

FINAL

**LEBANON CITY COUNCIL
WORK SESSION MINUTES
Tuesday, April 22, 2025, 5:30PM
Council Chambers
Remote Via Microsoft Teams: LebanonNH.gov/Live**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Douglas Whittlesey, Assistant Mayor Devin Wilkie, Erling Heistad, Nicole Ford Burley, Laurel Stavis, Christian Simon, George Sykes, and Karen Zook

MEMBERS ABSENT: Timothy McNamara

STAFF PRESENT: City Manager Shaun Mulholland, Deputy City Manager David Brooks, Interim City Manager Jack Wozmak, Public Works Director Jay Cairelli, Lebanon Deputy Police Chief Alan Lowe, Finance Director Vicki Lee, Deputy Finance Director Alesia Williams

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1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Mayor Whittlesey called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.
 - City Manager Mulholland reviewed the meeting criteria for attendees.
 - No comments from the public took place during this meeting but they can email their Councilors. The purpose of this meeting is to review the draft with the Council and make any changes they would like to see. Approval of the Draft Strategic Plan is set to take place on May 14, 2025.
 2. **Annual Work Session:**
Presentation of Draft Strategic Plan Objectives
 - City of Lebanon DRAFT Strategic Plan in its entirety is available at LebanonNH.gov/StrategicPlanBoard
 - Strategic Plan information is available at LebanonNH.gov/StrategicPlan

The Strategic Plan was presented to the Council in two forms: 1) As presented in the Council's agenda packet, and 2) A Replit form, which is an online/active form that can be used to make changes from the Miro board to the Replit software Strategic Plan Objectives as suggested by the Council. This can be done by going into the overall Strategic Plan/individual area/the individual initiatives and KPIs underneath each initiative. There is a link on the City Website under Strategic Planning.

Deputy City Manager Brooks noted this is the first of two work sessions for the Strategic Plan for 2026 through 2029. The Strategic Plan details the Council's goals and priorities and complements the City's long-range Master Plan by concentrating on operational aspects of the City Governance and specific objectives and actions beyond the Master Plan scope. More importantly, the Strategic Plan informs the City's budgeting process by ensuring the financial resources are allocated in alignment with the City's Strategic Objectives. After the Council adopts the updated Strategic Plan, the City Manager will issue guidance to City departments about preparing their operational budgets for the 2026 fiscal year. The Strategic Plan covers a three (3) year period. There have been a number of public engagement and listening sessions since January/February (2025) and some of the comments and recommendations that

have been received through those sessions have been brought to the Councils attention at recent Council meetings.

- **High Performing Government** (NOTE: The Strategic Plan Objectives can be found on pages 3-12, Council agenda packet)

Deliver a responsive and effective city government that prioritizes transparency, ethical conduct, efficient services, and community engagement while fostering continuous improvement, teamwork, innovation, and partnerships to meet resident needs and enhance the quality of life.

Deputy City Manager Brooks reviewed the materials from the Council's agenda packet and City Manager Mulholland displayed the live Replit pages, which is more up-to-date than what was in the packet.

Vision Statement

The city government has to be responsive to the needs of its residents, businesses and partners. The delivery and/or the facilitation of the delivery of services is one of the cornerstones of effective local government. A responsive and effective city government does the following:

- Transparency- the decision making processes must be open and as accessible as possible to allow the public to participate. Government records need to be available, easily accessible and in a timely manner.
- Ethics- City officials and staff meet public expectations of very high ethical standards while representing the City. Ethical expectations directly relate to the credibility of the City and view that people have of it. City officials comply with statutory and regulatory requirements.
- Problem Solving- the expectation is that the City government is an organization that functions to identify and develop solutions to address problems and the needs of the community. Data driven decision making is operationalized when and where appropriate.
- Teamwork- highly effective organizations are those that can bring together the players to achieve the mission. Our team consists of elected officials, appointed officials, staff, volunteers, service providers and our partners who work together to drive and achieve success.
- Communication- an effective City government utilizes multiple modes of communication to inform residents including emergency messaging, how to information, education materials, opportunities and the activities of the organization. This must be timely, accurate, accessible and sufficient to keep the public informed.
- Engagement- the City takes proactive steps to engage the general public and key stakeholders in the development of public policy.
- Efficiency- the City utilizes management practices and process review procedures such as LEAN to reduce wasted time and money while at the same time enhancing the quality of city services. City officials and staff operate in a culture of continuous quality improvement.
- Technology- the City utilizes technology to enhance the quality, accessibility, timeliness and efficiency of City services.
- Innovation- the City uses or develops innovative approaches to problem-solving and service delivery.
- Human Capital (Newly added)- the quality, skill base, experience and emotional intelligence of

City officials is of very high quality. The City invests in training and staff development constantly enhancing the effectiveness of City staff. The City is “growing” leaders from within its ranks to perform higher level and leadership roles in the organization. The retention of qualified personnel is a key objective for City leaders.

