch; though 90% of those petitions are denied if the applicant does not have a severe mental health disorder or pose a safety threat to others. The Cheshire Hospital emergency room will accept youth with mental health safety issues; however, there is a waiting list and no aftercare resources. Law enforcement is struggling because parents call them but police cannot take the youth to the hospital because there are no resources. It is a crisis for parents in this situation.

Ms. Brown continued discussing the opioid crisis, which has made JCC's work more challenging beyond the difficult lack of resources. She has done this report annually for the last five years, and in the last three years:

- every youth and family that enters JCC has been effected by the opioid epidemic
- every youth knows of someone who has overdosed
- many youths have had to call 911 for a parent or other close relative/friend
- multiple youths have experimented with opioids and some have overdosed with Narcan administered
- many youth can name up to five people they know who have died in this manner

Ms. Brown is amazed that she sees this increasing substance abuse in the children she works with aged 3-18. She knows there will be aftershocks of this abuse as these children become adults. Everyone is trying to find an answer for the opioid epidemic while there is a mental health and substance abuse crisis going on at the same time.

Ms. Brown said that despite all these challenges, JCC members remain committed to staying a great support for youth and families. Over the years, JCC has done an excellent job and this year they are moving forward with the mental health and substance abuse issues in mind, while continuing to meet the needs of youth and families in Keene.

Ms. Brown noted discussion of if JCC should be a standing committee in the City Ordinance. She thinks staff are in agreement that JCC's purpose is valuable but does not fit the standing committee structure due to the confidentiality of members. The plan is to remove JCC from the City Ordinance and create an administrative directive that keeps and coordinates JCC Committee members. Despite the change, JCC can still make reports to the MSFI Committee. Ms. Brown noted she is retiring, which sparked this question of next steps and she thinks this is the best way forward for JCC.

Mr. Bohannon said Ms. Brown has been the Youth Services Manager for 15 years and she will be recognized for her service later in May. He said her comprehensive knowledge of the community, state, and youth services will not be replaced easily. Since coming to the Department of Parks & Recreation, Ms. Brown has been an asset and she will be missed. Mr. Bohannon truly appreciates Ms. Brown's work and all she has done for the City.

Councilor Lamoureux recalled that JCC has a 97% success rate; he asked how many youths go through the program annually. Ms. Brown replied that JCC received 38 youth referrals in 2018; she noted, however, that JCC also works with the families of all 38 youth. She said the number of referrals have decreased because they typically come from

law enforcement, but police resources are strained right now as well. Parents cannot refer a child to JCC. Councilor Lamoureux asked what happened to the 3% of youth who did not succeed in the program. Ms. Brown replied that those 3% do not successfully complete the program and end up in court for multiple reasons, such as committing another offence while in the program. Councilor Lamoureux asked how the community was effected when Cheshire Medical closed their mental health unit. Ms. Brown replied that 15 years ago there were tremendous school and hospital mental health programs. The plentiful substance abuse resources have also declined dramatically. Ms. Brown recalled examples of youths' poor experiences in state hospitals. Ms. Brown said the children are crying for help and parents have nowhere to go.

Mr. Bohannon recalled that he and Ms. Brown began working for the City at nearly the same time, when there was a large community coalition that provided routine events for teens. Of all the organizations that participated then, only the City and the YMCA still exist. Mr. Bohannon is trying to find similar avenues that could exist again.

Councilor Hooper thanked Ms. Brown for the very good report. He was disturbed at what he heard and said there seems to be more need for services but funding is disappearing. He asked if this is a national trend. Ms. Brown replied in the affirmative and that the state is in crisis with little revenue coming in. Some states are doing better or worse. She said 25 years ago NH was top in the nation for substance abuse treatment. While things are bleak today, states are recognizing the crisis and hopefully funding solutions faster.

Ms. Brown concluded saying it was a pleasure to report to the MSFI Committee for the last five years as well as to serve the youth and families of this community. This was an enriching part of her life. While it is sad to see kids struggling, she has tremendous success stories and this was a wonderful part of her career.

Councilor Lamoureux moved to accept the presentation as informational, which Councilor Filiault seconded and the Municipal Services, Facilities & Infrastructure Committee carried unanimously.

2) Petition – Urging the US Government to Lead a Global Effort to Prevent Nuclear War

Chair Manwaring recognized Christine Brunner (of 72 Wakefield Street, Keene) who recalled that 56 petition signatures were reported at the last Council meeting and there are 25 more signatures since then. Ms. Brunner reflected on the previous agenda item and said she cannot help but draw attention to the fact that preventing nuclear war would divert needless federal spending to more important things, like youth services. She said the petition seeks a resolution from City Council calling on the US government to lead a global effort to prevent nuclear war. She said people have been signing the petition readily and she does not understand why it should not be a resolution passed readily by Council. She noted that a number of NH towns have passed such resolutions: Alstead, Portsmouth, and Peterborough, among others. The NH House of Representatives also

passed a similar resolution and she thinks the City can certainly do the same. She will be disappointed immensely if this does not come to pass.

