



# CITY OF CONCORD

## REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Thomas J. Aspell, Jr., City Manager

**DATE:** October 21, 2024

**SUBJECT:** 2024 – 2025 City Council Priorities

### **Recommendation**

Accept this report as to the current status of the City Council Priorities established on March 4, 2024.

### **Background**

Members of the City Council met on March 4, 2024 to discuss and set priorities for the remainder of Calendar Year 2024, as well as for Calendar Year 2025.

### **Discussion**

Listed below, are the accepted priorities, projects and ongoing initiatives; and their respective statuses as of September 30, 2024.

#### **GOAL 1. FINANCE & TECHNOLOGY**

##### **a) Balance the Budget Minimizing the Tax Rate Impact**

**Status:** For FY 2025, the City used \$560,760 to balance the budget. The FY 2024 Audit has not taken place yet and the new FY 2024 Unassigned Fund Balance percentage is not calculated. As of June 2023, the City's Unassigned Fund Balance was calculated at 22.4% of expenditures. The City's Fund Balance Policy is a minimum of 18.5%.

##### **b) Maintain AA+ Bond Rating**

**Status:** In January 2024, the City was notified by S&P Global Ratings that it issued an AA+ rating for the upcoming bond issue, and affirmed the AA+ rating for the City's outstanding debt.

##### **c) Maintain Compliance with Fiscal Policy Goals**

**Status:** The City General Fund Fiscal Goal E-1 limits debt service to 10-14% of total appropriations. On June 30, 2023, the amount was 9.4%. This will be updated upon completion of the FY 2024 Audit.

**d) Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Implementation**

**Status:** Implementation of all main modules was complete as of the start of FY 2024.

**e) Assessing Full Measure and List and Revaluation**

**Status:** The City's Full Measure and List and Revaluation process began in July 2024 and is expected to be completed in August 2026.

**f) Pursue Federal and State Funding**

**Status:** Notable grants in excess of \$100,000 applied for or received to date in FY 2025 include:

1. In August 2024, the City Council authorized applying for a \$6,150,000 grant from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) as part of the Airport Terminal Program; and \$1,660,000 relative to design, mitigation and construction associated with the airport terminal project.
2. In August 2024, the City Council authorized applying for a \$605,000 grant from the State of NH / FAA relative to the development of an environmental impact assessment associated with the airport and terminal parking improvement project.
3. In August 2024, the City Council authorized applying for a \$5,058,000 grant from the FAA for the Airport Terminal Project.
4. In August 2024, the City Council accepted \$144,929.47 of Opioid Litigation Settlement Funds to be placed in reserve, retroactive to June 30, 2024.
5. In September 2024, the City Council accepted \$1,140,000 in grant proceeds from the NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs Division of Economic Development to be placed in the City's Community Improvement Reserve account for future consideration.
6. In August 2024, a CMAQ grant in the amount of \$2,447,852 was received from the NH Department of Transportation for the McKee Square Intersection Project (CIP #31).

On January 12, 2024, the Fire Department applied for \$259,062 from the NH Department of Safety, State Homeland Security Competitive Grant Program, to secure funding for a modular vehicle barrier system for the protection of crowds occupying closed roadways at public gatherings. A prospective award letter was received on August 9, 2024 from the NH Department of Safety (DHS) stating that DHS/FEMA Notice of Funding availability is expected in early fall of 2024, after which an official award document and grant agreement would be forwarded to the City of Concord.

The Fire Department has entered into a grant agreement with the NH Department of Safety, Division of Fire Standards & Training and Emergency Medical Services for the reimbursement of \$17,174.30 in overtime funds spent to train members in various Technical Rescue disciplines. Additionally, the Fire Department has received permission from City Council to enter into grant agreements for up to an additional \$100,000 of reimbursements if additional classes become available. These agreements would reimburse 100% of overtime and benefit costs for members who attend these classes, so there would be no net cost to the City.

**g) Cost Containment – Health Insurance Costs**

**Status:** The City had a 10.5% renewal rate with Harvard Pilgrim last year, following a period of time with an increase in high cost claimants. The City continues to offer a high deductible health plan with a Health Savings Account to driver consumerism, and have piloted an enhanced Reduce My Cost program to encourage employees to pursue lower cost providers for ancillary services like CT scans, MRI's, and lab work. The program pays a percentage of savings directly to the employee for choosing the low-cost provider. The City, along with its benefit consultant, Borislow, continually looks at ways in which to contain costs on health insurance. Quarter One's claims analysis looks promising for a single digit renewal for FY 2026.

**h) Technology Infrastructure Improvements**

**Status:** The Information Technology Department has completed the replacement of the wired networking infrastructure. Cybersecurity efforts funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to improve security around the water and wastewater systems (to be completed mid-2025) are continuing on schedule. We will soon begin upgrading all Windows workstation operating systems from Windows 10 to Windows 11. This upgrade must be completed by October 2025, which is Microsoft's end-of-support date.