- Partnership (**Newly added**)- City leaders value the importance of partnerships with other municipalities, the school district, the housing authority and the other levels of government. Working with the business community, non-profit entities and neighborhood groups is highly valued in solving problems and providing services to the community.
- Leadership (**Newly added**)- the City values and understands its leadership role in the Upper Valley and the State of New Hampshire from a political, economic and social perspective. It actively advocates and exercises that leadership role in service to the people of the City and the Upper Valley.

The Strategic Objectives for this item are mostly the same as the prior year and Mr. Brooks highlighted and explained what was new or updated as listed below:

Action 1.1.2 (page 3, Council agenda packet): **Added** and relates to the Open Gov. permitting and licensing software system.

Chief Innovation & AI Officer Melanie McDonough has done a major amount of work with the OpenGov permitting system across multiple departments. She and Beth Beraldi have done a lot to get the City Manager’s permits online. Vender permits and the 79-E forms are the latest that have been updated. Ms. McDonough has worked closely with Planning on their permitting processes and all the different aspects of the building applications are now available through the OpenGov system. The DPW permits are being worked on and should be done by the end of this year.

Action 1.3.8: (page 7, Council agenda packet): **Added.** Conduct initial assessment regarding feasibility of achieving accreditation status. Assistant Mayor Wilkie was concerned about the word “feasibility” and asked if the word “viability” or “value” or some other word could be used to ensure that there is an actual benefit to achieving accreditation. City Manager Mullholland explained the reason why feasibility is used, noting this has to be completed first and explained his reasoning. For clarification, Councilor Simon noted it would be helpful to see where accreditation has had a tangible benefit as opposed to just accreditation.

Council/Staff Discussions:

In response to Mayor Whittlesey’s question regarding the plan, from a budget prospective, for 2026, Mr. Brooks noted that to the extent this information will be reflected on and acted on in 2026 should remain in the Strategic Plan. We can certainly make sure to add things that will be reflective of the actions that we want to take beginning in 2026 for budgetary purposes, etc. City Manager Mulholland noted what this does is show the expenditures already made and that we are achieving those objectives. It also shows whether the objectives and KPI’s are in progress, completed, or are stalled. In order to achieve the transparency, the initiatives show what the City will actually be able to do, not the what the City would like to do.

City Manager Mulholland explained the use of AI (Artificial Intelligence) and ChatGPT, noting these are tools the City can use to simplify complex internal data processes.

Suggested Changes to the High Performing Government Section:

Add new subsection 1.2.4: Add a clarifier to state a new “internal” process in the budget that includes time and cost. Mayor Whittlesey wanted to avoid some of the potential complications that have occurred

in neighboring cities/towns when onboarding a new manager after a long-term manager has moved on and suggested this needs to be reflected in the budget.

Vision Statement: Mayor Whittlesey requested adding after the phrase “The city government has to be responsive to the needs of its residents, businesses and partners” add “while also adapting to change in local conditions” and explained his reasons why the City needs to be flexible to act quickly. City Mulholland suggested adding “in a changing environment” instead.

Councilor Stavis requested incorporating “in a changing environment” at the end of the Leadership as well.

Under Ethics: Add “volunteers” between City officials and staff.

Under Partnership: At the end of the 1st sentence add: “to address the needs of the City and its residence.”

Deputy City Manager Brooks noted that any changes should be emailed to him.

- **Housing and Neighborhoods** (NOTE: The Strategic Plan Objectives can be found on pages 13-20, Council agenda packet)

This theme focuses on improving the quality of housing and neighborhoods in our community.

Deputy City Manager Brooks reviewed the Vision Statement and the Strategic Plan Objectives for Housing and Neighborhoods.

Vision Statement

The City of Lebanon shall actively foster a diverse range of housing opportunities and choices for current and prospective residents, and will strive to promote the development of diverse, sustainable neighborhoods that reflect Lebanon’s “small-town” character and distinctiveness. The City of Lebanon shall encourage a range of housing options for all segments of the population. New housing development should contribute positively to existing neighborhoods and create safe and desirable new neighborhoods consistent with the other planning goals of the City as expressed in this Master Plan. An inclusive community has a range of housing types to meet the needs of a diverse population. Those housing types include:

- Single Family
- Multi-Family (spanning duplexes to large apartment buildings)
- Elderly Housing
- Accessory Dwelling Units
- Manufactured Housing
- Temporary Housing - Homeless Shelters and Transitional Housing Units

