

CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE
HOUSING BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE



MEETING MINUTES
March 21, 2024 at 5:30 p.m.

School Board Conference Room, City Hall, 1 Junkins Ave. Portsmouth, NH

Attendees: Co-Chairs Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley and Councilor John Tabor, Megan Corsetti, John O’Leary, Jennifer Stebbins Thomas, City Manager Karen Conard, Housing Navigator Howard Snyder, Planning & Sustainability Planning Manager Peter Stith, Director Peter Britz, Erik Anderson, Tracy Kozak, Mary Loane, School Board representative Byron Matto, Dagan Migirditch, Councilor Beth Moreau.

Absent: None

- I. Roll Call: The meeting was called to order by Co-Chair Kelley at 5:31 p.m.. Erik requested clarification on order of procedure and the Assistant Mayor stated following Roberts Rules and members spoke of being in agreement.
- II. Meeting Minutes of 3/7/2024: Approval of minutes tabled after discussion due to requested clarification of potential work plan item Sherborne School and the mention of “affordability component.”
- III. Quantitative goal for the committee’s work: Discussions by members considered the last meeting’s discussions on housing issues in city, specifically to problems of affordability and affordable median income. Reading of the committee’s mission as set forth by the City Council. Debate on what could be realistically accomplished for the missing middle and affordable units permitted that could be built in a three-year timeline while the city has been averaging 20 – 50 units per year. Not to be consumed in the process to create but to find ways to add to that number. Housing Navigator states a goal of 200 units in consideration of zoning. Number may be too conservative but both rental and for sale units are considered. A number of 500 is considered that would consist of a variety of housing types and developments, not just PHA. Number is for units that are permitted after two-years. Rockingham Planning considers 1,500 units in the next 10 years. Not all units are to be city owned as private development must be encouraged as well.

Criteria of using affordable? Does the seacoast area supplied affordable housing by Portsmouth’s actions. Example of Lafayette Road property that was purchased by a local business owner. Do other communities have zoning or template in place that city could look at? Dover has transfer development rights as a potential example to look at. Concern on the differences in understanding and definitions of housing terminology of affordable, missing middle, and workforce housing. Workforce housing definitions 100% median income = 30% to buy, 60% to rent. Affordability in the city is subjective.

A number of 140 housing units is contemplated. Establishing a number needs to have an expectation of what the goal is; What do we expect out of the city and with the private sector? How do we incentivize them? Removal of zoning barriers a way to achieve this? Repurpose downtown office/commercial is challenged by parking requirements, but easier than new construction. Potential recommendations regarding changing office zoning to include housing can be made by the housing committee.

Find consensus on proposed number? Goal statement to include a vary range of greater housing choices and affordability numbers using state Area Median Income (AMI) numbers. Potential goal statement: "As a committee, support changes that create up to 500 permitted units of diverse housing over the next two years." Further discussion by members included housing type, how to adjust zoning, diversity, expectations of city and private sector, how to support a range of housing numbers and types, and long-term investment for a sustainable market led to an agreement that Councilor Beth Moreau would further develop a goal statement and it would be made part of the next meeting.

- IV. PHA presentation and open discussion with members on capacity for projects in the near-term: Tom Ferrini and Adam Ruedig of Portsmouth Housing Authority speakers. Discuss the ability to accomplish 500 over the next two years. Explanation on how tax-credit based financing works with the Federal government (allocation), and approach to using Ruth Griffin Place (permanent affordable units.) as an example. Recommend to accomplish diversity of housing then strongly suggest zoning for private sector needs to be locked in with the incentives so they do it.

Federal guidelines and law on how projects are implemented. Work to consider Portsmouth residents as preferred. Look at all property types and potential development partners. City owned land streamlines the potential of a project and reduces costs. Sherburne site evaluation was part of looking at all the other city owned properties and the possibilities of housing development. PHA works as a monitor for City's designating affordable housing units. Have limited funds not allocated by the federal government. Phases of development to create housing units. Clarification on working with the city council and the land use process (with public review and comment) regarding potential housing development.

Discussion regarding a letter dated March 22nd written by the mayor to Congressman Pappas. Letter part of process with federal government to get money. Reserves the right to say that we would like funds to go towards housing. To further apply and may not get. Letter must be site specific for a project but is non-binding. Discussion on past actions and matters regarding the Sherburne School in the context that the letter does the work to get in line for funds for the project and earmarks funds that if project did not get approved the funds are not given. Does not commit funds that would otherwise go to other needed matters of the city such as police and fire departments as other letters were sent regarding such matters.

Motion: Erik Anderson: Approve and forward letter as written with excluding Sherburne School as a site-specific project. Second: John O'Leary. Discussion. Vote: In Favor: 3; Opposed:8 Motion fails.

Motion: Byron Matto: Approve letter as written. Second: Dagan Migirditch
Vote: In Favor: 8; Opposed:3 Motion passes.

- V. Housing Navigator update: Actions since last meeting include housing presence on planning and sustainability website. Grant engaged RKG will be presenting on April 4th. Analysis on levers to pull regulatory changes to better incentivize. Final report on Places to Live Study Circle Dialogue ADU handbook.
- VI. Committee member questions and concerns: Moved to next meeting so the public comments can be heard.
- VII. Public comments: There were a number of residents in attendance, both in the room and on Zoom. The following individuals spoke: Rick Beckstead, Petra Huda, John Logan, Ester Kennedy, Paige Choice, Manny Garganta.
- VIII. The meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m..