New infrastructure projects to begin this year include replacement of half of the City's wireless networking infrastructure; expansion of fiber network to the new Penacook Library & Activity Center, the new Police Station, and, potentially, the new terminal building at the Airport; and replacement of Human Services software.

The Fire Department completed installation of an Uninterruptable Power Supply (UPS) to support the incorporation of the Fire Training Facility as a secondary Emergency Operations Center (EOC). This reliable UPS enhances the overall resilience of the training grounds as an alternate EOC, ensuring preparedness for a variety of disaster scenarios. In addition to the installation of a UPS, a fully functional telephone system that mirrors the emergency Communications Center phones was installed at the Fire Training Facility. This will ensure a fully functional backup location to continue communications operations in the event of an evacuation of the primary center. The Fire Communications Center also transitioned to a new, more reliable internet service provider that will ensure reliable connectivity to its cloud-based Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system.

The Fire Department continues to work with businesses, non-profit organizations, and government agencies in the city to transition them from the wired master box fire alarm system to a wireless mesh network radio box system. The wired infrastructure was scheduled to be decommissioned in July of 2024. To date, approximately 63% of the existing systems have been transitioned. In July 2024, the non-ordinance fee for account holders failing to transition from a Master Box to a Radio Box increased from \$445 to \$890 annually.

## GOAL 2. ORGANIZATIONAL

### a) Recruitment and Retention

**Status:** The Retention and Recruitment Committee has now made way for five of the City's six labor unions to negotiate either out of date or soon to be out of date collective bargaining agreements with an eye on retention and recruitment. The committee's recommendations were put into action with results reported below.

The earned leave bonus for CY 2024 was approved for union covered positions and has seen high usage: 350 employees received this time; 250 have used all of the awarded time; 45 have less than 8 hours to use by year end; 35 have 16 hours to use by year end; and 15 have up to 32 hours to use by year end. In the first quarter of FY 2025, the discounted rate at Beaver Meadow Golf Course was utilized by employees to play 84 rounds of golf; the non-resident Library card was utilized by 10 non-Concord resident employees; and 18 non-Concord resident employees received free family pool passes. Our employee referral bonus has paid out \$55,000 to current employees, \$6,000 of which was paid in the first quarter of FY 2025. Paid Family Medical Leave has had utilization, particularly with claims for child bonding in the first year of birth/placement. The Human Resources Department continues to look for trends in turnover by data analysis and exit interviews.

The Community Development Department has experienced quite a bit of extended vacancy periods for positions in Engineering, to include Civil Engineer, Project Manager (one of two positions vacant), Senior Engineer Technician, and the Engineering Technician II position. We have secured one of two Civil Engineer openings with the assistance of a recruiting firm with a recruiter specializing in Engineering placement. However, that recruiter is leaving the firm so we are searching for new engagement in this space. We have recently filled all open Planning positions. The Assistant City Planner – Zoning started on September 30<sup>th</sup>. The new Senior Planner has been filled, but will not start until December 9<sup>th</sup>. In Code Enforcement, the Electrical Inspector position continues to present a challenge to fill given high demand for licensed electricians in the private sector. However, a former employee has returned to the organization to fill the position on an interim, part-time basis. There are also retirements pending in key positions in this division that we must be ready to fill when the time comes. Recruitment for the Administrative Coordinator, a shared position between Community Development and Human Resources, will be initiated in October.

The Police Department continues to experience significant struggles with recruitment and retention issues. The root of the problem is the culmination of poor applicant pool numbers and the associated challenges/hazards of the work. Qualified police officers and other untrained police officer applicants are competitively recruited by most police agencies throughout the region. In calendar year 2024, the Police Department lost four (4) additional sworn police officers through the end of September. Currently, the Police Department has 13 police officer vacancies and two (2) full-time police dispatcher vacancies.

### b) Class and Compensation Study

**Status:** An RFP for a consultant to conduct a class and compensation study went out in the first quarter of CY 2024. Of the six firms that responded, Paypoint HR was selected. This consultant has performed similar studies in New Hampshire, to include

Dover, Derry, Claremont, Goffstown, and Merrimack County. Employee kick-off meetings were held in October and employees/supervisors are working on completion of their Position Vantage Point questionnaires, which are due on November 15. The project team consists of the City Manager, the Deputy City Manager – Finance, and the Director of Human Resources and Labor Relations. The project team is working with the consultant to finalize the external survey for comparisons of total compensation and will provide a project report in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of FY 2025.

**c) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice and Belonging (DEIJB)**

**Status:** The City Council DEIJB Committee will report on the status of this goal. The internal DEIJB committee has partnered with Avant Consulting, and the Leadership Team has been meeting bi-weekly to create systemic equity infrastructure, revise recruiting policies, and develop the guidelines around Employee Resource Groups.

