



Heritage Commission

Wednesday, May 10, 2023, 4:30 PM

2nd floor conference room, City Hall
3 Washington St, Keene, NH 03431

AGENDA

- I. **Call to Order** – Roll Call
- II. **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**
March 8, 2023
- III. **2022 CLG** – Recovering Black History in Keene Project
- IV. **Downtown Infrastructure Project Update**
- V. **2021 CLG** – Italian Neighborhood Heritage Project
- VI. **Gift Confirmation** – Donation from the Heritage Commission to the Historical Society of Cheshire County
- VII. **Next Meeting** – June 14, 2023
- VIII. **Adjourn**

1 City of Keene
2 New Hampshire

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5 HERITAGE COMMISSION
6 MEETING MINUTES
7

Wednesday, March 8, 2023

4:30 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall

Members Present:

Cauley Powell, Chair
Molly Ellis, Vice Chair
Susan DeGidio (remote)
Councilor Gladys Johnsen
Rose Carey
Brian Lee

Staff Present:

Evan Clements, Planner
Will Schoefmann, GIS Technician

Members Not Present:

Marilyn Huston
Louise Zerba, Alternate

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9 **1) Call to Order – Roll Call**

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11 Ms. Powell called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.
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13 **2) Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**

14
15 Ms. Carey made a motion to accept the minutes of the November 9, 2022 and January 11, 2023
16 meetings. Ms. Ellis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
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18 **3) Elections – Chair/Vice Chair**

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20 Ms. Carey made a motion to nominate Cauley Powell as Chair. Ms. Ellis seconded the motion.
21 The motion passed unanimously.
22

23 Ms. DeGidio made a motion to nominate Molly Ellis as Vice Chair. Chair Powell seconded the
24 motion. The motion passed unanimously.

25
26 **4) Downtown Infrastructure Project Update**

27 Mr. Schoefmann reported that, after the last public listening session, the City Council decided to
28 set up about five more informational workshops that would be open to the public. He stated he

29 would check the schedule and forward the information to the Commission members. He also
30 stated the information should be on the City's website.

31 Mr. Schoefmann also reported that the City Manager announced the project start date may be
32 delayed until 2025. He noted there are a number of federal grant funding opportunities that
33 would not be available if the project were delayed further. Ms. Ellis questioned why anyone
34 would want a delay. Mr. Schoefmann speculated businesses want more time to prepare for
35 construction. He wondered if they want to organize a fund to help affected businesses, like Ted
36 [McGreer of Ted's Shoe & Sport] and Luca [Paris of Luca's Mediterranean Café] did during the
37 COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Clements stated he did not know but did not think delay would be
38 helpful.

39 Chair Powell stated there is a working draft of the letter the Commission discussed sending to the
40 City Council at their last meeting. She sought input on the draft.

41 At 4:39 PM, two members of the public arrived. Rita Haywood moved to Keene a year and a half
42 ago and is looking to find a committee to work with. Jeananne Farrar has lived in Keene for 86
43 years. She was a founding member of the Heritage Commission and the Historic District
44 Commission. She is interested in the Commission's views on the project.

45 Councilor Johnsen arrived at 4:41 PM.

46 Mr. Schoefmann repeated his project update for the newcomers. Chair Powell asked Councilor
47 Johnsen to keep Mr. Clements updated on any insights relevant to the Commission. Councilor
48 Johnsen stated the Councilors want to make sure that they understand everything about the
49 project, so they are having at least one more information session. She mentioned there was a
50 wonderful turnout at both prior information sessions.

51 Chair Powell noted their meeting time was limited, but there would be other opportunities to
52 discuss the project.

53 Mr. Clements returned the discussion to the draft letter from the Commission to the City
54 Council. He suggested circulating and discussing the draft at the meeting but noted there is no
55 rush to finalize it. Chair Powell stated members could send their input in writing after the
56 meeting, as well. A revised letter could be the subject of a motion at the next Commission
57 meeting.

58 Mr. Clements distributed copies of the draft. Chair Powell gave attendees a few minutes to read
59 it. She then noted the draft was based on discussion at the last Commission meeting, as well as
60 written input from Ms. Zerba and Ms. Huston. She invited others to send their input to her, as
61 well.

62 Councilor Johnsen said the letter was very well written. She suggested stressing in the letter that
63 the Commission understands that the area has to be dug up because the aging pipes and
64 infrastructure under the street must be replaced and that is the reason the City is doing the
65 project.

