

# THE EQUINOX

The student voice of Keene State College

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THURSDAY, FEB. 16, 2012

## BearCat causes uproar

### Keene City Council will revisit \$286,000 Homeland Security grant for vehicle

CAM KING  
EQUINOX STAFF

Enraged at the potential idea of a tank rolling down the lovely causeway of Main Street, Keene residents roared to life to refute the acceptance of a federal grant to purchase a \$286,000 armored vehicle by Keene City Council Members.

"Thanks but No Tanks!" had been the motto all week for Keene residents trying to oust the idea of allowing an armored vehicle to reside in town. The Keene City Council voted 12-1 on its Dec. 15 meeting to accept a federal grant that would allow Lenco Industries of Pittsfield, Mass. to develop a tactical S.W.A.T. vehicle for use of the Keene Police Dept. The lone vote against the acceptance of the grant belongs to Terry Clark, who is a journalism graduate of Keene State College.

"I am here to ask you to have the courage and rescind the grant to purchase a Lenco BearCat," Clark said. Clark originally ran for City Council on the advocacy program of getting more police to roam the streets on foot to interact with townsfolk. Clark liked the idea of purchasing this, "tank" to, "fictionalizing action film writer scenarios of Hollywood." He went on to ask, "Do we really need to allow this paranoia of a militarized police force in Keene to go on?"

Scores of residents from Keene, city officials, and businessmen including two Lenco Industries representatives filled the second floor room in City Hall on Feb. 9, 2012. The sardine packed room enlisted over a total of 90 spectators, with more than 30 people going on record to preach their opinions about the potential of Keene's acceptance of this federal grant. The City Councilors who headed the meeting were Phillip D. Pregent, Kris Roberts, Mitchell Greenwald, June M. Donegan, and former Police Chief of Keene Thomas F. Powers.

Addressing the packed room at first was owner of Greenwald Realty, and chairman of City Council Mitchell Greenwald. "Due to the large amount of con-

the speaking times to two minutes, then one minute, then finally 30 seconds per responder.

Chief Ken Meola and Fire Chief Gary Lamoureux, who both spoke before the public had their chance to attempt to dethrone the idea of KPD boasting an

LENCO Representative Lenny Light.

Police Chief Meola also said, "The BearCat is equipped with thermal imaging, off-road capabilities, hazardous materials handling capabilities and provides police escort if needed. This is a vehicle to be used professionally by professionals."

Meola also boasted that the Keene police force will, "have no need for specialized integration to the vehicle" as Lenco will be able to familiarize officers with the new technology very quickly.

Keene Fire Chief Gary Lamoureux commented that, "This vehicle will be used for rescue missions, as the area we live in is susceptible to dangerous weather."

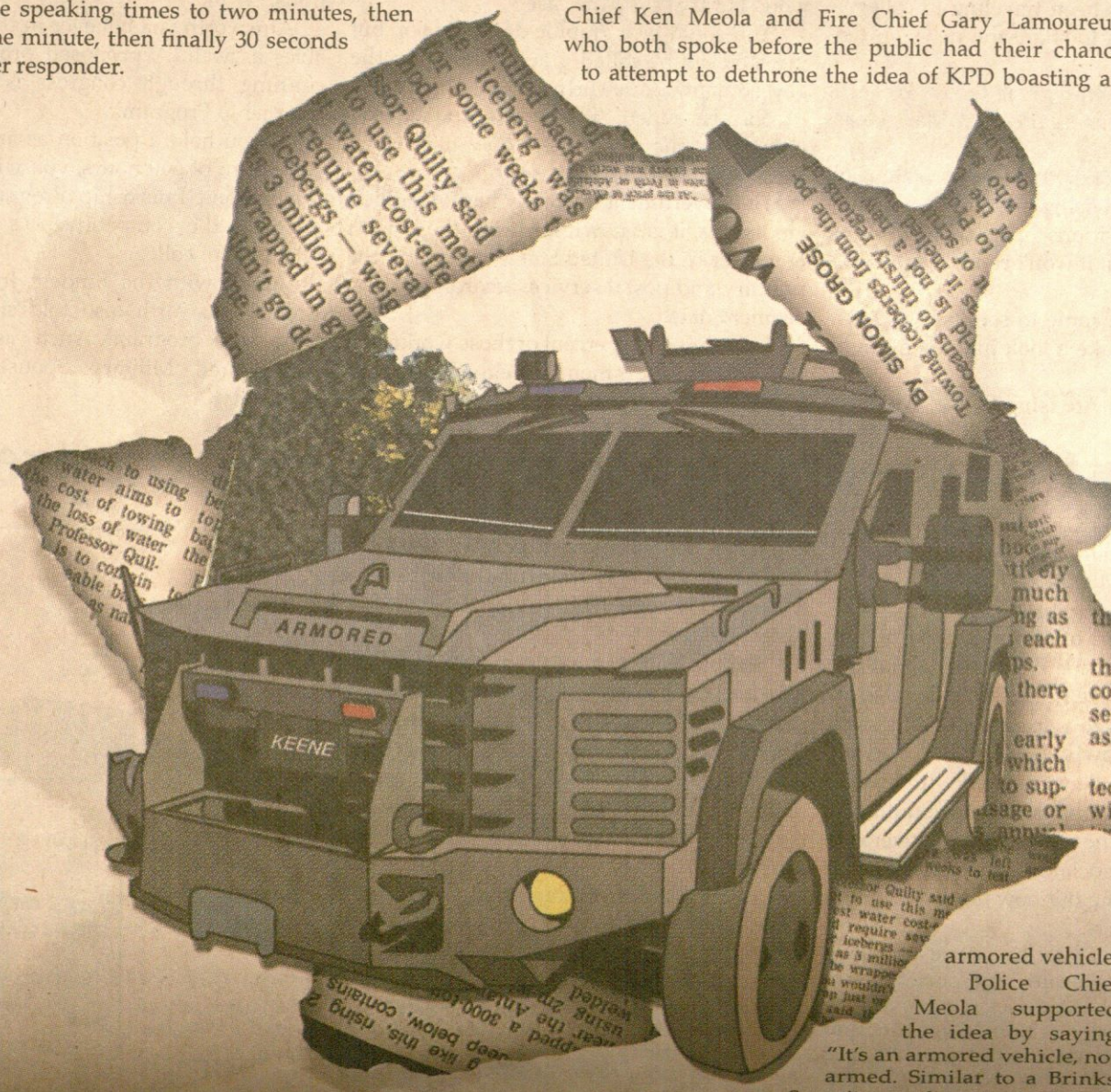
But with mounting concerns, some citizens fear the image that an armored vehicle would bring to Keene. City Councilor Terry Clark issued a broad message before the hearings of the public concerning the BearCat, warning that, "We must stand up to the culture of war and terrorism scare tactics."