The housing inventory of the City must include a mix to meet the affordability needs of its residents such that no more than 30% of combined household income is committed to housing. That mix of housing affordability includes:

- Market Rate Housing
- Workforce Housing
- Low Income Housing

Chapter 7 of the City’s Master Plan is incorporated into this Strategic Plan. Access to safe shelter is a

basic necessity for all people, the absence of which can result in severe health, social, and economic harm to both individuals and communities. The City of Lebanon shall seek to support its residents who have been afflicted by homelessness by establishing and facilitating the means by which the people of the City can prevent or overcome homelessness. The goal of the City is to ensure all residents have access to permanent, secure housing, and temporary housing is for many people a necessary step towards permanent housing and therefore a component of this goal.

Newly Added to this section:

Action 2.2.6: a. Housing Chapter Master Plan update beginning in late summer and fall 2024 and any required zoning changes to facilitate development of homeless shelters and services

Suggested Changes to Housing and neighborhoods:

Action 2.1.4: Add “benefits”

Action 2.6.2: Mayor Whittlesey requested a separate KPI specific to what the City is trying to accomplish for the next steps on Barrows Street, noting the end goal is to sell the properties so that there is a zero cost to the City. Mr. Brooks noted that the City has spent zero dollars on this project to date for the planning, design and permitting. This is all from grant funds from the Investment NH Program.

Council/Staff Discussions:

Assistant Mayor Wilkie spoke about Action 2.2.3 and wondered if this is duplicative of 2.4.1. He also shared a question from Councilor McNamara asking if it would make sense to mention the “missing middle” in the Vision Statement. City Manager Mulholland noted there is not a definitive definition for the “missing middle,” noting he has heard different versions of what people think that is (i.e., single family; multiple family; elderly housing; separate dwelling units; manufactured housing; temporary housing; market-rate housing; workforce housing; and, low income housing). This needs to be defined. Mr. Brooks felt this definition was for duplexes, triplexes, etc., things that are single family in scale but had multiple units in them. Councilor Stavis felt that increasing the variety of available housing takes care of what is called “the missing middle.”

- **Financial Stability and Efficiency** (NOTE: [The Strategic Plan Objectives can be found on pages 21-25, Council agenda packet](#))

Diversify revenue streams to reduce reliance on property taxes for general government operations. Ensure user fees reflect the actual cost of services and use fund balances strategically to minimize rate fluctuations.

City Manager Mulholland reviewed the Vision Statement and explained the Strategic Plan Objectives for Financial Stability and Efficiency, noting there were not a lot of changes in this section. The City is in compliance with its Debt Management Plan.

Vision Statement

The City strives to diversify its revenue streams to reduce the reliance upon the property tax as the primary source of revenue for general government operations. User fees have a direct relationship to the services provided and are commensurate with the actual cost of the services provided. The use of Unassigned Fund Balances in the General Fund as well as the enterprise funds is a strategy to minimize tax and fee rate spikes. The Unassigned Fund Balance in the General Fund is healthy when it:

- is within a range of 15% to 19% of the current General Fund expenditure budget;
- provides a cash reserve to address emergencies;
- provides sufficient cash flow between semi-annual tax billings.

Financial planning is based on a long-term strategy to mitigate tax and user fee rate increases. When possible, planning for capital projects in the six-year Capital Improvements Plan allows a more even spread of debt service payments. The City's debt load is maintained within the statutory requirements and the City Council's Debt Management policy for all funds. The City utilizes federal, state, and private grant funding to offset the cost of capital and operating expenses. Additionally, the City advocates in partnership with other municipalities and the New Hampshire Municipal Association for more state funding to offset the impact to local property taxes. The City takes active steps to transition education funding from the statewide and local property tax to a more equitable cost share with other revenue sources.

Council/Staff Discussions:

Mayor Whittlesey would like to see a new KPI Section, similar to the Fiscal Policy, that addresses an enhanced explanation regarding communications around the City's budget and what it covers (i.e., the cost of staff time, etc.)

Assistant Mayor Wilkie proposed an addition to Objective 3.2 ([page 22, Council agenda packet](#)), similar to the Fiscal Policy, another area that covers user fees, including a full user fee review in 3rd Quarter of each year.

- **Social Health & Justice** (NOTE: [The Strategic Plan Objectives can be found on pages 26-32, Council agenda packet](#))

Promote social equity and community wellbeing.

Deputy City Manager Brooks reviewed the Vision Statement and the Strategic Plan Objectives for Social Health & Justice, which is also being worked on by the DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion) Commission. If funds cannot be found to cover this item, then the work will be done in-house.