66 Ms. Haywood stated the current traffic pattern at Central Square is very confusing. She was
67 driving from Court Street to Roxbury Street and had to be “straightened out” by a police officer.
68 She feels the traffic lights are confusing. She thinks the proposed new circle might make more
69 sense. She relayed that, at one of the information sessions, a woman was very angry the street in
70 front of The Stage would be closed to deliveries, but she believes it would allow outdoor dining
71 and sounds lovely, and deliveries could be made early in the morning.

72 Returning the discussion to historic elements of the area, Chair Powell asked Ms. Carey for her
73 thoughts. Ms. Carey said she is in favor of the proposed plan because there would be more green
74 space for events and gatherings. It would be safer to access; it would be more pleasant to be in
75 the square area; it would be a less confusing traffic pattern.

76 Ms. Ellis noted she has a three-year-old, and she thinks about the memories he would make in
77 the future about going to the common, which would be his heritage. She agreed with Ms. Carey
78 that it would nice to have the space, particularly for pedestrian safety. She also noted there is an
79 alley behind The Stage for deliveries.

80 Mr. Lee said the letter was great. He agreed with Councilor Johnsen’s suggested addition to the
81 letter. He thinks the changes to the square will enhance or rediscover the original purpose of the
82 square – for congregation. He noted that he recently had difficulty trying to cross the street to get
83 to the gazebo in the square. He saw two near-accidents outside The Stage recently. He indicated
84 a roundabout with traffic lights is odd. He thinks the beauty and history will be enhanced by the
85 new design.

86 Councilor Johnsen noted the new plan preserves all the historic elements of the area. Mr. Lee
87 suggested adding specific historic elements the Commission wants saved to the letter.

88 Ms. DeGidio agreed with Mr. Lee. She thinks the letter was great. She also agreed with Ms.
89 Carey. She said they must look to the future. She thinks having fewer cars in the area would
90 make for a more people-friendly space. Having more space for outdoor dining area would be
91 good. The plan is a way to preserve and move into the future. She supports the plan.

92 Chair Powell read an email from Ms. Zerba:

93 My biggest concern is that Central Square remains as is to allow cars to travel
94 around, thus making it a real square. Another important feature is the appearance
95 of the street and square, including the church steeple. As people head up to Main
96 Street it’s a beautiful sight, and I would like it to remain as such. Keene is the
97 envy of all who visit, as well as our own community citizens. The City of Keene
98 has received many awards due to its architecture, green space, trees throughout
99 the downtown and common, and the overall appearance of a true New England
100 town, as it is perceived.

101 Chair Powell continued that Ms. Zerba does not want to lose any parking spaces; she does not
102 want to lose any trees unless they are dead, or it’s otherwise absolutely necessary; she does not
103 want to lose parking for visitors of the church, especially those with disabilities; and she does not
104 want any increase in traffic to School Street.

105 In response to Chair Powell’s question, Mr. Clements stated that Ms. Huston is against any
106 changes to the square.

107 At Chair Powell’s invitation, Ms. Farrar discussed her position on the plan. She first noted that
108 the Commission is doing a great job and commended Ms. Carey’s neighborhood tours and work
109 on the Italian Neighborhood Heritage Project. She then stated she is not in favor of the plan. She
110 said she has many engineers in her family, and an engineer who grew up in Keene told her the
111 traffic would be worse with the proposed changes. She is nervous about the lack of parking
112 spaces, especially around the park, where children would be playing. She noted the many awards
113 Keene has received for its architecture. She warned the plan would result in traffic overflowing
114 into surrounding neighborhoods. She worried there would be parking meters in front of nice
115 homes on residential streets. She noted Keene is the seat of Cheshire County and therefore the
116 center of business, civic events, political events, festivals, etc. She thinks the current Main Street
117 is well designed. She noted she almost got into an accident at the Winchester Street roundabout
118 but has never gotten into an accident on Main Street. She understands people live differently
119 now, but she is speaking on behalf of people who have a strong sense of place. She thinks the
120 plan looks like a playground or park not a government and business district. She understands the
121 infrastructure needs to be repaired as soon as possible, but the street should only be tweaked. She
122 has great reservations about the plan. The history of Main Street is astounding. The area should
123 still look like Keene, not a park.