Chair Manwaring recognized Chris Hansen of Alstead, NH, where a similar resolution passed. He has strong connections in the Keene community and he thinks it appropriate that this Committee received this petition. He recalled childhood memories in the 1950s of hiding under desks at school during nuclear attack drills. He said not changing the nuclear posture of our country and the rest of the world will impact communities like Keene, which will then be mandated to plan for a nuclear attack. While it may seem unlikely that Keene would be a target of nuclear war, he said to recall there are nuclear power plants and military bases throughout the state. He remembered feeling relief in the 1980s when the US and Russia reached a treaty on nuclear weapons. He believes the federal government needs us to remind them that this is a communal priority. He hopes the Council will support the resolution, which is a little work now to prevent a lot of work later.

Chair Manwaring asked if it is more prudent to send a letter to the respective NH Representatives. Ms. Brunner said such communication is included in the draft resolution, particularly sending letters to the Congressional Delegation and President. Chair Manwaring said it seems most logical to send a letter to Keene's Congressional Delegation, which could have the most impact on the issue. Ms. Brunner replied that legislation was brought up in the Senate and House; thus, Keene and the NH Representatives can lobby for approval and passage. She said the City Council is charged with protecting everyone and this resolution is a way to indicate clearly that protecting residents is a priority.

Chair Manwaring recognized Councilor Terry Clark, who said this petition has more to do with local politics and policies than the public might think. He said the biggest obstacle to reaching the City's sustainability goals is the fact that geopolitical conflicts and wars drive a thirst for fossil fuels; also, new wars make it distasteful economically to move away from fossil fuels. He referred to the former Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin (Montana), who was the first female in Congress. She entered Congress to oppose US entry into both World Wars. Councilor Clark said someone is always needed to speak against war and it will not cost Council anything to speak against war and he hopes they will.

Councilor Filiault said he was unsure what to do when he first saw this petition. He thinks all the speakers have presented good points. He also remembered nuclear drills in school followed quickly by being nuclear trained at age 19 while serving our country on a military submarine. On that vessel, the crew had 19 minutes after receiving a nuclear order from an unknown decision maker to decide whether to release a nuclear weapon. Thinking back on the issues makes him think this is a City Council issue. He stated: if not us, who? He said it is all politics. He was in favor of writing the resolution because it does not cost the City anything and it can only do good. Cities at the local level need to express the need to end this.

Councilor Sutherland said he would oppose writing this resolution because he disagrees. He said this country has a representative government and City Council represents the tax payers and residents. Council is responsible to the City to manage operations, budgets, and personnel. He recognized the argument and appreciated them but believes this will in fact cost the City money. He noted the employees present and utilities needed to hear this matter; he added that this will also take Councilors' time. He will vote against resolutions like this one, for the Paris Climate Accord, or resolutions against hate, among others. He believes those efforts are better directed towards Congressional Representatives. He was sorry to share that he would vote against this resolution.

Councilor Lamoureux asked the City Manager's opinion on whether writing a letter or resolution is better. The City Manager said staff has no opinion and either process can be done. She said the resolution process takes more time, while a letter is formatted easily with a template for the Mayor to sign. Both options accomplish the same thing but one is quicker. Councilor Lamoureux said he prefers to write a letter as customary in the past.

Councilor Hooper agreed that a letter is more appropriate. He thinks letters from municipalities on certain important local causes can trickle up to higher elected officials. He believes grassroots efforts are important to let countries know constituents care. He supported writing a letter.

Chair Manwaring recognized Joan Roelofs (of 69 Beaver Street, Keene), who said many local governments across the country are in bed with the military. She is a journalist who has written on the subject for many years. She said even the Economic Development Committee, City Council, and local governments are completely in favor of the military as a major source of jobs, contracts, and grants for infrastructure. She said our Congressional Delegation is tired closely to major military contractors. She said we cannot expect much from our Congressional Delegation, and therefore Keene has to make a sound statement that we think nuclear war is perhaps a great problem. She thinks it is important that citizens everywhere are able to say why it is not a great idea.

Ms. Brunner urged the Committee strongly to write a resolution versus a letter. If the Committee does vote for a letter, she encouraged them to emphasize the five key points in the petition, which she recalled:

1. Renouncing the option of using nuclear weapons first;
2. Ending the sole, unchecked authority of any president to launch nuclear attack;
3. Taking US nuclear weapons off of their launch-on-warning/prompt launch status;
4. Cancelling the plan to replace its entire arsenal with enhanced weapons; and
5. Actively pursuing a verifiable agreement among nuclear-armed states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals.

Councilor Hooper moved to recommend that the City Council direct the Mayor to write a letter urging the US government to lead a global effort to prevent a nuclear war. Councilor Filiault seconded the motion.

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Councilor Lamoureux said as much as he appreciates the comments, he wanted to address statements of local government bodies in bed with the military. He supports this letter to prevent nuclear war but he does still support the military in some fashion. Voting for this letter does not imply lack of support for the military. Councilor Filiault agreed and said as a veteran, he knows honorable people in the military but the most honorable people are not always sent into battle. He agreed with Councilor Lamoureux to avoid anti-military wording because they have a job to do. Councilor Filiault agrees with a directive against nuclear war.

On a vote of 4-1, the Municipal Services, Facilities & Infrastructure Committee recommends that the City Council direct the Mayor to write a letter urging the US government to lead a global effort to prevent a nuclear war. Councilor Sutherland opposed.

3) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Manwaring adjourned the meeting at 7:07 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katryna Kibler, Minute Taker