Former Keene police officer of 27 years Edward Gross said that, "Keene is as good as it is today because officers in this town fight what we fear." Being an open advocate for the purchase of the BearCat, Gross cited personal experiences such as the Keene State College riots when the Red Sox won the World Series in 2004 and 2007, and putting to rest a school shooting at Monadnock High School in 1991. "If you want to argue the \$300,000 cost, then argue the cost of a dead officer in the streets for not having the protection they need."

While there was much to say, opposers of the Keene's acceptance of this federal grant heavily outweighed those who supported it at the meeting.

Dave Braggler, who admitted only being in Keene a few days said, "It seems like unnecessary spending for the government. I have yet to see shootings, terrorist attacks, and I don't need to duck while going to a restaurant. I won't be fooled into living in fear."

Concerned citizen Ted Speaks said, "While I have a lot of confidence in our police, I don't want to see a



armored vehicle.

Police Chief Meola supported the idea by saying, "It's an armored vehicle, not armed. Similar to a Brinks Security truck you see deliver-



229 Main Street  
Keene, N.H. 03435  
wcy@keene-equinox.com  
Circulation 2,500

Newsroom: 603-358-2413  
Ads/Bus. Office: 603-358-2401  
Executive Editor: 603-358-2414  
Fax: 603-358-2407

# OPINIONS

Mission...

The Equinox exists to promote the free flow of information, to protect the First Amendment, to stimulate high standards in the practice of journalism and to foster excellence amongst student journalists.

THURSDAY, FEB. 16, 2012

OPINIONS / A4

[Keene-Equinox.com]

## EDITORIAL

### Keene Police finds a new pet in the BearCat

Keene city council voted 12-1 in December to accept a Homeland Security grant of more than \$285,000. This grant would allow the Keene Police Department to purchase a LENCO BearCat, an armored vehicle whose intended use was never quite specified.