124 Chair Powell asked what features are important to save. She said the trees in the center median
125 are beautiful have a lot of character, and she does not want to lose them. They are likely to stay,
126 though. Ms. Ellis said the area is not really a square. She suggested it be thought of more like a
127 common, where everyone can congregate and have community events. That is the true heritage
128 of the area.

129 Ms. DiGidio wondered what Mr. Paris and Mr. McGreer think about the project as businessmen.
130 Mr. Clements said he understood their greatest concern to be that businesses remain open during
131 construction and not experience any business interruption. He noted Keene is using the same
132 consultant as Concord used, so the company understands how to reduce the day-to-day impact of
133 construction on businesses. He noted that property owners in the area would ultimately benefit
134 from the infrastructure improvements, although not necessarily their tenants.

135 Mr. Clements stated that Ms. Farrar’s comments about place making resonated with him. He
136 thinks that, particularly with her work with the history and preservation of the community, the
137 issue of community identity should be highlighted in the letter. He noted the square is the
138 economic engine not only for the city but also the county, so maybe turning it into a park is not
139 the right decision. He noted he was only giving his personal opinion.

140 Councilor Johnsen, speaking as a Commission member and not a Council member, noted that a
141 lot of people want a bike path, but wondered where it would go, since no healthy trees would be
142 removed. She suggested the Commission might want to address that in the letter.

143 Ms. Farrar said an engineer told her the Concord project was different because it involved a
144 straight Main Street, which is much less complicated than a five-exit roundabout. She said an

145 English engineer specializing in roundabouts said not to mess with it. It would be very
146 complicated. She stated that many people are also worried about the cost of the project. She
147 thought the City Manager indicated it would cost up to \$9,000,000. She noted it could get even
148 more expensive. Once the street is dug up, they could find more problems. Mr. Clements noted it
149 would not get any less expensive than it is now, and additional delay could jeopardize federal
150 funds. Ms. Farrar wondered if the city would lose CLG (certified local government) money if
151 they ripped up its history, and it was no longer a Preservation America community or no longer
152 had a historic or heritage district.

153 Chair Powell returned the Commission's focus to the history and heritage of the area. She
154 indicated there would be more in-depth discussion at a future meeting. She asked if any
155 particular projects should be highlighted in the letter. She suggested the Preserve America
156 designation and Main Streets of America award. Ms. Farrar added that Keene received the
157 Distinctive Destinations award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Ten
158 Best Public Spaces award from the American Planners Association for Central Square.

159 Ms. Farrar noted Keene has many parks, including the recreation department and a new park on
160 Carpenter Street, which should be utilized more for gatherings. She noted there is a green in
161 many places in New Hampshire, including Walpole. She said Keene is a little different. Since
162 1828, the design has worked for all these years. She acknowledged there should be some safety
163 improvements, though. She said the community is designated as a Pedestrian-Friendly
164 Community. She lamented that people now want outdoor dining and a bike lane, but there's only
165 so much you can fit on the streets.

166 Mr. Clements summarized the discussion about additions to the letter. He noted the Preserve
167 America and Main Street America awards were important as aspirational for purposes of place
168 making. He said Keene has been proven to be a great place, and they should make it better.
169 Keene is the economic engine and county seat. There's a balance between urban features and
170 rural living. The letter should acknowledge that the Commission understands work must be done.
171 The area should be enhanced to allow for safe congregation. The project should leave a legacy.
172 He suggested the Commission think about how they want future generations to use the space and
173 live and move about in the square. He suggested including a few specific features, like the center
174 median and trees, the Commission wanted to preserve. The idea of the common versus the
175 square also goes into place making.

176 Mr. Clements said he thinks it was a great letter, and the suggestions would make it better. Chair
177 Powell agreed, noting she would circulate a revised draft of the letter.

178 Ms. Carey requested adding something about how the traffic pattern would impact surrounding
179 areas, with a focus on School Street. Mr. Clements said he would provide an update but did not
180 think it should be in the letter. Councilor Johnsen noted she often has close calls with accidents
181 in the area all the time. Chair Powell noted there used to be a police officer directing traffic there.
182 Councilor Johnsen said that many of the younger councilors are thinking younger, and that is
183 important. Mr. Clements noted Keene's population is aging, however, so the design should not
184 only be for the next generation. Ms. Haywood said attracting young people is also important.

185 Ms. DeGidio made a point to thank Ms. Farrar for her perspective. She said Ms. Farrar was
186 amazing and gave the Commission a lot to think about. Even though Ms. DeGidio supports the
187 project, she thinks Ms. Farrar brought up important points. Ms. Farrar responded that
188 preservation has been her passion for 25 years.

