

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ROADWAY SAFETY PLAN COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, January 22, 2024

4:00 PM

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

Members Present:

J.B. Mack, Chair
Elizabeth Dragon, City Manager
Autumn DelaCroix
Ockle Johnson
Erin Roark
Frank Linnenbringer
Fred Roberge (remote)
William Lambert

City Staff Present:

Don Lussier, City Engineer
Brett Rusnock, Infra. Project Manager
Amanda Palmeira, Assistant City Attorney

Other Staff Present:

Michelle Marshall, FHWA
Frank Koczalka, VHB
Phil Goff, VHB
Eric Tang, VHB

Members Not Present:

Councilor Bryan Lake
Reagen Messer

1) Call to Order

Mr. Lussier called the meeting to order at 4:05 PM. The goal of this Committee is to develop a Roadway Safety Action Plan (RSAP) with both specific and general recommendations to improve safety for Keene's road network, including both City maintained roads and those maintained by NH Department of Transportation (DOT). Ultimately, the goal is to have this plan in place and adopted by the City Council so the City can apply for Federal grants for safety improvements.

2) Roll Call

Roll call ensued.

3) Welcome & Introductions

Consultants from Vanasse Hangen Brustlin (VHB) were in attendance in-person and remotely: Eric Tang (Safety Lead), Frank Koczalka (Project Manager), and Phil Goff (Engagement Lead). Michelle Marshall, Federal Highway Administration Liaison, and Amanda-Joe Zatecka, Senior Highway Safety Engineer for NH DOT, were also present.

Committee members introduced themselves:

- Councilor Laura Tobin was not yet officially appointed to the Committee. Councilor Tobin does not drive, so this topic was important to her, as she had been a pedestrian in Keene for 15–20 years.
- Ockle Johnson is a professor emeritus at Keene State College (KSC), with long-term experience trying to cross Main Street on his commute to/from work.
- Erin Roark is a teacher at Symonds and Franklin Elementary Schools, and she walks throughout the City daily.
- Frank Linnenbringer is the Assistant District Engineer for NH DOT, District 4.
- Autumn DelaCroix serves on the City’s Bicycle/Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee (BPPAC) and is a full-time cyclist commuter.
- Fred Roberge serves on the Governor’s Commission for Disabilities and was appointed to this Committee to ensure mobility and access/coordination of services for people with disabilities. He was Vice President of Transportation for Easter seals for 42 years, and he also served on: NH State Coordinating Council for Community Transportation, Alliance for Healthy Aging Transportation Committee, and more.
- William Lambert is the NH DOT Highway Safety Active Transportation Administrator, and he previously served 23 years as a NH Traffic Engineer.
- Joshua (J.B.) Mack is the Assistant Director of Southwest Regional Planning Commission and has been a transportation planner for 20 years.
- Elizabeth Dragon is the Keene City Manager.

Ms. Dragon said that this Committee’s work would be an important effort to consider Keene’s transportation system holistically. She thanked the Committee members for agreeing to serve.

4) Committee Charge

Mr. Lussier read the Committee’s charge:

“Oversee the development of a comprehensive Safety Action Plan for the City of Keene. Provide guidance and general direction to City of Keene staff and engineering consultants as they collect and analyze roadway safety data and generate draft work products. Ensure that the plan development process provides for the equitable representation of all roadway users and stakeholders, and that the final document addresses the diverse needs of those groups. Assist in the development of specific roadway safety improvement priorities and recommendations. Ultimately, the Committee will make a recommendation to the City Council with respect to adoption of the draft plan and a roadway safety performance goal.”

The members appointed to this Committee were chosen to ensure representation from as many stakeholder groups as possible. Ultimately, this Committee will make a recommendation to the City Council on a roadway safety performance goal and for how to adopt a draft plan. Over the next 6 months, the consultants from VHB—with this Committee’s guidance—will develop the

draft plan that this Committee will recommend that the City Council adopts. Additionally, this Committee will recommend to the City Council a goal for the long-term improvement of roadway safety performance in Keene. These goals could include metrics like ‘reducing roadway accidents by X percentage per year’ or ‘eliminating roadway fatalities by 2050’, for example.

