

City of Portsmouth
Housing Blue Ribbon Committee
School Board Conference Room

MEETING MINUTES

May 8, 2025

For the Zoom recording: https://youtu.be/HzLv1BBS_k?si=c4TjlQqEfVbQvLs4

Meeting Called to Order at 5:30 p.m.

I. Roll Call

Attending: Councilor John Tabor, co-chair; Councilor Beth Moreau, Erik Anderson, Mary Loane, John O’Leary, Andrew Samonas; Planning and Sustainability Director Peter Britz. Peter Stith. Absent: Tracy Kozak, Dagan Migirditch, Jennifer Stebbins Thomas, Megan Corsetti, Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley, Byron Matto.

II. Minutes for March 13, 2025 and April 10, 2025 tabled until next meeting. Requested simplification of April minutes before vote to approve.

III. City Council Referral – Re: Zoning Barriers

Discussion about the use of Committee comments on these items. Councilors Bagley and Cook asked for a list of zoning obstacles to development in Portsmouth. Planning Department generated the list and asks the Committee for recommendations on zoning impediments to housing to carry forward, to the Council and to the Master Plan process. Based on the assumption that more housing will produce more affordable housing, although not always guaranteed. The market still governs what gets built. Need to go project by project, neighborhood by neighborhood.

Which zones should be changed? How will those changes affect the quality of different areas. Master Plan process needs to understand the concerns and recommendations of the Housing Committee to offer concepts that help the consultants guide the creation of more housing. The Committee is one focus group there will be other public focus groups.

General considerations:

District	Lot Area Requirement	Total Parcels	Nonconforming Parcels for lot area	Percent Nonconforming
GRA	7500 sq. ft.	1198	609	51%
GRB	5000 sq. ft.	562	361	64%
GRC	3500 sq. ft.	336	126	38%
R	5 Acres	45	19	42%
SRA	1 Acre	292	100	34%
SRB	15,000 sq. ft.	2558	1630	64%

- 64% of GRB is non-conforming – can zoning modifications help change that, e.g. an apartment in a finished basement in a single family house.
- Combine GRA, GRB and GRC?
 - a. Parking
 - Changes to parking requirements currently need a Conditional Use Permit or variance that then goes to ZBA. Can moving parking review to the Site Planning Process reduce the encumbrance?
 - Maybe eliminate the parking minimum in certain zones?
 - “Thought leader” best practice may be for the developer to determine how many spaces the market for his project will demand. West End Yards example, developer later sought to include more parking
 - b. Density
 - Residential A & B only allows a house and an ADU per lot. If owners decide to tear down an existing house they are limited in the use of that lot for more housing as it then must go through non-conforming review. (Note: since changing ADU ordinance in 2023, demand has increased significantly, as hoped.)
 - Lot frontage criteria should be reviewed. Zoning requires 100’ but many are 50’.
 - Opportunity for assemblage ‘clusters’ when combining lots in a zone designated single family, e.g. West End Yards. Case by case depending on topography but maybe City could develop a book of templates showing what might work, neighborhood by neighborhood.
 - Eliminate single family zoning completely? “Comfort vs. adoption is iterative.” Part of the continuing conversation started in Master Planning.
 - Portsmouth allows some options – like individually-owned but connected housing not allowed anywhere else in NH.

To Gateway? Key= GA/MH (garden apartment/mobile home park) I (Industrial) OR (office research) GB (general business)						
	Property	Map/Lot	Size of Lot	Current Zone	Future Zone	Current Development
3	55 Heritage Ave	0267-0004-0000	2.40	I	GB	Warehouse building
4	52 Heritage Ave	0267-0011-0000	7.44	I	GB	Storage Unit/Car
5	100 Heritage Ave	0267-0011-00A2	6.70	I	GB	Storage Unit
6	Concordia Ave	0267-0016-0000	3.47	I	GB	Office type building
16	2075 Lafayette Rd	0268-0013-0000	30	MHB	G1 or G2	Office building
17	0400 Lafayette Rd	0268-0012-0000	25	MHB	G1 or G2	Warehouse
19	2 Marina Rd	0273-0006-0000	3.33	I	GB	Auto Repair
20	13 Marina Rd	0273-0006-0000	4.07	I	GB	Auto Repair
21	1 Marina Rd	0273-0007-0000	3.83	I	GB	Auto Repair
46	Commerce Way	0210-0001-0001	6.33	GB	GB	Office building
47	1414 Commerce Way	0210-0001-0011	5.36	GB	GB	Office building
48	1414 Commerce Way	0210-0001-0012	5.36	GB	GB	Office building
49	1414 Commerce Way	0210-0001-0000	6.67	GB	GB	Office building
50	1414 Commerce Way	0210-0001-0002	6.66	GB	GB	Office building
51	1414 Commerce Way	0210-0001-0003	5.45	GB	GB	Office building
52	1414 Commerce Way	0210-0001-0004	6.62	GB	GB	Office building
53	1414 Commerce Way	0210-0001-0005	5.36	GB	GB	Office building
54	1414 Commerce Way	0210-0001-0006	6.66	GB	GB	Office building
55	Shakespeare Drive	0217-0002-1471	2.57	GB	GB	Warehouse
57	1000 Main St	0210-0001-0001-B	1.66	GB	GB	Office bldg, land

Should all of Heritage Ave be something other than industrial??
Should west end be something other than industrial??

c. Map Changes

- Gateway discussions determined two categories: made changes to change Office/Research to Mixed Use along Commerce Way and outer Islington. Make that change to recommend considering opportunities to convert Industrial to Mixed Use
- Discussion of additional areas like Heritage Ave, Constitution Ave, etc. to convert to mixed use/Gateway.
- Does Portsmouth need 27 zoning districts? Simplify.
- Make Pease available for co-living.

d. Gateway Incentives

- RKG planning public input session, will invite Housing Committee
- What might encourage developers to take the incentive? Have to balance cost, market demand, construction requirements and process.

e. Focus Groups

- Small focus groups with developers – not public sessions – would provide insights. With 1 Planning staff and 1 Councilor to facilitate
- Recommend developers outside of the area who have done affordable projects what they need to reach their goal. Local developers tend to keep size just under incentive threshold to avoid “jumping through hoops.” Currently takes 2 years from proposal to approval so avoiding longer permitting process situations.
- Asked the Committee to develop questions such as
 1. What kind of project works (pro forma cash flow) that gets us more middle income housing?
 2. What would we need to change in zoning to get more of these?
 3. How would zoning have to change to make it easier for larger apartment projects (e.g. 100 units)
- Permitting: how long do you anticipate permitting to take? Where are inefficiencies?
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f. Other

- How does the building inspection process impede?
- How can Portsmouth get the neighboring communities who benefit from City services to engage in making affordable housing parcels available for mutually-beneficial projects? Relying on adjustments in State law regarding density.
- Discussed the 10-15% set-aside quotas for affordable housing. What works: at 15% got no applications; at 10% getting a few.

IV. Development Update

Correcting pipeline data from RKG vs. Planning Department: projects permitted v. started v. completed.

V. Public Comment – none.

Adjourned 7:05 pm.

Next meeting June 12, 2025 at 5:30 pm.