189 Ms. Farrar left the meeting at 5:21 PM.

190 **5) 2021 CLG – Italian Neighborhood Heritage Project**

191 Mr. Clements noted Mr. Schoefmann had to leave but wanted to show an example of a story
192 map. Mr. Clements said he would show the story map but couldn't speak about it much because
193 he was not involved in the project.

194 Chair Powell said she would not be able to do more interviews because the person filming would
195 be away. Additional clips would have to come from the completed interviews. Mr. Lee has
196 already cut some new clips but may send additional ones to consultant Ray Corson. Councilor
197 Johnsen noted she still wants the City Council to hear about the Commission's work at some
198 point, maybe once the story map project is done.

199 Mr. Clements explained that a story map is a scrolling story that includes graphics and GIS maps
200 and information. He showed a story map for the Dillant-Hopkins Airport regarding leasing and
201 development opportunities. It includes location maps and an overview of the facilities with
202 additional information. It is easy to scroll and get a sense of everything. The story moves with
203 the map. It is somewhat interactive. It is good for visualizing points.

204 Chair Powell noted the technology would work well for the project, with different photos
205 moving to different areas, some historic, some modern, showing embedded videos, and using the
206 map to move the reader around. Mr. Clements agreed about the benefits of using a story map for
207 the project.

208 Mr. Clements asked Commission members to send Mr. Schoefmann ideas about how a story map
209 could be used for the project. It would be built out based on the posters Ms. Carey and Ms. Ellis
210 put together and additional photos and videos. Ms. Carey noted she wants to add something
211 about the Pearl Street School, which was sawed in half and separated into two buildings at some
212 point. Ideas should be sent to Mr. Schoefmann.

213 **6) 2022 CLG – Recovering Black History in Keene Project**

214 Mr. Clements had little to report. There is a tentative plan for a consultant to meet with the
215 Historical Society to talk about how their respective projects fit together. He said the project is
216 on track. He is hoping to kick the project off at the upcoming meeting in April. Chair Powell
217 noted she plans to invite Jenna from the Historical Society and Kabria, the consultant working on
218 the project to the meeting.

219 **7) Gift Confirmation**

220 Mr. Clements reported that he received a letter from the Historical Society thanking the
221 Commission for donating a DVD presentation about the history of Keene Middle School, but he

222 was unaware of such a DVD or donation. Neither Chair Powell nor Ms. Carey were aware of
223 such a DVD or donation. Mr. Clements said that, after double checking with Ms. Zerba and Ms.
224 Huston, he would reach out to the Historical Society for clarification.

225 Ms. Carey asked if the Commission is a member of the Historical Society. Chair Powell said she
226 thought so, and that membership was annual. She noted the Commission could pass a motion to
227 renew the membership when the time came.

228 **8) Next Meeting – April 12, 2023**

229 Chair Powell asked if anyone had questions before the meeting adjourned.

230 Ms. Carey noted she had the displays Councilor Johnsen brought forward and was happy to set
231 them up anywhere, possibly in the lobby. Councilor Johnsen suggested she check with Patty
232 [Little, City Clerk]. She wants councilors to see the display. Chair Powell suggested waiting until
233 the story map is done and publicizing it by displaying the plaques. Ms. Carey will hold onto the
234 displays. She is willing to set them up. Councilor Johnsen said she was impressed with the
235 displays and appreciated the interviews.

236 Ms. Carey wondered if a story map for Central Square would help people visualize the plan.
237 People get overwhelmed with such a confusing subject. She suggested the Commission could
238 collaborate with the City of Keene. There could be historic photos. Councilor Johnsen said the
239 engineers could be asked to do it. Chair Powell noted it is in the Commission's wheelhouse to
240 incorporate a narrative history of the area in a story map. She noted there is time to do research if
241 the project doesn't start until 2025. Ms. Carey suggested having the story map available at
242 workshops might be helpful. Mr. Clements expressed support for the idea but wasn't sure if it
243 was feasible. He said he would reach out to the communications director about it. Chair Powell
244 suggested waiting until the plan was more solid before making a story map.

245 **9) Adjournment**

246

247 There being no further business, Chair Powell adjourned the meeting at 5:36 PM.

248

249 Respectfully submitted by,
250 Wendy Chen, Minute Taker

251

252 Reviewed and edited by,
253 Evan J. Clements, AICP - Planner