5) Formalities

A) Rules Governing Public Bodies – Assistant City Attorney

The Assistant City Attorney, Amanda Palmeira, explained important things for the Committee to understand from NH’s Right to Know law RSA 91-A. Specifically, this law provides the requirements for open meetings and open records. For example, the meeting room door should not be completely closed, so that the public know they can enter. Notifying the public that an open meeting will occur is a part of the requirement. A public meeting occurs when a quorum—5 members for this Committee—is present and discussing official business. Without a quorum, a meeting cannot occur, and no official business should be discussed. Also required for a public meeting is that the Committee must be able to communicate contemporaneously, meaning that the law extends beyond just the Committee present in a room. If the Committee discusses official business by email, that counts as communicating contemporaneously, and therefore technically becomes a meeting. Thus, the Committee should always avoid using “reply all” for Committee emails, as doing so constitutes an unnoticed quorum; staff emails to members will use “bcc” to avoid this issue. For this reason, emails should always be sent via a City Staff member—Mr. Lussier or Mr. Rusnock. Also importantly, topics within this Committee’s jurisdiction—per its official charge—should only be discussed during a formal, publicly noticed meeting. If a quorum of this Committee was together at a social gathering, for example, they should not discuss any Committee business. The Committee members should understand that there are enforcement mechanisms that could invalidate certain public bodies’ actions, so the Assistant City Attorney urged caution. There are some exceptions to when a meeting must be held in public, but such an instance was not anticipated for this Committee. Certain documents the Committee works with are also public records and a member of the public could request to review that record; things like personal notes are exempt. To meet the requirements of RSA 91-A, this Committee has an assigned minute taker to produce minutes that the Committee must vote to adopt.

If Committee members have any questions about NH’s Right to Know law, they should contact the Assistant City Attorney, Amanda Palmeira (apalmeira@keenenh.gov), or the City Attorney, Tom Mullins (tmullins@keenenh.gov).

Mr. Roberge questioned whether he could report on this Committee’s work to the Governor’s Commission on Disabilities. Ms. Palmeira said that was fine as nothing in these meetings is secret or privileged. Still, if a quorum of this Committee was present at a Governor’s Commission meeting, that would trigger a formal meeting of this body. The Right to Know restrictions are to preserve the sanctity of this public body in a formally noticed meeting.

B) Rules of Order

The Committee reviewed the draft Rules of Order. A brief discussion led Mr. Lussier to include a “new business” section on future agendas to ensure an opportunity for public input. Mr. Lussier mentioned that remote participation is allowed if there are no objections from the Committee. Remote participation is only allowed if there is a quorum of the Committee at the physical, advertised meeting location. So, if anyone needs to attend remotely, they should alert Mr. Lussier, so he can ensure there is a quorum at the meeting location.

A motion by Mr. Mack to approve the Rules of Procedure as presented was duly seconded by Mr. Lambert and the motion carried unanimously on a roll call vote.

C) Election of Committee Chair & Vice Chair

The City Manager nominated J.B. Mack to serve as Chair. The nomination was seconded by Mr. Lambert and on a roll call vote, the motion carried with six members voting in favor. J.B. Mack and Autumn DelaCroix abstained.

The Committee chose to defer electing a Vice Chair until the next meeting.

6) Overview of VHB’s Scope of Work

A) Stakeholder Engagement

Mr. Goff discussed stakeholder engagement, including public input over the next 5 months, which would be a significant portion of the ultimate RSAP.

i) *Monthly RSPC Meetings*

This Committee would meet on the 4th Monday of each month for 6 months.

ii) *Technical Advisory Committee Meetings*

This Technical Advisory Committee would be comprised of additional City Staff (i.e., Fire and Police Departments)

iii) *Stakeholder Listening Sessions*

VHB consultants planned a total of 8 stakeholder meetings. These stakeholder listening sessions would be additional opportunities to gather data. For example, consultants would meet with KSC staff, administrators, and students to understand key issues for them regarding walking, biking, traveling, and safety on and around the campus. For example, the consultants hope to meet with SAU administrators to better understand what is/is not working for the Safe Routes to School program. The Keene Housing Authority would also be a key stakeholder. The consultants also

want to learn more from the BPPAC that Ms. DelaCroix represents. The Committee also recommended meeting with Pathways for Keene.

