

FINAL

**LEBANON CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, December 18, 2025, 6:00 p.m.
Council Chambers**

Remote Via Microsoft Teams: LebanonNH.gov/Live

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Douglas Whittlesey, Assistant Mayor Devin Wilkie, Erling Nicole Ford Burley, Timothy McNamara, Laurel Stavis, Christian Simon, George Sykes

MEMBERS ABSENT: Councilors Heistad and Zook

STAFF PRESENT: City Manager Andrew Hosmer, Deputy City Manager David Brooks, Finance Director Alesia Williams, Deputy Finance Director Victoria Paquin

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Mayor Whittlesey called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
 - City Manager Andrew Hosmer announced the meeting criteria for attendees.

2. PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS:

A. Citizens Binding Initiative Petition to Establish a Finance Advisory Committee – Public Hearing for the purpose of receiving public input and taking action on a Citizens Binding Initiative Petition seeking to amend City Code Chapter 31, Boards, Committees and Commissions, to establish a Finance Advisory Committee.

Included in the agenda packet: [\(All supportive documents and information, as listed below, can be found on pages 2-11, Council agenda packet\)](#)

1. Final Language of Citizens Binding Initiative Petition question and brief explanation
2. November 25, 2025 City Clerk Certification of Petition Sufficiency
3. Proposed Ordinance #2025-15
4. City Charter Section 7.01 - Citizen Binding Initiative
5. City Code Chapter 89 - Initiative Petitions

Deputy City Manager Brooks reviewed the background behind establishing a proposed Finance Advisory Committee.

BACKGROUND

On October 2, 2025, the City received a Citizens Binding Initiative Petition in accordance with Section 7.01 of the City Charter from the Petition Committee Chairperson. The Citizens Binding Initiative Petition seeks to amend City Code Chapter 31, Boards, Committees and Commissions, to establish a Finance Advisory Committee.

On November 25, 2025, in accordance with City Code §89-8.A, the City Clerk verified that the requisite number of signatures of registered voters had been obtained on the petition and certified the petition as sufficient to comply with the provisions of City Charter §7.01. Pursuant to City Code §89-10.A, the Clerk's certification was presented to the City Council on December 3rd, at which meeting the Council scheduled the current public hearing.

If, following the public hearing, the City Council decides to pass the Citizens Binding Initiative Petition without alteration, such action will have the effect of adopting Ordinance #2025-15, as proposed and included in this agenda packet.

If, following the public hearing, the City Council decides not to pass the Citizens Binding Initiative Petition as presented, or takes no action whatsoever, then the City Council shall cause the original, certified Citizens Binding Initiative Petition question and the brief explanation or synopsis to be placed on the ballot at the next municipal election on March 10, 2026 [§89-11].

Mayor Whittlesey clarified the Council looked into this because there was a disconnect between our City Ordinance around this and the City Charter. The City Code allows for non-substantial changes but does not define what substantial is. Per the Charter, it has to be without any alteration and any alteration to it pushes to a vote on the ballot.

Mayor Whittlesey also noted he thought there were a couple of things that would need to be amended after the vote. They were generally insubstantial and generally the petitioner's committee was in agreement. 1) The language around membership needs to be revised because the appointments for citizen representatives would be by Council to say that they would be appointed by the Mayor for 1-year terms. 2) A cleanup around adding language around alternates. We would want to add two (2) citizen alternates.

Councilor McNamara questioned if what was in the packet would go on the ballot. Deputy City Manager Brooks noted that modifications cannot be made until the language takes effect. As proposed by the Petition Committee, it would be effective sometime after July 1, 2026 and the Council would be able to amend this section further.

Assistant Mayor Wilkie wanted to make sure that everybody has a similar understanding for 3164.a: Four (4) citizen members and three (3) City Council representatives shall serve staggered two year- terms meaning that two (2) citizen members would be appointed for 1-year terms, and the other two would be appointed for two (2) year terms and further inferred how this would work.

Mayor Whittlesey opened the Public Hearing. And the following came forth to give their comments:

- **Ralph Akins (Ward-2):** He spoke about his reasons why he felt the Council should adopt the Citizens Binding Initiative Petition to Establish a Finance Advisory Committee tonight so planning projects can be started.
- **Joan Townsend (Ward-2):** She spoke about her reasons why she felt the Council should adopt the Citizens Binding Initiative Petition to Establish a Finance Advisory Committee, so we can work as a team to move Lebanon forward in a positive way.
- **Rebecca Kattamis (Ward-2):** She spoke about her reasons why she felt the Citizens Binding Initiative Petition to Establish a Finance Advisory Committee should be adopted and urged the Council's full support.

Hearing no further comments from the public, the Public Hearing was closed.

Council/Staff Comments:

The Council held discussions on why adopting the Citizens Binding Initiative Petition to Establish a Finance Advisory Committee is a good idea; whether or not this Citizens Binding Initiative Petition should go before the voters or be adopted by the Council tonight; concerns about adding more

bureaucracy to the City's government, especially if constrained by the government process; taking advantage of the opportunity to improve what the City is doing; how, when we hear something from the public that they feel strongly about, and that we also agree with, it makes sense to adopt this petition without sending this to the public; how some residents have urged the Council not to pass this petition; concerns about membership appointments and the need for representation from across all areas of the City; how the membership appointment process worked for the DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) Committee when it first started up; the process for interviewing candidates for membership appointments to Boards, Committees, and Commissions; and whether or not the Citizens Binding Initiative Petition Committee would attend the City's Budget Workshops as part of the Council's regular process..

Councilor Stavis wanted to make it clear what the RSA says and to keep this in mind when establishing the Citizens Binding Initiative Petition for the Finance Advisory Committee. She read the following to the Council: "Such duties and powers as a municipality or SAU that sees fit: That no such Committee's recommendation shall have any limiting effect on appropriations." She wanted to make sure that "as it sees fit" factors into the process going forward.