**d) Solid Waste Contract Implementation**

**Status:** Having signed a new solid waste contract in November 2022, which transitioned curbside collection to a cart-based system and increased disposal costs, the General Services Department has been working with the Solid Waste Advisory Committee to evaluate alternate diversion programs.

**e) Community Communication**

**Status:** The City was notified on May 10, 2024 that its 2024 Hazard Mitigation Plan, which was adopted by City Council on April 8, 2024, after a two-year update process, was formally approved by FEMA. The plan, which is good for five years, will be due for another update in 2029.

**GOAL 3. HOUSING / HOMELESSNESS**

**Status:** Presently, there are 2,352 housing units in development. Of this total, 584 units were recently completed or will be completed by the end of 2024; 783 units have been approved by the Planning Board and are awaiting construction; and 985 units are currently in the development permitting process. The 2,352 housing units presently in development will increase the City's housing stock by 12.1% and the City's population by 5,409 people.

The City, using a variety of tools, has directly supported several recent and proposed housing projects. Tools employed by the City include the sale of City-owned real estate, procurement of grants supporting the development of housing projects, construction of infrastructure improvements, zoning amendments, granting of RSA 79-E Community Tax Relief Incentives, as well as gap financing through the City's Revolving Loan Program. Recent examples of housing projects directly supported by the City using the aforementioned tools include, but are not limited to: Penacook Landing / 33-35 Canal Street (54 units, affordable); Rosemary's Way / 95 Village Street (42 units, affordable); Isabella Apartments / 32 South Main Street (64 units); First Church / 177 North Main Street (30 units); 6 South State Street (8 units, affordable); as well as ROI Properties / Black Hill Road (385 units); among others.

Housing, and especially income restricted housing (a.k.a. affordable housing), is a regional issue. As of 2020, there were 2,106 income restricted (affordable) housing units within the Central New Hampshire region. (The Central New Hampshire region consists of 20

communities located within the Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission's territory.) Of this total, 1,214 units (or 58%) were located in Concord. While Concord had 58% of the region's income restricted housing, Concord's population only comprised 36% of the Central New Hampshire region (43,709 of 120,510). As such, Concord has a disproportionate share of income restricted housing for the region. Additionally, 8 of the 20 communities (or 40%) within the Central New Hampshire region had zero income restricted (affordable) units.

Between 2020 and 2026, a total of 505 income restricted (affordable) units have been, or will be, constructed in Concord. Of this total, 373 have already been built. The City was directly involved in several of these projects through several of the tools mentioned above, such as sale of City real estate, securing of grants, or assistance with financing via the City's Revolving Loan Fund Program.

**a) High Functioning, Coordinated, Quantified Approach to Homelessness**

**Status:** During the first nine months of FY 2024, the Police Department has been directly involved in responding to citizen complaints related to homelessness issues throughout the city. The Police Department has responded to complaints related to encampments, trespass issues, welfare checks, illegal dumping, and more serious criminal issues, such as a 2<sup>nd</sup> degree assault.

The Police Department is committed to working with other community stakeholders to address these problems. The Concord Police Department has forged strong relationships with those impacted by homelessness, as well as groups whose charge it is to support those in need. Officers know members of the homeless community very well and work to ensure that they are connected to services. Officers work with the Concord Coalition to End Homelessness, the Concord Homeless Resource Center, the Friendly Kitchen, the Salvation Army, the McKenna House, and the Community Action Program.

Police Department members have worked collaboratively with other organizations to address encampment cleanups throughout the city. In addition, the Police and Fire Departments participate in a subcommittee of the Public Safety Advisory Board, which is tasked with looking at homelessness specific to how it impacts the City of Concord.

**GOAL 4. TRANSPORTATION & UTILITY INFRASTRUCTURE**

**a) Fully Fund Street Paving and Sidewalk Program**

**Status:** Through the Purchasing Division, the General Services Department awarded a multi-year paving project to GMI Paving earlier this year. With the exception of a portion of Airport Road, where a new sidewalk is being designed by the City's Engineering Division, all of the FY 2024 paving has been completed. Since the contract was for a two-year period, GMI Paving is scheduled to complete approximately half of the streets included in the FY 2025 budget, as well as temporary pavement repairs on the Loudon Road bridge.

**b) McKee Square**

**Status:** Traffic studies and preliminary design concepts are underway. A community meeting to review the outcome of these efforts and receive feedback will occur in the coming months. The project is included in the State's 10-Year Plan for construction in

2025. Eighty percent (80%) of the project will be financed with State grants. On August 23, 2024, the City was notified that its application for a Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) grant in the amount of \$2,447,852 was awarded for the project.

**c) I-93 Project With or Without Bridge Deck (Including Storrs Street Ext.)**

**Status:** The I-93 Project has been included in the 2024-2025 State 10-Year Transportation Plan. Design and permitting are scheduled from 2025-2028, with construction commencing in 2029. The project is tentatively scheduled to be completed in the mid to late 2030's. Estimated project cost is approximately \$504 million. The State has agreed to relocate the State's Lincoln Line and portions of the CSX Northern Main Line to facilitate Storrs Street Extension North (CIP #18).

