

City Council December 2014 Forum Summary Report

On Tuesday, December 2, Keene’s Mayor and City Council convened a public forum to discuss the events of October 18, 2014 and the future of the Keene Pumpkin Festival. Approximately 250 people attended the forum, which was held on the Keene State College Campus in the L.P. Young Student Center from 6:30PM to 8:30PM. In addition to members of the public and students, the forum was attended by members of the City Council and the Keene City Manager John MacLean, Keene State College President Dr. Anne Huot, appointed members of the City/College Commission, college and city staff, State Representatives from Keene, and members of the media.

As individuals signed in, a handout was distributed to provide background information for attendees (this document is attached). Participants were asked to provide input on the future of the Pumpkin Festival in Keene by filling out a comment card. Some participants chose to speak at the microphone, where each individual was given three minutes to share their opinions. Others chose to submit only written testimony using speaker cards provided. In addition, Mayor Lane provided a 10-day comment period for others to contribute to the conversation.

The following is a summary of the comments, concerns, suggestions, and questions that were heard from both speakers and those submitting written comment before the December 12th deadline. Comments ranged in length from a few sentences to numerous pages. City staff from the Planning Department and City Clerk’s Office reviewed each comment and summarized the key ideas and unique suggestions to capture the intent of the comment. In most cases, entire sentences were included in order to allow full articulation of the contributor’s idea, and many comments fit into more than one category listed below. Many of the over 100 contributors had similar comments, so for this reason asterisks (*) were used to identify comments from multiple contributors with the same theme. For instance, when 5 commenters suggested the same idea, the comment would be followed by a (5*). Comments marked with asterisks appear at the beginning of the section, with additional comments arranged by length. All comments are available for viewing at the City Clerk’s Office at 3 Washington Street in Keene.

Abbreviations used include “KSC” for Keene State College, “PF” for Pumpkin Festival, and “COK” for City of Keene.

The comments are arranged as follows:

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1. COMMENTS REGARDING PUMPKIN FESTIVAL 2014

- PF unrelated to the rioting acts that took place (34*)
- It is not a PF problem but a KSC problem (28*)
- Enormous thanks to and support for actions of emergency personnel (27*)
- Social media/ out of City promoters played large role in riotous events (11*)
- KS Students expressing disgust and anger about PF 2014 (10*)
- More negative came out of PF 2014 than good (7*)
- City must publish the final costs from the 2014 PF and KSC / University of NH needs to step in and pickup that tab since majority of extra expense was focused on neighborhoods around KSC (5*)
- PF 2014 was the best yet (5*)
- KSC should bear the burden of initial security cost for 2014 (4*)
- We are all responsible for the events of October 18, 2014 (4*)
- Police response escalated the situation (4*)
- Living on Water St, have to pass by student housing to get downtown, during PF walking by these houses was unsafe/dangerous with young adults offering children alcohol to get in on the party
- Media inaccurately portrayed riots – out-of-staters were more aware of events than people at the PF
- Our youngest and most vulnerable community members were frightened/traumatized by the events
- We are all extremely lucky the situation did not become more serious than it was already in 2014
- Police response turned intoxicated people's anger into a unified anger towards law enforcement
- Fines should be instituted for those involved in the riot, jail time for those who cannot pay fines
- First responders used effective tactical strategies and did not let the mob control the situation
- Students arrested should be required to make public apologies and answer question- "why?"
- Punishment was disappointing, ineffective, and a weak attempt to recover KSC reputation
- I spent my PF 2014 experience guarding my property for 4.5 hours – That is unacceptable
- The cost of the helicopters and extra police presence should be charged to Let It Shine
- College, City, Police took appropriate actions when planning and responding to events
- FinnaRage – films wild parties for profit – used social media to lure people to Keene
- Organizers did their best to communicate with students and take preventative action
- Some landlords did become aware and crowd was removed from their property
- Let It Shine is responsible for promoting the event and is therefore responsible
- Young children, elderly people were a few hundred feet away from violence
- The "No Parking" signs in the Southeast neighborhoods were effective
- Left large group of people roaming the streets with no place to party
- Marlboro Street did not experience the destruction it has in the past
- More promotion of the success of containing the crowd is needed
- Outsiders did not come for the PF, came to party
- Tradition is to drink heavily, to excess, to party
- Additional cost cannot be placed on taxpayers

2. SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO MOVE FORWARD

A. RELATED TO THE FUTURE OF THE PUMPKIN FESTIVAL

- PF is no longer a fun event and should be discontinued as it has become an attractive nuisance (45*)
- I would like to see PF continue (44*)
- Classes should not be in session and the campus/dorms should be closed for PF (16*)
- Nonprofits truly rely on the event to provide numerous services throughout the region, without it, community might not be able to benefit from these services (16*)
- Moving to another location will not help, the date and event attracts “them” (14*)
- PF should continue to go on because it put Keene on the map, it’s a long-standing tradition in our community, and it’s a fun, friendly, family event (11*)
- Decision should be left up to popular vote by residents (9*)
- Take a one year hiatus (9*)
- A 3 day requirement (before, during, and after) PF any gatherings over a set # of people on a residential property should require a permit – focused on neighborhoods around campus (7*)
- This has been escalating for years - someone is going to be seriously injured if there is another PF (7*)
- Monthly meetings are needed on the subject (7*)
- I would much rather see the City take the financial support it has historically given to the PF and distribute it to non-profits in order to make up for the loss of fundraising at PF (5*)
- I’ve been coming to PF as long as they’ve been held and I want to see it continue (5*)
- Do not let the actions of a few ruin this for everyone (5*)
- Change the date, time, and/or time of day of the PF (5*)
- They didn’t cancel the Boston Marathon, or airplane transportation after 9/11, and we don’t abandon cities after hurricanes or other natural disasters – we rebuild, and rise above (4*)
- Students should not be able to have guest passes during the PF (3*)
- A hiatus will shut it down permanently (3*)
- Move PF to the Fairgrounds and don’t close downtown Keene anymore (3*)
- Move the PF to Wheelock Park (2*)
- Why not schedule KS Parent Weekend the same as PF? (2*)
- City and College need to be better prepared to handle another PF (2*)
- With all the negativity in the world today, we have to create our own positive stories to balance the negative ones. We have done that with the PF – how many communities can make that claim? The PF provides positivity and that’s a very important thing for us all
- Landlords need to be held responsible, especially on Winchester and Butler Courts – how can it be that two years in a row there are problems at particular properties and no action is taken to recover costs and punish landlords/tenants?
- To continue PF means the city willingly supports the needs of a group of downtown merchants over the safety, well-being, and quality of life of the other citizens, people who actually live here*

