

In Keene, alcohol, council meetings not a mix

◆ **Not a beer:** Three arrested after mayor asks people in audience to not drink at the meeting.

By **MELANIE PLEND**
Union Leader Correspondent

KEENE— Three people were arrested at a Keene City Council meeting for drinking from what appeared to be beer bottles during the meeting.

Free Keene activists Ian "Freeman" Bernard, 30, and Sam "Dodson" Miller, 34, both of Keene, were arrested inside city council chambers. Activist Monica Granger, 27, of Keene, was arrested outside of the meeting. Each was charged with disorderly conduct.

On Wednesday, Miller announced on the Free Keene blog that "The Keene City Council Drinking Game," would take place at last night's meeting. The general idea was participants would drink from brown bottles labeled "Not a Beer" every time council members performed certain actions such as when voting unanimously or when one said "master plan." At the meeting, Miller, who brought in a blue cooler filled with the brown, passed out flyers to councilors and the press titled "The Shire Society." The flyer asked council members to repeal open container and public consumption of alco-

hol ordinances.

Though eight protesters were in the audience, only four actually drank from the brown bottles during the first few bits of business at the meeting.

Keene police Chief Kenneth Meola, who regularly attends council meetings and one other police officer, stationed in the back of the room, were in attendance, but left the group alone. That is, until Mayor Philip Dale Pregent stopped the meeting to make an announcement.

"We do not permit alcoholic beverages or alcoholic beverage containers in the council chambers," he said. "Please dispose of these containers if you want to remain in the meeting. ... If you don't, you will be asked to leave." No one moved or said anything. Pregent repeated the announcement.

At that, the protesters started asking who he was speaking to specifically.

Pregent told them, "The public is not allowed to speak."

The protestors tittered over that and asked again who he was speaking to and who had alcohol, "since clearly this is marked 'Not a Beer.'" Miller also asked



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Keene police asked Free Keene protesters to show them what they were drinking at last night's Keene City Council meeting after the protesters had said they planned to drink alcohol at the meeting. When they repeatedly refused to say what they were drinking, three of them were arrested in council chambers. One more woman was arrested outside.

what ordinance or law gave the mayor permission to tell them they couldn't drink in public. The mayor didn't answer, but eventually decided to recess the meeting.

The councilors left and police tried talking to the protestors, telling them their actions were disruptive and asking them to hand over the bottles to prove they weren't drinking alcohol. Three of the four people drinking refused to hand over their bottles and asked what authority police had to request such a thing. One protestor, Heika Courser, who most recently came to the public's

attention for her arrest while topless in the town square, handed over her bottle.

"It's just water," she said. "There was never any alcohol in here."

As the spectacle went on, others attending the meeting began asking the other protestors, who were filming the incident with cell phones and video cameras, to stop. This caused one woman to stand in front of a member of the local media to keep them from taking pictures of what was happening.

Meanwhile, Chief Meola, who had been trying to get the protestors to leave,

asked the mayor if he wanted them arrested. The mayor said nothing. After a few moments of this, Meola pointed at Miller and Bernard, the two who wouldn't give up their bottles, and arrested them. Both men continued to ask what they were being arrested for. Meola reacted by saying he was clearing the room and ordered everyone including the press to leave or they would be arrested too.

Everyone left, but a short time later, two more police officers were called in. Protesters heckled them as they went in to assist the other officers in council chambers. After about 10 minutes, police escorted Miller and Bernard out of chambers in cuffs.

"City Council members should be ashamed of themselves," Miller shouted as police led him down the stairs and out of the building.

Once outside, Meola and another officer, arrested Granger who had left the room when police ordered it cleared.

Some of the protestors followed the group to the police station, but no arrests were made.

"They are standing outside peacefully," said Keene Police Sgt. Todd Lawrence. "They aren't causing any problems."