Work on the Bridge Park is underway. An initial public meeting was held on February 20, 2024. Development of preliminary alternatives is nearing completion, and a public meeting to present design alternatives will likely occur before the end of calendar year 2024.

**d) State Parking Garages**

**Status:** Demolition of the former NH Department of Justice Building at 33 Capitol Street has been completed. The State recently awarded a contract to PC Construction in the amount of \$17.7 million for construction of the State's new 409-space Legislative Parking Garage. Construction is scheduled to begin in October/November 2024. Once the new garage is finished, the State will demolish the existing Legislative Parking Garage located above the Storrs Street rights-of-way. Demolition will involve termination of the City's 1974 Air Rights Leased to the State for the garage.

**GOAL 5. COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**a) Interim Zoning Amendments / Initiate Master Plan Update / Concord Next 2.0**

**Status:** On July 8, 2024, the City Council adopted Ordinance #3167, which established zoning regulations for charitable gaming halls/casinos.

On August 12, 2024, the City Council approved Ordinance #3168, which modified the Zoning Ordinance. Specifically, the ordinance created a conditional use permit for obstruction of the view of the State House dome for development projects located within the Central Business Performance and Opportunity Corridor Performance Districts; created a separate conditional use permit to allow for the maximum building height to increase from 80' to 90' within the Central Business Performance District; and also modified previously existing conditional use permit provisions which allow the maximum building height to be increased from 45' to 80' within that portion of the Opportunity Corridor Zoning District located between Loudon Road, Storrs Street, Hills Avenue, and I-93. Upon passage, said ordinances were referred to the Planning Board for further review. Said ordinances were adopted, in part, to promote redevelopment of Phenix Hall and adjacent properties.

Once the Planning Division is fully staffed, the Community Development Department will initiate efforts to prepare interim amendments to the existing Zoning Ordinance to address the most significant, persistent issues therewith. Following the completion of an upcoming City Master Plan, which, subject to future City Council appropriations

would commence in FY 2026, and likely will take approximately two years to complete, more comprehensive amendments to the Zoning Ordinance will be initiated to implement the goals and objectives of said forthcoming Master Plan.

**b) Implement Economic Development Advisory Committee**

**Status:** During its March 2024 meeting, the City Council adopted Ordinance #3159, which re-established the Economic Development Advisory Committee. Appointments were confirmed by City Council on April 8, 2024. To date, the Committee has met on June 25 and September 24, 2024.

**c) Economic Development Web Site Overhaul / Digital Marketing Package**

**Status:** In April 2024, the City launched a newly revised and updated web site, which included an Economic Development page. The Economic Development page continues to be refined by staff.

**d) New Airport Terminal**

**Status:** The current terminal building was constructed in 1937, and later expanded in 1965. The building is obsolete, fully depreciated, and inadequate to support this growing general aviation airport. Additionally, the building is not compliant with modern building codes, including the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Due to these shortcomings, it has been a long-standing City goal to demolish and replace the current terminal with a new, modern facility that will support the airport for decades to come. Specifically, the goal of replacing the current terminal has been carried in various City Airport Master Plans since at least 1996.

Subject to State and Federal permitting processes, upon completion of the new terminal, the existing building would be demolished. Once demolition is completed, the property occupied by the current terminal will be used for additional hangar development at the airport.

In February 2024, the City was notified it was the recipient of a project intent to award for \$2.51 million towards the construction of a new terminal as part of the Federal Aviation Administration's FY 2024 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law – Airport Terminal Buildings Grant Program. This potential grant is a key financial component of making the long-desired project a reality in the coming years.

On March 11, 2024, the City Council approved Resolution #9622, which appropriated City, State and Federal funds to proceed with design, permitting and bidding of the new terminal building and associated parking, in anticipation of the aforementioned grant funding for construction of these improvements.

Following the approval of Resolution #9622, staff and project consultants began the process of designing the project, including presentation to the Planning Board in May 2024, and have currently completed the preliminary design phase.

As design of the new terminal and related improvements progressed in early to mid-2024, the City was informed by the FAA that the 2011 environmental assessment is insufficient for the new Terminal Project. Specifically, the 2011 environmental



assessment determined that portions of the Airport are eligible for inclusion as a historic district under the National Register of Historic Places. While the Airport is not listed on the National Register, nor is it a locally designated Historic District, the FAA has decreed that an additional environmental assessment must be completed in order for the proposed terminal building and related improvements to proceed.

The environmental assessment (EA) process can take up to 12 months to complete. It is anticipated that the updated EA will include an alternative analysis for the proposed new terminal building, demolition of the existing terminal building, as well as other projects programmed in the City's current Capital Improvement Program.

Representatives of the City, FAA, NHDOT, and Jacobs Engineering (the City's on-call airport consultant) are working on an accelerated schedule to complete the EA update. Once completed, design of the new terminal building and related improvements will resume.

