



## MEETING MINUTES

### City of Portsmouth Housing Blue Ribbon Committee Conference Room A at City Hall\*

Thursday, May 16<sup>th</sup> 2024  
5:30 p.m.

#### **I. Meeting Called to Order by Co-Chairperson Joanna Kelly at 5:30p.m.**

Co-Chair Kelly calls roll call:

Attending: Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley, Councilor John Tabor (Remote), Councilor Beth Moreau, School Board Representative Byron Matto, Erik Anderson, Megan Corsetti, Tracey Kozak, Mary Loane, Dagan Migirditch, Jennifer Stebbins Thomas, Planning and Sustainability Director Peter Britz, Planning Manager Peter Stith and Housing Navigator Howard Snyder

Absent: John O'Leary, City Manager Karen Conard

#### **II. Approval of 5/16/2024 Meeting Minutes**

Co-Chair Joanna Kelly: Motion to approve minutes.

Byron Matto: So moved.

Erik Anderson: Second.

In favor: All.

Opposed: None.

Motion approved unanimously.

#### **III. Guest Speaker - Rick Chellman, Planning Board Chair:**

Co-Chair Kelly: Introduction of guest speaker, Rick Chellman, to discuss housing densification and zoning regulations. Rick, who is well-versed in national and international housing trends, provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities facing Portsmouth.

Rick Chellman: Spoke of the importance of examining different neighborhood densities within Portsmouth, such as Atlantic Heights, Richards Avenue, and Lincoln. He highlighted the potential for these examples to inform zoning changes that could enable similar developments in other areas of the city.



Throughout the discussion, Rick emphasized the national relevance of housing densification and shared examples of innovative projects from various states. He underscored the need for Portsmouth's zoning regulations to become more flexible and straightforward to better accommodate modern housing needs. Rick noted that while the city's zoning ordinance is currently complex, there are opportunities to simplify it based on feedback from the ongoing Master Plan process.

Rick spoke of towns in New Hampshire vote on zoning changes at annual town meetings. Portsmouth can vote on zoning amendments year-round with public hearings. Any person can propose a zoning change with the Planning Board and then with City Council vote.

The meeting also delved into the mechanics of the planning board's role in site plan review and subdivision regulation adjustments. Rick explained that while the planning board can modify these regulations, any zoning changes require city council approval. He pointed out that recurring variance requests often indicate a need for regulatory changes and should be addressed to streamline the process. Also stated that parking requirements are currently in zoning and would be better if in site plan review.

Byron Matto: Asks about barriers to housing.

Rick Chellman: Success has been had with character-based zoning. Discusses using Market Square as an example.

Mary Loane: Asks about boundaries for matching.

Rick Chellman: Discusses design guidelines outside of Historic District.

Mary Loane: Asks about possibility of higher density.

Rick Chellman: Notes design guidelines use character images and higher density can be achieved with little change to character of neighborhood.

The conversation shifted to the Sherburne school site, a focal point for potential development. There was some confusion about the planning board's involvement in the RFQ (Request for Qualifications) and RFP (Request for Proposals) processes. It was clarified that the RFQ process is currently underway, and more detailed plans will be developed and reviewed in subsequent stages.

The meeting concluded with a focus on developing a detailed work plan that includes community input and aligns with city council decisions. Rick committed to reviewing the RKG report to provide further insights into housing incentives. The committee members were encouraged to send specific questions to Rick via email for further clarification.



#### **IV. Housing Navigator:**

Howard Snyder: Discusses purpose and intent in the creation and implementation of a work plan. The discussion began with a quick overview of what a typical work plan entails, including action items, timelines, and decision points. Sted goal is to ensure that everyone had a clear understanding of the components and structure of an effective work plan.

The presentation highlighted four primary components: defining goals and objectives, assigning tasks, preparing timelines, and evaluating constraints and limitations. An example was provided to illustrate how a work plan can address specific zoning reforms, such as changes to building heights, by aligning with relevant code sections, housing types, and master plan goals.

The department emphasized the importance of organizing and prioritizing tasks within the work plan. Members were asked to email their goals, objectives, and suggested action items before the next meeting. This information would be compiled and discussed to finalize the work plan, ensuring all members had the opportunity to advocate for their priorities.

#### **V. Committee Member Discussion on Items for a Work Plan:**

Members discuss preliminary thoughts on items for a work plan. A request is made for a template to be distributed so that a draft work plan can be prepared ahead of the next meeting.

#### **VI. Public Comment:**

Jim Smalley @ 352 Kearsarge Way: raised several important points during the public comment session. He began by expressing a desire for more public interaction during the meetings, noting that this had been promised but not yet fully implemented. The Planning Department acknowledged this concern and committed to finding a way to include more public dialogue.

Jim then shifted his focus to the metrics used to measure the success of housing initiatives. He critiqued the current emphasis on the number of approved units, suggesting that this does not accurately reflect affordability. Instead, he proposed using metrics like the ratio of median house prices to median income or similar measures for rent to better capture affordability.

He highlighted the significant impact of zoning laws on housing costs, noting that since 1970, zoning has increasingly protected existing property rights at the expense of affordable housing. He argued that increasing density, even modestly, could help reduce costs without necessitating high-rise buildings. He mentioned that various factors, such as floor area ratios and density bonuses, play a critical role in housing economics and should be carefully considered.



In conclusion, he emphasized the need for a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to planning that includes economic analysis and public input, suggesting that the planning board could benefit from having an economist involved.

Co-Chair Joanna Kelly: Motion to adjourn

Megan Corsetti: So moved.

Councilor Beth Moreau: Second.

In favor: All.

Opposed: None.

Motion approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 7:16 p.m.

Vote was unanimous in approval.