The Council continued discussions regarding staff costs, time, commitments; how it might be better for the Citizens Binding Initiative Petition Advisory Committee to have their own meetings; how there should be a pathway on how to do this without having to run two parallel budget processes; how membership should involve people with experience in budgeting, financing and accounting, etc.; what would be the best way to collect/brainstorm input ideas to make sure that those questions (for potential candidates) are formulated so that all the information people need is collected.

Mayor Whittlesey noted that after July 21, 2026 (expected start date for the Citizens Binding Initiative Petition Advisory Committee), his recommendation would be that at their first meeting they can establish the membership selection process, set meetings dates, develop their agendas, etc. He suggested mimicking some of the other Board/Committee/Commission membership questions and then defining further what this committee would be looking for and further explained his reasoning. Once the Citizens Binding Initiative Petition Advisory Committee have formulated their ideas they can bring them back to a Council meeting in February for the Council's review.

Councilor Simon would also like the Council to sample some of the Petitioners' ideas as they may have additional questions that may be important to the work they will be doing.

Mayor Whittlesey spoke about his reasons why he felt this item should be accepted tonight as is and not sent to the voters. He did not think the regular City Council meetings were the right venue for The Citizens Binding Initiative Petition Advisory Committee. He felt the best approach could be through the Governance Committee. It would still be done in an open session. Having a formal structure in a committee just makes sense. Probably, the first few months, a lot of stuff may be wrong, but we can learn and adjust. There is a lot of flexibility for us to really make what we in the City need.

ACTION:

Councilor McNamara MOVED, that the Lebanon City Council hereby passes, without alteration, the Citizens Binding Initiative Petition seeking to amend City Code Chapter 31, Boards, Committees and Commission, to establish a Finance Advisory Committee, as reflected in proposed Ordinance #2025-15,

as presented in the December 18, 2025 City Council Agenda Packet. The Ordinance shall become effective as of July 1, 2026.

Seconded by Simon.

***The Vote on the Motion was approved (9-0).**

3. NEW BUSINESS

- A.** Discussion and Set Public Hearing for January 7, 2026: Consideration of City Clerk's Certification
of Petition Sufficiency for NH RSA 49-B:5 Petitioned Amendment to City Charter to Establish a
Tax Cap.

Included in the agenda packet: [\(All supportive documents and information, as listed below, can be found on pages 12-18, Council agenda packet\)](#)

1. Final Language of Petitioners' Committee's Question Seeking to Amend the City Charter
2. December 4, 2025 Response from NH Attorney General, on behalf of the state agencies
3. NH RSA 49-B:5, Charter Amendments, Procedure

Deputy City Manager Brooks reviewed the background for the above.

BACKGROUND

On October 27, 2025, the City Clerk received an affidavit pursuant to RSA 49-B:5, II-a, (a), from a group of Lebanon voters seeking to form a Petitioners' Committee for the purpose of pursuing an amendment to the City Charter. The Petitioners' Committee seeks to amend the Lebanon City Charter, Article VI, Financial Management, §6.05, Budget Procedure, to impose a limit on annual budget increases in the amount to be raised by taxes in the City.

To advance the process, the Petitioners' Committee have already gathered (RSA 49-B:5, II.) and validated/certified voter signatures equal in number to 15 percent of the number of ballots cast at the City's last regular municipal election. (RSA 49-B:5, IV). The Council had 10 days to issue notice of a public hearing on the amendment (RSA 49-B:5, V(a)). No substantive changes may be made to the proposed amendment at the public hearing. Finally, within 7 days after the public hearing, the council must order the proposed amendment to be placed on the ballot at the next regular municipal election that occurs not less than 60 days after the date of the Council's order.

With the next municipal election scheduled for March 10, 2026, the foregoing process must be completed by no later than January 8, 2026, or else the proposed charter amendment cannot be placed on a ballot until the 2027 municipal election.

The City Council's January 7, 2026 meeting is the last regular meeting date to complete the process at least 60 days prior to the March 10, 2026 municipal election. As a result, it is suggested that the City Council schedule and notice a public hearing for January 7, 2026, with the caveat that the required number of voter signatures must yet be collected and submitted in time to allow the City Clerk to validate the signatures and issue a certificate of petition sufficiency prior to the public hearing. The City Clerk has offered to attempt in good faith to certify the petition by January 6th if the petition forms are returned by December 29th. However, if the signatures are not obtained and filed more than 20 days prior to the public hearing, and if, as a result, the City Clerk is unable to certify the petition as sufficient prior to the public hearing, then the public hearing would be cancelled or continued to a later date and the proposed charter amendment would not be eligible for placement on the ballot for the March 2026 municipal election.

ACTION:

Councilor Simon MOVED, that the Lebanon City Council hereby schedules a public hearing for Wednesday, January 7, 2026, beginning at 7:00pm in Council Chambers, City Hall, and Remote via the City’s Virtual Platform, for the purpose of receiving public input on a petitioned amendment to the Lebanon City Charter, Article VI, Financial Management, §6.05, Budget Procedure, to impose a limit on annual budget increases in the amount to be raised by taxes in the City, and taking action to order the petitioned amendment to be placed on the ballot at the next regular municipal election to be held on March 10, 2026.

Seconded by Councilor McNamara.

****The Vote on the Motion was approved (7-0)***

4. ADJOURNMENT:

Councilor N. Ford Burley MOVED for adjournment.

Seconded by Assistant Mayor Wilkie.

****The Vote on the MOTION was unanimously approved (7-0)***

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Dona E. Gibson
Recording Secretary