It is important to note that the updated EA process may affect design details for the terminal building and related improvements. As such, findings of the updated EA, as well as any potential modifications to the terminal project resulting therefrom, will be presented to the City Council prior to resumption of design efforts.

During its August 12, 2024 meeting, the City Council approved a consent resolution which authorized the City Manager to apply for Federal and State funding in an amount up to \$605,000 for various purposes, including the completion of an updated environmental assessment for the Airport pertaining to the proposed terminal project.

The Engineering Division of the Community Development Department has received tentative notification that the FAA and NHDOT are recommending approval of the City's grant application for additional EA at the Airport. A resolution accepting and appropriating funds was submitted to City Council at its September 9, 2024 meeting and set for public hearing on October 15.

**e) Heights Sewer Project**

**Status:** The FY 2024 Budget included \$1.9 million, combined, for CIP #91 and CIP #275, to design a replacement sewer pump station and piping improvements to address sanitary sewer capacity for certain areas of the Heights. The FY 2025 Budget appropriated the sum of \$16,900,000 for CIP #91 (sewer main improvements) and \$6,250,000 for CIP #275 (sewer pump station improvements) to fund construction of the project. Design is underway. The project will be bid in late FY 2025. Construction will begin in early FY 2026. The project is currently scheduled for completion in late fall 2026.

**f) Regulatory Amendments – Review Charitable Gaming**

**Status:** During its February 12, 2024 meeting, the City Council set for public hearing on July 8, 2024, proposed zoning amendments pertaining to charitable gaming. The Planning Board held a public hearing on May 15, 2024 on the proposed ordinance. The final ordinance was adopted by City Council on July 8, 2024.

**g) Mayor's Business Visitation Program**

**Status:** The Mayor's Visitation Program was implemented in August 2024. To date, two businesses have been visited (Boyce Highlands and Grappone Mazda). The goal is to conduct one business visitation per month (on average).

**GOAL 6. ENERGY / ENVIRONMENT / SUSTAINABILITY****a) Community Power Review**

**Status:** On March 11, 2024, City Council approved Resolution #9620, adopting a Community Power Plan and authorizing the City to join the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire (CPCNH). The Draft Community Power Electric Aggregation Plan was submitted to the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) on April 15, 2024. The Community Power program launched on October 1, 2024.

**b) Complete Solar Arrays at Old Turnpike Landfill / Hall Street Wastewater Treatment Plant**

**Status:** In May 2023, the City issued an RFP for the lease of the capped landfill for a ground-mounted solar array. Kearsarge Solar, LLC, was selected for the construction of a 5 MW solar array on the landfill. The City will benefit from annual rent payments for a 20-year lease term; annual property tax payments in the form of a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT); and annual electric cost savings from group net-metering credits.

In fall 2023, Kearsarge Solar submitted their interconnection plan to Unitil and is currently awaiting final comments prior to finalizing design. City staff is working with the developer on the final terms of the PILOT agreement and group net-metering agreement.

Design is underway. Permitting will be completed this coming winter. Construction is scheduled for summer 2025.

Through the City's Purchasing Division, the General Services Department procured Kearsarge Solar to install a solar array at the Hall Street Wastewater Treatment Plant, funded through a grant received from the NH Department of Environmental Services. Construction of the array began in September 2024. The project is scheduled to be completed in November 2024.

**c) Convert Remaining Ornamental Street Lights to LED**

**Status:** A citywide street light conversion project in 2021-2022 resulted in the installation of 2,005 LED cobra head lights and 20 LED flood lights. Not included in this program were 72 ornamental lights (referred to as the "Bishop Crook" lights) located between Exit 13 and the southern limits of the Main Street Project, and between Exit 14 and the northern limits of the Main Street Project.

In January 2024, City staff worked with a lighting designer to select fixture options that are similar in design to the existing, but meet EnergyStar specifications for energy efficiency. A quote for the fixtures, including installation, was submitted in February 2024. Staff is currently researching grant opportunities.

## GOAL 7. PUBLIC SAFETY

### a) New Police Station

**Status:** On April 8, 2024, the City Council received a comprehensive staff report and presentation concerning acquisition of 4 Bouton Street for a new Police Station (CIP #643), as well as projected costs and a schedule for a new station if the City Council elected to move forward with said initiative. Following said report, the City Council unanimously voted to proceed with acquisition of 4 Bouton Street. In accordance with the City Council's directive, the City acquired 4 Bouton Street on May 24, 2024 for the sum of \$3,924,232. The FY 2025 Budget appropriated the sums of \$240,000 to weatherize and secure the building, as well as \$3,131,800 to design the new Police Station. The City intends to select a Construction Manager for the project in October. A design team for the project will be selected in January 2026.