Mr. Koczalka mentioned that equity would be a critical focus of the RSAP. Including the needs of underrepresented communities (e.g., those without access to a car) would be essential to this effort. He mentioned the commitment to Keene's Complete Streets program and the national Safe Streets for All grant program. City Staff would share the Safe Routes to School plans with the consultants, though Chair Mack mentioned that many may be outdated.

When looking at the list of stakeholders, Councilor Tobin expressed concern that many people she knows did not fall into any of the listed categories. For example, she urged making the distinction between trail bike advocates and those who use bikes as a mode of transportation and commuting, like getting to work. She said the trail bike users have access to services and flexibility in where they are coming/going from, whereas commuters need their bikes to get where they must go each day. Councilor Tobin urged the distinction between biking/walking for recreation versus necessity. Mr. Goff noted that there was some flexibility built into the plans to meet with various neighborhood groups. He hoped they would reach some Keene Housing Authority sites. He also suggested coordinating with some of the larger employers in the City to invite their employees to talk about safety. Mr. Lussier agreed with Councilor Tobin's suggestion that it could be more useful to have separate meetings for recreational bikers and commuting bikers. Councilor Tobin said recreation means that a biker has flexibility in their timeline and path (e.g., can shift to the other side of the street), whereas those who bike to commute have less flexibility; it is a matter of function versus mode of transportation.

Mr. Johnson said—as someone who walks and bikes a lot—that he has different concerns about where it is safe to walk versus where it is safe to ride. He agreed with the need to maintain the distinction of those who bike for recreation versus necessity.

Ms. Roark noted that there is small population of professional road cyclists who also choose that mode of transportation to get to work. She wondered if these stakeholders should be included in the "A" group. She thought it was important to distinguish advanced cyclists.

When thinking about complete streets, Mr. Goff also mentioned the homeless population. He said the consultants would be meeting with Keene Housing Authority and other social service agencies like Monadnock Family Services, Southwestern Community Services, Home Healthcare Services, and the Community Kitchen. Chair Mack also suggested Hundred Nights, for which Mr. Johnson sits on the Board.

Ms. Zatecka (of NH DOT) urged caution regarding corridors with active cyclists who are commuting. She suggested not only looking at those corridors that cyclists would use, but to also think about the future and how to open more, safer routes for cyclists.

iv) MSFI Committee Meetings

The consultants would have 3 presentations before the City Council's Municipal Services, Facilities, & Infrastructure Committee in advance of a final presentation to the City Council in early June.

v) *Project Website*

The project webpage—hosted on the City of Keene website—would go live in the next 2–3 weeks. The webpage would be a resource for City Staff and the public to learn more about the RSAP. The website will be a significant resource for the consultants and Committee to understand the roadway conditions that members of the community are experiencing for the various modes of transportation.

vi) *Online Survey & Input Map*

The consultants have been working on a 14-question online survey. They were narrowing those down to the 4–5 most critical questions that would be sent to community members as a FlashVote survey, which would soon be open to the public. The City Manager mentioned how community members could submit their input on other City initiatives regularly shared using FlashVote on the City's website.

Mr. Koczalka explained that the online survey would be important for the consultants to fully analyze the roadway situation in Keene. While the crash data will show specific issues, it would also be important to gather anecdotal details from the community on things like near misses, which might not be easily or clearly assessed in the crash data.

Mr. Goff demonstrated how the online survey would be embedded within an online input map to gather data on specific intersections or roadways. The survey user could use the map to indicate locations in the City where there are barriers or challenges to various modes of transportation. These details would show the consultants what to assess further and how those assessments should contribute to subsequent recommendations.

B) *Data Collection & Analysis*

C) *Determine Priorities*

Mr. Tang explained that all the stakeholder engagement, data collection, and analysis would help with determining priorities for Keene's RSAP.

