

City of Portsmouth
Housing Blue Ribbon Committee
Conference Room A*

MEETING MINUTES

March 13, 2025 at 5:30 p.m.

I. Roll Call

Meeting called to order by co-chair Assistant Mayor Kelley at 5:30 pm.

Attending: Councilor Beth Moreau, Erik Anderson, John O’Leary, Dagan Migirditch, Jennifer Stebbins Thomas, Planning and Sustainability Director Peter Britz, Planning Manager Peter Stith.
Absent: Byron Matto, Tracy Kozak, Mary Loane, Megan Corsetti, Councilor John Tabor

II. City Owned Properties

The purpose of our ranking is to go to the City Council with recommendations on lots for them to consider for repurposing. This list was first developed in the now-sunset land use committee as city-owned parcels that could possibly be redeveloped for below market rate housing with some add-ons per committee request. Committee did a site walk on each. Ranked in order of priority from prior meeting.

- **City Hall Lower Lot** -- The Lower Lot currently provides employee parking and is 1.3 acres in size. The parcel offers a potential development opportunity for housing which could be built over the existing lot and maintain the employee parking. The lot is walkable to downtown but is also serviced by COAST currently. There are no wetlands on the property and utilities are easily accessible. Development of this parcel should carefully consider the surrounding neighborhood and dwellings, especially located on Mt. Vernon Street. Construction here would displace neighborhood and City staff parking, although parking would remain long-term. Will need PD and neighbor input. Would be one of the more difficult properties from a political perspective but makes the most sense from a practical perspective, especially for downtown workforce. Zoned municipal, so no height restriction. Less need for a mitigation plan. Keep on the list.
- **25 Granite Street** -- 25 Granite Street is approximately 3.9 acres, has access off Granite Street but also has frontage on Woodbury Avenue. The current use of the site is recreational and it contains a ball field. A small apartment building could potentially fit on the site while retaining the ball field, while a larger development could be built without retaining the ball field. There is potential to acquire additional land to the east from the condo association that would create an opportunity for more housing and keeping the ball field. There are wetlands on the adjacent parcel which extends an area of

wetland buffer onto this lot. Utilities are easily accessible for connection and there are no steep slopes or other topographical constraints on this parcel. Perhaps it's possible to purchase some of the land from the condo association and connecting that to land not being used for the softball field (created as mitigation for the loss of the field when the Middle School was expanded and should not be sacrificed) that can't expand their buildings due to the wetland. With the softball field this would be a nice place to live and accessible to stores. Suggestion that we recommend this property to City Council in conjunction with looking into acquiring some of the land and keeping the softball field. The city being involved with the condo association to help satisfy the needs of the city and the association is not a unique situation – it's like Spinnaker.

- **Falkland Way** -- This property is just under an acre and is bisected by Bedford Way. A portion of this property may be suitable for development alone or in conjunction with the PHA, who owns the adjacent property and has additional square footage that could be combined with this to develop more housing. This site would not be suitable for a large development, but the opportunity to create some housing is present. There are no wetlands and utilities are accessible. PHA might be interested in adding more senior housing to its adjacent property. For discussion at next meeting when PHA attended. Otherwise not a viable standalone project? This site is in a dense neighborhood with community gardens for their greenspace. Historically affordable. Hesitate to put forward both of the Atlantic Heights sites.
- **134 Preble Way** -- This property is approximately 2.6 acres and contains an existing sports field, walking trails and woodlands on steep slopes. The ball field and existing trails are used frequently and are an amenity for the residents. Due to the steep slopes and shoreland buffer, the site is constrained and would likely be expensive to develop. Committee comment: remove from the list because the cost of developing it is going to be cost prohibitive plus this site also has a well-used ballfield. Reminding the city of its ownership and further recreational use.

Committee additions:

- **95 Mechanic Street** -- that's been reserved for expansion of the Mechanic Street Pump Station.
- **195 Greenleaf Avenue** -- deed restricted for recreation-only. Is there a way to adjust the deed restrictions to allow affordable housing? City staff noted that in addition to the deed restrictions Community Development Block Grant funds were used on that site and if the purpose were changed to something that doesn't qualify for a community development block grant, the city would have to repay those funds. Don't eliminate because this piece of property has attributes for workforce housing: the location has transportation and a variety of things. We're looking for properties over three acres, though this has massive amounts of wetland and wetland buffer right so there may be very little that's buildable. It's being leased to Operation Blessing but at some time some place it might have more of

a purpose for housing and we should investigate the deed restriction, CDBG pay back and wetlands now. But it also provides a significant recreational resource now to the people who live across the street in a really challenging part of town in terms of walking or biking anywhere. It serves as a community hub and recreational facility for a lot of our disadvantaged residents currently especially with its use by Operation Blessing.