Working with City Administration, members of the Police Department have moved forward with the property acquisition of 4 Bouton Street as the future home for the Police Department. The building has been secured and weatherized. Additionally, there are ongoing efforts to partner with a construction management (CM) company, which we anticipate having on board soon to assist us in moving forward with the selection of a design firm. We anticipate the selection process of the design team to be completed by the end of 2024.

### b) City Hall Campus Master Plan & Schematic Design

**Status:** On April 8, 2024, City Council was briefed on City Administration's proposed strategy to proceed with a City Hall Campus Master Plan, presuming relocation of the Police Station to 4 Bouton Street. The FY 2025 Budget included \$250,000 to undertake a campus master plan. A consultant for the project will be selected later this fiscal year.

### c) Fire Gear Replacement

**Status:** The order to replace every primary set of structural firefighting gear with a PFAS-free ensemble has not yet been received. It was originally expected to arrive in the fall of 2024. The manufacturer delayed the production in order to work through a durability concern that they discovered and hope to have a solution for soon.

### d) Build Out Police Department Social Worker Staffing & Funding Options

**Status:** After an exhaustive recruitment effort, on February 4, 2024, the Police Department hired a lead Police Social Worker. Over the last month and half, the new Police Social Worker has worked hard to establish her role within the Department and has done a great job at reviewing calls for service and identifying individuals in need of service. She has networked with other key community groups to open the lines of communication to help improve services; has worked directly with homelessness issues throughout the city, and is a member of the Merrimack County Drug Court team. Soon, the Police Department will move forward with the recruitment for an Outreach Social Worker.

As of September 30, 2024, the recruitment process for an Outreach Social Worker has been promising. The job posting generated significant interest and the Police Department received 105 applications. Three (3) applicants have moved forward to the

final stages of the recruitment process. An offer of employment is anticipated to be made very soon.

e) **Community Policing**

**Status:** The Concord Police Department has continued to work very hard to foster positive engagements with the community. The Department is fortunate to have a dedicated Community Services Division; however, the entire Department is dedicated to community policing.

The Concord Police Department logged 162 self-initiated calls for service during this quarter of CY 2024 for community policing. This included engagements with several community organizations, like the Friends of Forgotten Children, the Boy Scouts of America, the Friendly Kitchen, The Concord Homeless Resource Center, the Crisis Center of Central New Hampshire, Archways, the Concord Boys & Girls Club, Community Bridges, the Community Action Program, and the Merrimack Valley County Child Abuse Advocacy Center.

With the start of the school year, police officers routinely visited schools throughout the city, including the Christa McAuliffe School, Beaver Meadow School, Concord High School, Merrimack Valley Middle and High Schools, Mill Brook School, Penacook Elementary School, St. John's School, and St. Paul's School. Additionally, D.A.R.E. Officers are preparing for their classes this school year, which will be taught throughout the city. Officers also participated in Police Readers, where officers go into the elementary schools across the city and read books to students.

The School Resource Officers are actively involved at Concord High School and Merrimack Valley High School. Currently, due to workforce shortages, there is no SRO at Merrimack Valley Middle School. The Community Services Officers stay in contact with Bishop Brady High School, Trinity Christian School, and St. John's School as well. Liberty, the Department's comfort dog, also makes frequent visits to the schools in the city. Safety assessments continue to be conducted at several of the public and private schools. Recommendations have been made to the schools to help officers in accessing the schools during threatening events.

During this quarter, police officers met with several members of the business community to discuss public safety issues, such as to identify organized retail crime at Target and Best Buy stores, as well as fraud education at several area banks. Members of the Police Department have conducted active shooter trainings, as well as safety presentations to businesses, schools, and community groups. The Department held two RAD (Rape Aggression Defense) classes. Both classes were well attended. Due to the unfortunate trend of mass shootings occurring in businesses and schools throughout the country, the Police Department has been offering CRASE (Civilian Response to Active Shooting Events) active shooter training seminars. During this quarter, the Department participated in four (4) active shooting trainings with over 150 attendees.

The Police Department hosted several community events. On August 6, 2024, the Department held its yearly National Night Out event at Rollins Park. National Night Out is an evening of local and state police officers coming together to help increase awareness of community police programs, which in turn helps build bridges between officers and those they serve to protect. This year, approximately 4,000 attendees participated in the event.

During the month of September – Food Action Month - the Police Department partnered with the NH Food Bank and sponsored several food drives. Participants were challenged to “Help Stuff a Cruiser”. Three local charities were the benefactors of the food drives. Enough food was collected to provide 3,602 meals and \$1,446 was raised. The Department also participated in two Coffee with a Cop events.

The Police Department works closely with the New American communities throughout the city in an attempt to open communication and to plan for informational events with the Department. The Department also serves on the Refugee Advisory Council (RAC), which meets monthly. The RAC helps ensure the coordination of services for refugees and immigrants, and raises awareness of issues that affect refugee and immigrant communities throughout New Hampshire.