Mr. Tang said that determining priorities would allow for the biggest impact. This would aid in finding locations in the City where proven treatments could be effective (the Federal Highway Administration has 28 effective measures). There are funds available from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for behavioral safety measures. Collectively, the consultants would

analyze infrastructure and non-infrastructure treatments that could improve safety in the City's priority areas.

Mr. Tang displayed a map of Richmond, VA, to demonstrate how a City map could be overlaid with things like high injury networks, for example. Doing the same for Keene, the consultants would be able to focus on car crashes for a strategically focused analysis. Still, this is a somewhat reactive approach, and the goal was to be proactive through activities like community engagement. Through a comprehensive but strategic review of different roadways in the City, the consultants would assess whether there are common characteristics among crashes in Keene to allow for more proactive planning. Mr. Tang used the map to again demonstrate the importance of equity, noting that some roadways create challenges to accessing healthcare, for example. Socio-economic data will help to determine underserved and disadvantaged neighborhoods (e.g., households with 0 cars). Identifying comprehensive and strategic priority locations allows for short-, medium-, and long-term mitigation. Overlaying socio-economic and crash data could prove insightful. At the Federal level, the goal is to prioritize 40% of funds to serve disadvantaged census tracts. When Keene applied for this grant in the first year, only certain census tracts were identified. In the second year of the grant, the definition was refined further with additional metrics, resulting in a more robust tool. The third round of applications was anticipated to open 2–3 weeks after this meeting, and would align with this Committee's timeline. The consultants would continue monitoring any changes to those census tracts as there had been some ongoing modifications. The consultants would carefully read the notice of funding opportunity to understand all changes and nuances. Mr. Tang added that there were a lot of planning dollars available to encourage localities to consider potential demonstration (i.e., pilot) projects. The City could also choose to pursue additional studies that could complement this RSAP.

In terms of being proactive, Chair Mack asked if the consultants were aware of Keene's Complete Streets Policy and Complete Street network typology, which could be helpful in proactively prioritizing funds for safety improvements. Mr. Koczalka agreed that one of the consultants' tasks was to assess both City of Keene and NH DOT policies. VHB helped to create the NH DOT Strategic Highway Safety Plan, which included language on complete streets and equity. A brief discussion ensued about the various possible funding streams for these projects.

D) Develop Improvement Recommendations

The efforts listed above to analyze data and prioritize improvements would lead to recommendations at both the specific project level and general policy/standards level.

E) Action Plan Development

The Action Plan will provide a roadmap to success, with equity interwoven.

7) Project Schedule

The consultants noted that the project was a bit behind schedule. A Federal notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) was moved up to February from April and the end date was not yet known, though 90–100 days was anticipated. The consultants were working with the data to develop strategies and countermeasures. Mr. Lussier was pushing the consultants to be ready to apply for new grants when they become available. That said, Mr. Lussier was more interested in having a good plan, which can be referenced and used as the basis of funding requests for years to come. For example, the NHDOT’s 10-year plan includes Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funding for certain projects, but the City needs a solid plan of what it wants to accomplish first. Mr. Koczalka noted that once Keene has a RSAP in place, there would be a process in place to incorporate new data once VHB is no longer on this project; this can help with City Staff turnover.

Councilor Tobin mentioned the City of Keene’s SeeClickFix software/app that allows residents to report issues, like a downed tree, to the Public Works Department. She wondered if roadway safety concerns could be reported there too. Mr. Lussier said that system was developed and built more so for Public Works tasks. Still, it could be used to report more general safety concerns even though that is not what it was built for. The City Manager thought there might be a way to dig further into the SeeClickFix data to identify street safety reports.

8) Open Forum Discussion

The Committee engaged in an open discussion to brainstorm the following 4 questions about general roadway challenges, goals, and concerns.

- A) What are your key goals for the RSPC?**
- B) What are the challenges for roadway safety in Keene?**
- C) Who are the communities of concern in your daily work?**
- D) Which agencies or partners do you believe should participate in this plan?**

In terms of goals, Mr. Tang noted that NH Strategic Highway Safety Plan has a goal to reduce fatalities and injuries by 50% by 2035, and working toward 0 fatalities by 2050. Keene could have more aggressive goals depending on what works for the City.