- KSC and COK cannot promise to keep young adults who want to be rowdy from doing so – we must recognize our inability to affect this kind of change or to enforce this sense of control over young people. These are adults who are making their own choices and we need to treat them as such
- Before City Council decides on the restrictions/requirements/provisions of another PF permit, assurance needed that the first and foremost question councilors are asking of themselves is – am I acting in the best interest of the City of Keene residents?
- I am TIRED of the damage to my personal property – landscaping damage, public urination, smashed pumpkins, vomiting, loud yelling, blocking me in my driveway – and I pay taxes for this?
- If the PF moves forward, organizers should pay 100% of all costs without relying on tax dollars, and in addition should pay the extensive costs of city employee labor for planning/implementation
- This community is and can be more than PF – we are not a fall festival. We are not defined by a single event or date on a calendar, but a spirit that is focused on maintaining our quality of life
- Let It Shine has said “we won’t do another PF unless it is supported by the community and safe for all” – How safe can a future PF be for first responders? For the surrounding neighborhoods?
- As a result of these riots we can be assured that Keene will be mentioned in the news for years to come when it involves issues not related with the PF – there will be consequences long after its over
- In the end there were 123 additional police called in to quell the behavior – can that number be afforded for a PF next year? 232 officers in total, only 109 were scheduled initially
- The way we keep our community safe, pull ourselves together, and restore our reputation is to confront this head on and not to let this great event slip away because we are afraid
- Before City Council makes any decision, there needs to be a serious effort to include truly affected property owners in any final discussions (Blake St, Winchester Terrace, Butler Court, Davis St)
- Smashing pumpkins used to be a problem, now there is a cleanup race – derby competition between teams for cleanup – another amazing turnabout like this is necessary and can be found
- Videotaping is a deterrent to poor behavior, advertise that folks are being caught on camera – if people know they are being videotaped less likely to be unruly or disrespectful
- Control the number of people who come by controlling the parking lots – don’t bus people in, and don’t let people park overnight in the lots – charge for them
- KSC students being on break during the PF will just create problems for local landlords and it will also mean separating KSC from the rest of the community
- Non-profit world is loaded with intelligent, engaged members of our community who will come up with new fundraising opportunities moving forward
- If people are going to come to party – give them a place to party – perhaps the athletic field? Away from residents, and where they won’t get injured
- PF is like a hornets nest at a picnic, if you knew the nest was there and held the picnic anyway you are partly responsible for outcome
- The only locals who go do so either because they have visitors who have never been or have small enough children to enjoy it
- Move PF to location where alcohol is not served, whereas in the current PF footprint over 20 places serve alcohol

- If we take the PF away, you will have not only lost a great annual event for the Monadnock region, but the respect of the general public
- Ending the PF will send the message that as a city we are willing to give up because of some punks
- We will develop things to replace the energy and pride the PF once brought us but time to move on
- A new PF next year should require greater student involvement eg. they bring 15000 pumpkins!
- We need to know what it feels like to not have a PF when October comes around – will we miss it?
- PF is a heavy cost to the City, don't blame KSC on something that the City cannot afford anymore
- Unless or until PF can be returned to a community event with no chance of future riots, let it go
- The impact that PF has had on this community both good and bad can't be taken away from us
- When competing with other communities it detracts from the family and community emphasis
- National Guard is needed in off campus housing areas to control conduct if the PF lives on
- Other colleges embrace on campus events during festivals (Connecticut College's Floralia)
- Should have 10 students from each class, KSC, Police, and Security on safety committee
- Hold an on campus event for the PF including a controlled atmosphere, maybe a concert
- Without oversight, PF is like a vacant house that attracts nuisances (no one is in charge)
- Challenge KSC to become a stakeholder in the PF – footprint should include the campus
- The payments that the City makes to support PF is in effect a PF tax on property owners
- Cannot let outsiders look down on Keene for stepping away rather than being proactive
- Citywide student curfew during the PF regardless of whether they live on or off campus
- City of Keene should require "additional insured" status on the event insurance policy
- We can no longer reasonably control or influence the negative elements tied to the PF
- There is an economic cost to all citizens of Keene resulting from increased pollution
- Need to focus on solutions to poor behavior, not eliminate a family friendly event
- Police need to discourage standing crowds and encourage people to move along
- Family events like PF are important to retaining young professionals in the area
- If people don't want the PF in their backyard, it shouldn't be in anyone's yard
- I want my young children to be able to enjoy the PF as I have growing up
- Hiatus is needed to give time to heal and present/determine solutions
- Any future party will have students vying to out-riot the past parties
- Safety committee needs to be instituted if event proceeds next year
- Even one life in danger is too much and the PF should not go on
- Out of community promoters have no place in our community
- Fraternity/sorority life should be more connected to the PF
- The loss of income for non-profits would be debilitating
- PF not continuing will not greatly impact non-profits
- Size and philosophy of PF needs to be re-evaluated
- Please don't take it away! It's only one day a year
- Want to be able to enjoy it and not endure it
- Encourage students to "police their own"

2. SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO MOVE FORWARD:

B. IN GENERAL

- Disorderly/disruptive behavior fueled by alcohol is a year-round issue (40*)
- Community meetings are needed on a regular basis to discuss issues between college and community (12*)
- Keene State College is known as a “kinda sorta college/keg stand college” we need to eliminate the impression that this is a drinking institution (9*)
- More family friendly events are needed in Keene, not less (8*)
- We need to find a way to address behavior problems without taking away wonderful community event (5*)
- Punishment by KSC has not been swift or serious enough to make a difference (4*)
- Any investments the City makes in neighborhoods and infrastructure are erased with litter, disrespect, outright destruction, need to fix the core problem (4*)
- Who thinks it is wise to put 80,000 people in downtown Keene? (3*)
- KSC needs more classes on Friday (3*)
- We who work or live with youth must find ways to engage, mentor, elder, and be in community with the, - if not, we will continue to reap the drunken and drugged mayhem of alienated, disengaged, nihilistic youth, who have little to no connection to genuine community
- Pub crawls are unnecessary and by being associated with KSC, the administration is saying in effect that it is okay to drink en masse during the day in downtown Keene – should we be encouraging this? Does this fit with the healthy community we have told others we aspire to be?
- Look at Union College in Schenectady, NY – college purchased two streets of houses and rehabilitated them for students, also students need to apply for off campus housing
- Off campus housing should be seen as a privilege available only to students who have demonstrated mature, pro-social behavior over a period of several years
- Police should wear cameras to increase accountability and the perception that people behaving poorly will be held accountable
- Neighborhood surrounding campus used to be full of families – people got fed up and none of the houses are homes for families anymore
- KSC should make students sign a contract that if you riot, you will be expelled and financially responsible for your actions
- All KSC students should have annual training in understanding our community and the responsibilities of adulthood
- The response from KSC after PF 2013 was to talk and send emails asking the “kids to be good” – discussion is good but only if it leads to concrete results
- By not providing housing for their students on campus, KSC can claim that the partying problem does not belong to their institution
- UNH System leadership needs to be reminded of the responsibilities it has to its host communities
- “Just leave town” – it leaves properties vulnerable to litter, graffiti, disrespect, use as a parking lot

- DC employee appreciation day – recognition is really important of those doing good in community
- A well-known system of reporting poor conditions of college housing needs to be implemented
- Message needed that damage, injury, distress are unacceptable, must be credible and legitimate
- Freedom has limits – education is needed for those who do not know where their freedom ends
- The reactions of the rioters is part of larger issue of anti-government, anti-oversight mentality
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- Residents have responsibility of modeling good behavior and treating students with respect
- Police need to go to parties with their lights off, not announcing their arrival to the parties
- Penalties for large gatherings need to be more severe, for instance, \$500 for first infraction
- Find a way to speak to out of town guests instead of letting them ruin our city then leave
- Non-profits have made significant investments regarding their fund raising ability at PF
- Student misbehavior is a problem – look to others that have been working on this issue
- Students are scared and in a new place, we need to recognize the challenges they face
- Training needed for living as adults in this community: respect, responsibility, safety
- All weekend evenings Thurs – Sun are torture for residents surrounding the campus
- The PF is not a time for KSC and COK to babysit these students at their residences
- Long-term community strategic planning sessions are needed with all stakeholders
- Let it shine is a non-profit organization and cannot make laws or control students
- Alums are genuinely concerned about their alma mater and the KSC reputation
- Students are bombarded with advertising about the coolness of binge drinking
- Safety means different things to different people in terms of a police presence
- Tenant education is ongoing process not a one-time, during orientation event
- Reach out to people who do this on a larger scale – Oktoberfest, Mardi Gras
- Acknowledge students that are participating in cleanup, remediation, change
- Property owners should not be asked to contribute to the event as taxpayers
- This community is tired of the disrespect and disregard for resident's needs
- Why aren't people asking students "why" they are behaving this way?
- Do not give up on Keene State students because of peer's guests
- Only 2 expulsions for such dangerous behavior is unacceptable
- Alcohol should not be sold within ½ mile of the KSC campus
- City ordinances for permits before parties is not effective
- Clear escalation in rowdy behavior is of serious concern
- School within line of site of KSC campus (Wheelock)
- KSC admits more students than they have housing for
- Knock & Talk program should have never gone away
- We can't let "bad apples" spoil the bunch
- It's about "we," it's not about they

3. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- City has missions and values statement: VOICE: Value Everyone. Obtain Public Input. Income the Public. Continue to assess facilities and infrastructure. Establish priorities. Is this actually the framework for city decision making? As a community, we don't feel valued, informed, and our input is not being sought
- On December 2, more people spoke in favor of keeping the PF than against it; A resident-organized forum was held in November with more folks speaking against the PF than at the Dec 2 forum
- First Night was an awesome event - We now have to go to Northampton to experience it.. We do not want to travel so far but have to, and in doing so, we are not spending our money locally
- What happened to the conversation about Keene becoming the healthiest community? If the only opportunity our young adults have is to drink isn't that inconsistent with the vision the "healthy community" group has set forth?
- Instead of pub crawls, we should encourage something like "Old Home Days" where the community comes together for games and comradery – KSC seniors should sponsor this day for the community – could be called the KSC Senior Challenge
- The inability of KSC to provide housing has long contributed to this issue of forcing families out of neighborhoods and them becoming college houses which is partly the reason for all the tension
- We have already eliminated the 3-day street fair and the international festival, 1 night snow and ice art walk – why PF too?
- Forums are valuable, but results are generally altered by who hosts them, where it is located, and who the target audience is
- Our world seems to be constantly bowing down to small numbers of instigators instead of serving the majority
- Whatever the result, more children/family activities are needed. Maybe more, smaller festivals?
- We can find more productive and creative ways to attract tourists to our region than lit pumpkins
- Where are the families that lived in our neighborhoods? If they aren't here, who is the PF for?
- The folks who spoke at the December 2 forum are not representative of the entire community
- If Let it Shine wants to host an event, let them bring back First Night on New Year's Eve
- It is impossible to guarantee safety to our citizens in the future regardless of PF or not
- The City spends too much money – now we're asking for \$\$ to fix up City Hall??
- There should be a required first course for freshmen regarding virtue and morals
- To the extent we can substitute marijuana for alcohol, we should encourage this
- Students are not involved/integrated/inherently part of the community
- Local businesses should be able to sell product on the street at PF
- Need to incentivize students to participate in community forums
- We do not live in Keene but it is my hometown and I still care!
- Off campus housing reduces community feel

4. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION NEEDED

- Does the school admit more students than it has housing for? Do they intend to continue? Why would developers be building large developments of beds for students if enrollment is not increasing dramatically?
- What are the costs, separate from the direct contribution and the cost of security, of planning the PF, what is the true cost to the city and its taxpayers?
- COK has not provided an estimate of the economic loss in tax receipts, business revenue (including compensation to employees) and charity that Keene citizens would lose should PF be cancelled
- How are students who get alcohol violations handled? When is a student kicked off campus for behavior?
- I have heard that businesses' property and liability insurance premiums are increasing because of PF and that many business owners close because they don't want to deal with the crowds – is this true?
- Is it true that 40% of non-profit's income is provided by the PF? How much income is actually provided to non-profits through proceeds from the PF?
- Alcohol free New Year's event held a few years back was largely successful – how did they do it?
- What is the economic impact of the student activity in Keene (while school is in session v summer)
- Is there really a net economic benefit after calculating in the costs of planning/policing the event?
- Where can I find the recent study related to the economic impact of the college?
- What about monetary value for all vendors of the PF not just non-profits?
- What isn't getting done because of the City's expenditures on PF?
- Has the City considered requirements for large party/gatherings?
- Student Code of Conduct – is that available online?
- What will the budget be increased to for PF 2015?
- What about 2014 law enforcement costs?