#### **f) Fire Department Equipment Replacement**

**Status:** The Fire Department has worked with City Administration and the General Services Department to draft a tentative plan to address the upcoming challenge of balancing the 48-month lead times on new fire apparatus with the increasing call volume’s impact on an aging fleet. This plan will be presented to City Council once the details are formalized.

The Fire Department continues to wait for the arrival of several apparatus that have been ordered with FY 2023 and FY 2024 CIP funds, comprising two ambulances (one ordered on February 5, 2023 and the other ordered on July 19, 2023); a tanker (ordered on June 15, 2023); and a tower truck (ordered on August 9, 2023). The tower truck is now expected to arrive in spring/summer of 2025, and the remainder of the vehicles are expected to arrive in fall/winter of 2025.

#### **g) Continuous Improvement in Public Safety Effectiveness**

**Status:** During the first quarter of CY 2024, the Police Department has continued to make forward progress with departmental policy improvement. The Department is gearing up for State accreditation, and part of that process is meeting or exceeding gold standard policies for the profession. Accreditation ensures accountability and transparency in police operations and promotes trust and confidence within the community.

As of September 30, 2024, the Police Department continues to improve departmental policies. This work has been steady over the first three quarters of calendar year 2024, and we will continue to make progress toward our State accreditation goal.

The Fire Department continues to bolster its reporting capabilities of Fire and EMS incidents and response profiles over the past 25 years. This information will soon be used, with the assistance of the Public Safety Board, to establish service level expectations and metrics for the City in anticipation of pursuing additional staffed apparatus in the near future.

#### **h) Recruitment and Retention**

**Status:** During the first quarter of CY 2024, the Police Department has continued to lead the way in response to its significant staffing crisis. In response to massive vacancies and employee burnout, the Police Chief worked with the City Manager to

extend the vacant patrol shift overtime incentives from January 1, 2024 until February 17, 2024. This overtime pay incentive increased officer overtime engagement and worked to spread the work out among a larger pool of officers. Overall morale within the Department improved, as officers felt that the Command Staff and the City Administration recognized their extra work.

In addition, retention bonuses were paid on April 12, 2024, to further incentivize employees to resist job-hopping, as our police officers are heavily recruited. The Concord Police Department has developed an innovative staffing strategy where the retention of our employees is paramount, followed closely by new recruitment.

The Police Department has worked with its staff members and made necessary changes so that staff feels supported and valued. Through a combination of equipment upgrades, training opportunities, and compensation, the Command Staff has worked hard to stabilize the Department's staffing crisis.

During the first quarter of CY 2024, the Police Department hired three new police officers, which is the same number of officers hired during the same time period in 2023. A promising factor is that two of the three newly hired officers are individuals with prior experience. This is significant because it is the first time in several years that we have hired a certified police officer from another police department within Merrimack County. A benefit of being able to attract and hire previously certified police officers is that it shortens their training period by at least 16 weeks. This not only translates into officers being released on patrol sooner, but it also represents a savings of over \$42,000 in training costs.

The Professional Development Unit of the Police Department is actively recruiting, using both in-person and online approaches. The Department attends college job fairs, hosts internships, works with military groups, and uses referral bonuses to find quality applicants. These efforts will need to continue, as the Police Department still has 13 police officer vacancies, and eight employees who are eligible to retire. This includes the Chief of Police and the entire Command Staff.

Through September 30, 2024, the Police Department has continued to work vigorously to identify and hire qualified police officer applicants. It is important to note that our retention efforts significantly slowed our turnover rate; however, the retention period was not long enough to allow for the Department to recover. The Police Department hired six (6) new police officers in calendar year 2024, but had four (4) officers resign. Currently, the Department still has 13 police officer vacancies and interest in these positions is at a historic low. The Professional Development Unit is seeing one or two applications per week.

The Fire Department is actively recruiting and still struggling to fill multiple Firefighter/Paramedic and Firefighter/AEMT vacancies due to the ongoing staffing crisis. Efforts to recruit some individuals have failed due to expressed concerns about the contractual requirement to start new employees at Step A in the IAFF 1045 wage schedule. A growing concern has also been heard from some prospective candidates that one of the two unions (Concord Fire Officers Association – IAFF Local 3195) within the Fire Department is currently out of contract. This has created additional challenges in filling current vacancies.

## **GOAL 8. RECREATION & LEISURE**

### **a) Complete Construction of a New Canal Street Riverfront Park**

**Status:** On April 3, 2024, a ribbon cutting was held for the new park. Construction is currently underway. Substantial completion is scheduled for late fall 2024. Final punch list items will be addressed in spring 2025. The City's total budget for the project is \$3.37 million. The project is being funded by a mixture of Tax Increment Finance District supported bonds, Parking Fund supported bonds (new Canal Street Public Parking Lot), development impact fees, as well as a \$500,000 Land and Water Conservation Fund grant from the State of New Hampshire.