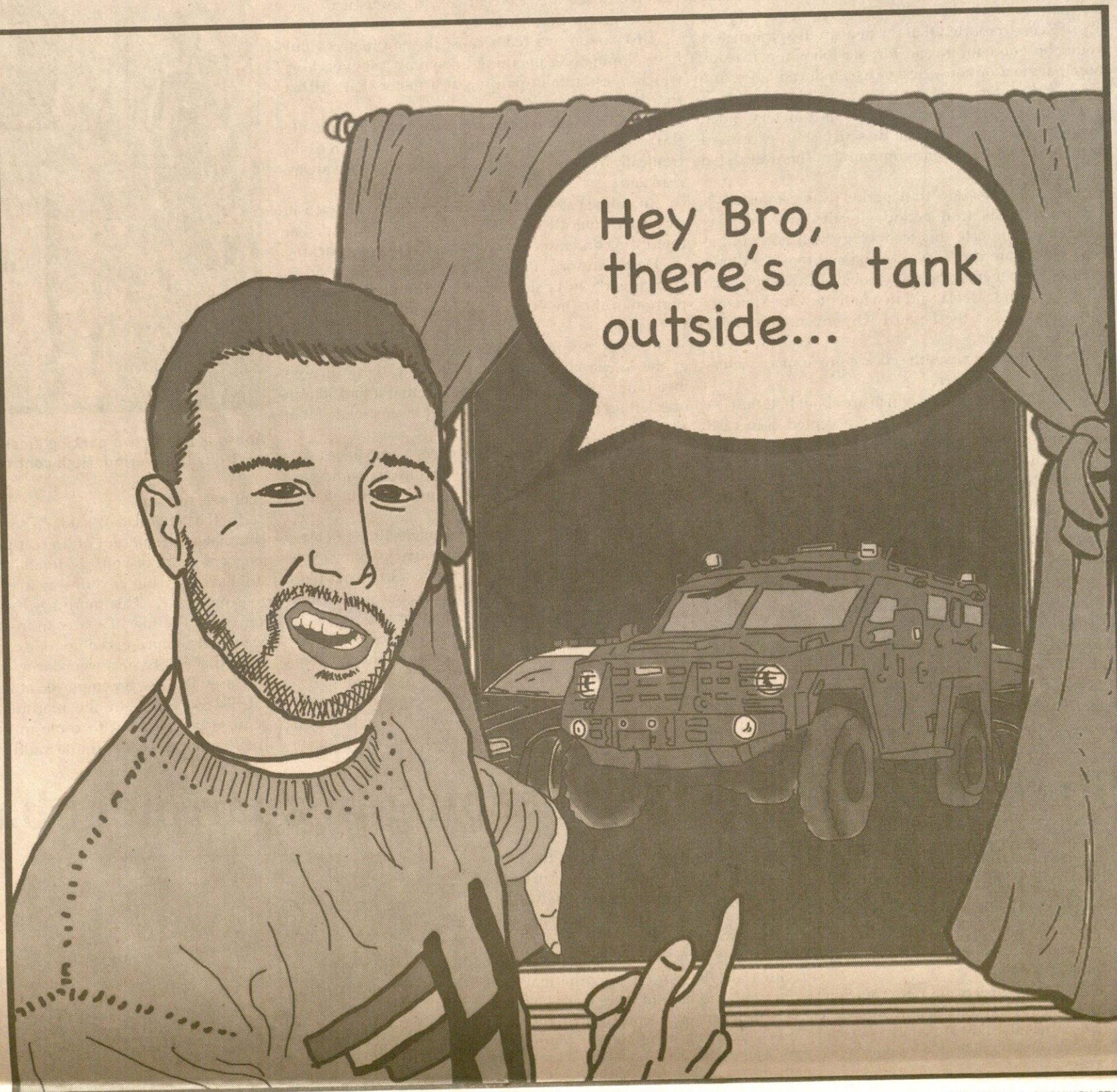
However, backlash began recently over the council's acceptance of the grant. A hearing was put together this weekend allowing residents who were angry over the council's decision. Approximately 20 people spoke out against the council's decision, urging members to reconsider their positions.

The council's decision to purchase the vehicle came under scrutiny as citizens questioned the need for such a vehicle in an area like Keene. The supporters of the vehicle often cite the vehicles usefulness in rescue situations as well as transporting S.W.A.T. Team members to and from locations where they are needed. However, citizens were concerned that the police would be willing to abuse their new toy and potentially create fear within the community.

As college students, the KSC community should be especially wary of the police and their new toy, the BearCat. In the application for the Homeland Security grant, police cited Pumpkin Fest as one of the times when this vehicle had the potential to be useful to the police and the community.

Pumpkin Fest has come under fire lately for the actions taken by college students during the annual weekend of revelry and drinking. It's not inconceivable to imagine the police using this vehicle to intimidate students who are causing a ruckus in the area. While this initially seems like a good use for the vehicle, for some, using methods of intimidation such as the BearCat would be an abuse of police power.

Before students stand by and allow the police to acquire a vehicle of the caliber of a LENCO BearCat, perhaps students should consider whom the vehicle is most likely to be used against. It's not Keene residents who have a history of drunken shenanigans; it's the Keene State College students who are bound to get unruly and require actions from the LENCO BearCat. This isn't a vehicle to rescue, it's a vehicle to intimidate.



NICK VESSELLA / EQUINOX STAFF

## STAFF COMMENTARY

### Voter laws affecting students everywhere

I have always been skeptical of any bill trying to limit votes. From Voter IDs to reclassification of domicile, I have always seen far more consequences than benefits.

However, when a state representative explained to me the Voter ID bill that the New Hampshire House was working on, I was apt to

*If the legislature were to take this vote away, out of state college students would have no say over*

would have no say over what goes on at their respective campus and essentially have no say over what rules are going to be imposed on their campus.

Instead of discouraging voting, in an age of low voter turnout, we should be doing all we could to encourage that voters get to the polls