- **305 Greenland Road** -- the front parcel is the new skate park The back parcel is being used right now as a laydown area for DPW projects. Once that's done it's intended as recreational space for a field the connection to the rail trail. Wondering about the 16 acres that's in the corner that is also municipally own at the end of Harvard Street and includes a drinking water well for the city of Portsmouth. It would be extremely difficult to build because of the narrowness of where you could actually build given the radius of the well. The site was a stump dump so using it for recreation is a little bit safer than trying to put people living there. Still, has potential for housing. It's an obligation of this committee to recognize every type of property that has potential and score it in some type of manner. We try to gauge what's the better value and recognize that housing is a is a strong consideration and how we weigh housing or recreational or other applicable use is something we should consider.

Last meeting the committee voted to take some action with regard to POHA. How was that taken forward to the council. Councilor Tabor's motion was that this committee brought forward a recommendation that the city manager look through the pre-qualified applications for housing from the RFQ and RFP and consider the pre-qualified developers for any future project. If we bring POHA on board they may help us look at sites and make a determination what would be a good site. We can make recommendations and the council can certainly act on those recommendations but before anything gets done it would be nice to have somebody who works in this area look at the sites and provide some input. Of note: the land use committee called on the PHA director for that and that's how we got down to the current list.

Consider any worries about a conflict we could address with Legal and then come back to this committee and say this would be a better appropriate route for a motion or recommendation under protection of the RSA because the city manager with permission from the city council is within her role to process any disposal or acquisition of land. We're making recommendations to the city manager and if there is something that we recommend that's not in compliance she's not going to do it.

Two motions: that the committee recommend to City Council that they investigate and explore options 1) at the city hall lower lot and 2) at 25 Granite Street if they were able to actually acquire more land from the condo association.

City Hall: 1 opposed, others voted in favor.

25 Granite Street: all voted in favor.

195 Greenleaf Avenue property and its deed restriction. Anderson made a motion to recommend staff and City Manager investigate any CDBG restrictions on 195 Greenleaf Ave. as well as the deed. Seconded. Voted 2 in favor, four opposed.

Motion to remove 195 Greenleaf Avenue from consideration. Seconded. Voted 4 in favor, two opposed.

Anderson made a motion to include 305 Greenland Road in the recommendations sent to City Council. Seconded. Discussion about using the same process of site walk and other evaluation before recommending to Council. Voted 1 in favor, 5 opposed. Site not eliminated from consideration, just not sent to council yet. Committee request for staff to report back at the next meeting regarding any intended city uses of that space.

II. 2025 Committee Goals

Councilor Tabor proposed a short list of some of the objectives and actions for the committee. Going over the original matrix of 50-60 items, is there anything the committee would like to be removed or added?

- talking about zoning changes to convert existing zones that don't allow housing to allow them (eg GNOD)
- increase the dollars available in the affordable housing trust
- convert unused city property to housing
- look at parking constraints -- stimulate more housing density by removing parking minimums
- Co-living -- review planning board draft policy and advise City Council on what recommended actions to take
- greater density in neighborhoods through gentle zoning amendments where we could look at
- ask city attorney Jane Ferrini for a small breakdown of some of the zoning bills in NH Legislature that the city Legislative Subcommittee is watching. Eg expand ADU possibilities to prevent arbitrary minimum lot sizes, allow more residential and commercial zones

Asked the committee members to review the matrix and send over their ideas for the next discussions, looking at what zoning ordinances to potentially trim down or adjust.

III. Public Comment

Gerald Duffy, 428 Pleasant Street in favor of the co-living draft ordinance and expanding the idea beyond downtown.

Petra Huda 280 South Street on a report on the impact of the elimination of federal affordable housing trust funds that PHA is relying on for the Sherburne project. POHA said they had outside

funding they were not dependent upon either the federal government or the city for funding. Second question on the matrix – spending any money that is not appropriated must go through the City Council as the city manager only has the authority that the City Council gives her.

Alice Swall, Woodbury, concerned about co-living dormitory situations not affordable housing for seniors or a single parent with a child.

Jim Smalley, 352 Kearsarge Way on having POHA provide input. Every day residents have to leave the city they love because we move too slowly and zoning is too restrictive.

Richard Smith on the urgency of housing. The people that grew up here can't afford to stay here. Maybe have legal, conservation staff at meetings in rotation. Provide transportation to come to meetings.

Next meeting: April 10, 2025.

Adjourned at 7:15 pm.