### **b) White Park Inclusionary Playground**

**Status:** An RFP for construction of the new playground went out in early summer 2024. The City was awarded \$400,000 in Land and Water Conservation Grant funds; received \$50,000 in donations; and appropriated \$350,000 of GO bonds for the construction. The City is in the process of awarding a contract.

### **c) Complete New Penacook Library & Activity Center (Divest of 3 Merrimack St.)**

**Status:** The project was completed in August 2024. Closing has taken longer than expected due to Boys and Girls Club related issues with calculating the final sale price for the City's condominium unit, which contains the new Penacook Library and Activity Center, as well as title issues related to a variety of public and private funding sources used by the Boys and Girls Club to develop the project. Occupancy is now projected for late October / early November 2024. In accordance with Resolution #9518, which was adopted on December 12, 2022, City Administration has initiated efforts to divest of the existing Penacook Library, located at 3 Merrimack Street, for redevelopment. Divestment shall include the requirements to preserve and adaptively reuse the existing building.

### **d) Memorial Field Design & Partnership Review**

**Status:** The City has held two public meetings to help develop a new Master Plan for the concept. At the last meeting, the residents present were in favor of a full renovation of the entire complex. City staff and the design team presented information to the Concord School Board at their October 2024 meeting and will update the City Council at their November 2024 meeting.

### **e) Keach Park Lights**

**Status:** The first public meeting was held last fall. City staff are meeting with the H.L. Turner Group on final design and permitting. City staff have reviewed the project with the Airport Advisory Committee and are in the process of reviewing with NH Fish & Game to make sure there is no impact to wildlife. A second public meeting will be scheduled as soon as all cost estimates are complete. At the second meeting, there will also be a review of facility usage, maintenance needs, and other projected operating costs/revenue of the project. After the second public meeting, there will be a presentation to the Recreation and Parks Advisory Committee, the Airport Advisory Committee, and then City Council for final review and approval.

**f) Merrimack River Greenway Trail (MRGT)**

**Status:** Construction of the 4,000' section of the trail through the city's Gully Hill Sunflower Fields has been completed, and a ribbon cutting ceremony was held on September 27, 2024. Total project budget is \$705,000. Efforts to acquire the portion of the Northern Main Railroad, between Horseshoe Pond and the Contocook River, are ongoing. Boundary surveys, real estate appraisals, and title review are underway. Once completed, a Purchase and Sales Agreement will be negotiated by the City and the NH Department of Transportation with CSX for this section of rail.

**g) Garrison Park Pool**

**Status:** The City held a community meeting with the neighbors of Garrison Park to discuss the opportunity to convert the pool to a splash pad or keep it as a pool. Everyone present wanted to keep it as a pool, as the City can offer swim lessons there and a pool can be used by all ages of the community, while a splash pad is geared towards younger children. As the Garrison Park Pool has not been open for the past four years, due to lack of lifeguards, residents present requested that the City keep Garrison Park Pool open this year, even if the City is unable to hire enough lifeguards. Each summer since COVID, the White Park, Kimball Park, Merrill Park, and Garrison Park pools have not been fully open. The Parks & Recreation Department was able to hire enough lifeguards and Water Safety Instructors to open all six pools and splash pads during the summer of 2024.

**h) Terrill Park**

**Status:** Terrill Park remains fully designed and permitted. Over the past year, City staff have renewed all required permits for the project and they are in place until 2027. Phase 1 of the park was finished and opened in October 2020. This phase included the construction of the first section of the Merrimack River Greenway Trail, moving the existing dog park and building a new parking lot to support the trail and the dog park. Phase 1 was funded by a Land and Water Conservation Fund grant, private donations, and City funds.

**i) Kiwanis Park Design**

**Status:** Funds were appropriated in the FY 2024 Capital Improvement budget for final design and permitting of the park. The City has been working with VHB, who was involved with the master planning process for the final design and permitting of the renovated park. The City is now working on a traffic study and permitting for the project.

In addition, the City has brought on a skateboard park designer, Gridline, to help design the new skateboard park. All design documents will be completed by late fall 2024 and then the Parks & Recreation Department, working with VHB, will be submitting required permits per the approved master plan.

During the winter of 2023-2024, the Department applied for a Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant in the amount of \$500,000 to help with construction costs of the new skateboard park. During the summer of 2024, the grant was deemed complete and we should find out status of the grant request by the end of December.



If awarded, Parks & Recreation Department staff will work with skateboard park committee members and the community at large to fundraise the required match of the grant award.

**j) Identify Additional East Side Greenspace**

**Status:** The Recreation & Parks Advisory Committee has discussed, at several meetings, the need for new parks and safe access to them. The City's Master Plan calls for ten acres of park land per 1,000 residents, and with 2,300+ new housing units in the approval or planning stages (including approximately 1,000 units for the Heights neighborhood in the vicinity of the former Steeplegate Mall), there is a need to work with developers and the community to identify and plan new community parks. Areas east of Keach Park and areas around Thirty Pines have been discussed.