Councilor Tobin suggested creating pathways where different modes of transportation can coexist. For example, how could someone safely get from east to west Keene without a car. The pathways do not always have to be alongside the roadway. She thought bikes would align with some sections of the City but not others. She was also interested in identifying barriers to these pathways, including seasonally, when snow plowing might create additional barriers, for example.

Ms. Zatecka mentioned NH DOT’s Vulnerable User Plan, which was developed after many bike/pedestrian crashes in transition zones (i.e., rural to urban).

Mr. Linnenbringer wondered if increasing safety for 1 mode of transportation could decrease safety for other modes of transportation (e.g., cyclists and raised curbs). Ms. Roark mentioned that in Sweden, everyone bikes for every reason, with safe and accommodating lines on every sidewalk to accommodate bikes and pedestrians. Ms. DelaCroix spoke in favor of raised crosswalks, which remind drivers to be attentive to pedestrians sharing the space; there was general agreement about the safety of raised crosswalks, though there was one mention that they could potentially damage a bike. Mr. Linnenbringer mentioned vehicle speeds as a concern, for which he hears many complaints. Ms. DelaCroix noted that when bikes are at sidewalk grade, the sidewalks would be wider, which would better allow the City to plow sidewalks. The City Manager added that any new sidewalks built in the City should be wide enough to be plowed.

Councilor Tobin questioned whether there could be a way to develop accountability so that people constantly driving through crosswalks with pedestrians are compliant. For example, the City could enforce failure to yield infractions. The City Manager said that level of enforcement for vehicles is challenging because by the time it is reported, they are gone. As a part of the downtown reconstruction project, the City was contemplating bike lanes at sidewalk grade, including rules and enforcement. The City Manager said rules are important, but enforcement is equally important, as is a realistic expectation of enforcement. Mr. Koczalka added that public outreach and input is particularly important to gain insight into issues for which there is no data, like near misses.

Regarding communities of concern, Mr. Johnson said he was retired from KSC but still on the Board and well connected there. He is also on the Hundred Nights Board. He added that another community of concern is the elderly and Keene Senior Center, whose experiences with safety would be important to consider.

Ms. DelaCroix said that if we are relying on enforcement, then we have already lost. There are many practices, for example, like narrowing intersections or sharpening corners, which slow traffic and force drivers to acknowledge that they are entering an unusual space. Mr. Lussier added that such engineering solutions would deter 85% of drivers, but there would always be the 15% who do not follow rules. Still, Mr. Johnson mentioned that crossing Main Street to/from KSC is much safer now than 10 years ago, when there were no flashing lights at the crosswalk. Ms. DelaCroix also encouraged a focus on newer forms of transportation, like electric bikes.

Chair Mack added that community youths are important stakeholders. He works with a non-profit that developed a youth transportation service. For example, there are dangers for kids riding scooters down West Street in the dark during winter. He thought youths were often overlooked as people who cannot generally afford or drive a car. When talking about Safe Routes to School, he mentioned the 5 Es: education, encouragement, enforcement, evaluation, and engineering. He wondered if these factors would be important in creating the RSAP or if the Plan would be more focused on infrastructure. Mr. Tang said they would absolutely be important. Such an effort involving the youths of Keene could be a good demonstration/pilot

project. Mr. Tang added that the RSAP will ultimately reflect the safe systems approach, which focuses on 5 elements: safe road users, safe vehicles, safe speeds, safe roads, and post-crash care.

9) Next Steps

The next steps include:

- Schedule stakeholder meetings
- Distribute the public survey to community members
- Data analysis results
- Set goals and targets
- Set strategies and countermeasures
- Develop the project website

This Committee will have 6 meetings, intended to each be 1.5 hours. The next meeting is Monday, February 26.

10) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Mack adjourned the meeting at 5:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker
January 29, 2024

Reviewed and edited by,
Donald R. Lussier, P.E., City Engineer

Adopted on February 26, 2024 on a roll-call vote with 8 members in favor and Debbie Bowie abstaining and Ockle Johnson absent.