Vision Statement

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such that no more than 30% of combined household income is committed to housing. That mix of housing affordability includes:

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Chapter 7 of the City's Master Plan is incorporated into this Strategic Plan, access to safe shelter is a basic necessity for all people, the absence of which can result in severe health, social, and economic harms to both individuals and communities. The City of Lebanon shall seek to support its residents who have been afflicted by homelessness by establishing and facilitating the means by which the people of the City can prevent or overcome homelessness. The goal of the City is to ensure all residents have access to permanent, secure housing, and temporary housing is for many people a necessary step towards permanent housing and therefore a component of this goal.

Council/Staff Discussions:

City Manager Mulholland noted that under Action 9.3.3: Update procurement policies (page 28, Council agenda packet), the City may not be able to have those policies and will have to look at these very carefully to see what we can/cannot do, it all depends on what the final language is from the State/Federal governments.

Assistant Mayor Wilkie requested the Strategic Plan be reviewed to remove non-essential mobility language in job descriptions because he felt this puts barriers to applicants where it is not necessary. City Manager Mulholland noted this is already in the Strategic Plan because all of those require ADA compliance. Reasonable accommodations need to be made for anyone applying for those jobs. Mayor Whittlesey would like to see any psychology/actual barriers be removed from applications because the City may discourage a well-qualified candidate from applying for a position unintentionally.

- **Recreation, Arts & Parks** (NOTE: [The Strategic Plan Objectives can be found on page 33-45, Council agenda packet](#))

Enhance community recreation facilities and programs while promoting arts and cultural activities.

Deputy City Manager Brooks reviewed the Vision Statement and the Strategic Plan Objectives for the Recreation, Arts, & Parks Department.

Vision Statement

Recreation: The City has a wide array of recreational opportunities available to its residents. Some programs are operated by the City while others are provided by not-for-profit entities and for-profit entities. A robust range of recreational opportunities has a positive impact on the physical and emotional health of our residents. The City's vision for Recreation is further outlined in Chapter 10: Recreation of the Master Plan.

Arts, Culture, and the Humanities: The City celebrates the arts, culture and the humanities in its various modalities. The City's recently created Arts and Culture Commission is the primary City body to advocate and advance the arts in the community. The City supports a vibrant partnership with a growing arts community to enhance opportunities for equitable participation and inclusion. The City continues to enhance opportunities for displays of art in public places to create a livelier living environment. The City's vision is further outlined in Chapter 12: Community Design and Civic Art of the Master Plan.

Parks: The City maintains parks in various parts of the City to enhance neighborhood environments and provide outdoor spaces for its residents to enjoy the outdoor world. Everything from athletic fields, the Storrs Hill Ski Area, the Mascoma River Greenway, the Northern Rail Trail and various nature trails and conservation areas provide a variety of opportunities to exercise and enjoy nature.

Libraries: Our vision is to be the hub of the community, a place where individuals of all ages and backgrounds can find the resources, technology, and support they need to achieve their goals and realize their full potential. We strive to create a dynamic and innovative library system that reflects the diverse needs and interests of our community and empowers everyone to lead fulfilling and meaningful lives.

Newly Added to this section:

Action 4.2.9: Review and Update the Community Facilities and Services Chapter of the Master Plan (pages 39, Council agenda packet).

Council/Staff Discussions:

City Manager Mulholland spoke about the City’s cemeteries, noting we are falling behind and explained the history of the Cemetery Board of Trustees. We have cut the funding for cemeteries because there are insufficient resources to keep them in the condition that most people would like them to be.

Suggested Changes to this section:

Action 4.4.2: Councilor Ford Burley suggested keeping this item but rephrasing it because the Heritage Commission has applied for a grant to do rehabilitation on the building and are currently putting out a request for proposals.

Action 4.2.5: Mayor Whittlesey suggested not including this item in the Strategic Plan at this point.

Assistant Mayor Wilkie suggested adding the phrase: “explore future possibilities for Westboro Park and Trails” because we do not want it to fall completely off the City’s radar until we can consider what the future of that space would look like. He also suggested asking the West Lebanon Revitalization Advisory Committee to explore and propose alternative plans for that space (i.e., what is the task/alternative proposals; time by which they could get this done).

Councilor Simon suggested adding a statement that says: “If and until a no-risk/no cost option is brought forward, there will be no effort brought forth by the City to acquire the property.”

Conclusion: City Manager Mulholland will write proposed language for this item before May 14, 2025 or will suggest complete removal of this item.

Action 4.2.1: Mayor Whittlesey suggested adding a KPI for Food Trucks that includes fees, functions, a policy, pool parking lot, etc.).

3. ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 7:24 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Dona E. Gibson
Recording Secretary