

City of Portsmouth
Housing Blue Ribbon Committee
City Hall Conference Room A

MEETING MINUTES

August 14, 2025

For the Zoom recording: <https://www.youtube.com/live/oHsu99wKhOQ>

Meeting Called to Order at 5:30 pm.

I. Roll Call

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

II. **Minutes:** June 12, 2025 minutes approved with correction of “Mark Stebbins” to “Mark McNabb.”

III. **Chairman’s Remarks** – Committee agenda covers:

- a. Housing Trust Fund – John O’Leary asked that his request on a broader Trust Fund topic be taken up and the Committee agreed to do so.
- b. Review of the status of the Sherburne Project. Craig Welch from PHA was unable to attend tonight so suggest scheduling him for the Sep 11 meeting (later agreement to schedule him for October 9 meeting due to Committee conflicts on Sep 11). Both O’Leary and Erik Anderson asked for discussion on Sherburne at this meeting, without Craig Welch participation. See item V, below.

IV. **Housing Trust Fund and request from Arts and Culture Committee** – Jeffrey Cooper and Karen Rosaria from the Portsmouth Arts and Culture Commission asked if the Committee might support the creation of artists’ live/work studio space, particularly in the development of Sherburne School. PHA had proposed an option with 8 live/work studio units in Sherburne as well as the option of regular apartments to maximize density in the space.

The Commission is charged with implementing the new Cultural Plan in which live/work studios are a priority. The Commission has created a Collaborations & Resources subgroup that is researching how Portsmouth might create affordable workforce housing for artists and has looked at examples in New England including NH, such as ArtSpace, a nationwide consultant that helps municipalities consider artist overlay districts. The Commission plans a report to City Council on October 20.

Cooper and Rosaria also asked if the Housing Trust Fund might be a vehicle for donations for artist live/work studios. Deputy City Attorney McCourt has advised the

creation of a separate Artist Housing Trust Fund as the language for the existing Housing Fund 1) does not reference artists and may restrict the Trustees of the Trust Funds from accepting or applying funds exclusively for that use and 2) holds the City to strict income qualifications and goals for its use as approved by City Council and the NH Attorney General. Cooper noted that because the Commission is strictly precluded from any type of fundraising it would be difficult to fund or promote an Artist Housing Trust Fund. Migirditch suggested that the Commission might enlist the support of a Portsmouth arts organization to collaborate on a project such as workforce housing as originally intended at 3S Artspace.

O’Leary and Anderson expressed concern about the Commission’s request of the Committee and asked for more focus. Matto asked the Commission to provide a definition of an artist overlay district and examples of incentives the Committee might support creating.

- V. **Sherburne Update:** Discussion about the phasing PHA. TAC and Planning Board materials are considering one project. However, PHA has applied for tax credit funding for just Phase 1 of the new “L” building with 90 units. That application decision is due Dec 11, 2025 then PHA plans a second tax application for the second building with 27 units and the 8 units in a renovated Sherburne School.
- a. Committee members Anderson and O’Leary are concerned that the Sherburne portion will never be completed and are worried about maintenance on the school for the next 4+ years.
 - b. Migirditch noted that the PHA proposal has included phasing from the start. PHA is mission-driven not profit-driven and have an obligation not to stop in the middle. He recommended that the Committee trust the process that is years into execution and go stage by stage.
 - c. Peter Britz noted that while private developers can’t phase their projects, those involving municipal property can do so and that PHA has defined two discrete projects.
 - d. Planning Manager Stith noted the land use agreement includes maintenance by PHA and that the City will not be turning the property over to PHA until after the December financing determination is made.
 - e. In the context of the delayed timing to apply for tax credits for each of the phases, the request that the City waive fees and possible utility cost items -- O’Leary asked that Craig Welch report on any other possible hiccups that might develop so that the Committee can ask the appropriate questions to keep the process transparent.
- VI. **Housing Trust Fund**
- a. Councilor Moreau noted that the Housing Trust Fund currently contains the \$500,000 from the City/Kane settlement.

- b. O’Leary made the suggestion that the City, having received no interest from surrounding towns in providing land for developing workforce housing be invited to donate funds to the Housing Trust Fund,
 - i. Samonas suggested that Rockingham Planning Commission might be a better source for that ask.
 - ii. Migirditch suggested soliciting private enterprise who need workforce housing to keep their employees.

VII. Upper Valley Low Interest Loan Program [Detailed starting on page 17 in Committee packet:

https://files.portsmouthnh.gov/agendas/2025/Housing+Committee/Meeting_Packet.pdf]

- a. Committee members continue discussions with local financial institutions such as Piscataqua Savings and Service Credit Union who see the need and want to participate for the tax credits for community investment and concern. Evernorth is statewide. Next step is to create a local steering committee.

VIII. RKG Followup

- a. Peter Stith/Peter Britz reported that RKG is preparing a report due in the next couple of months with more detail than the July 15 rollout, incorporating feedback and offering specific recommendations for possible zoning ordinance changes.
- b. Existing incentive program may have been too ambitious and that using a basis of the smaller number of affordable units might produce fewer units per development but more developments for a net of more affordable units.

IX. Future meeting topics: parking minimums as a constraint to housing

- a. Master Plan – takes time; are there items on the list the Committee reported to Council that can be acted on more quickly, in the next 6-12 months, given that this Blue Ribbon Committee will sunset at the end of this Council’s term?
- b. Parking requirements for 7+ units now part of site plan review. What are the requirements and does the RSA allow redefinition for 7 units or fewer?
- c. What other adjustments does Portsmouth need to make due to recent legislation, eg 1 parking space per unit vs. 1.3 spaces and ADU ‘by right.’
- d. Councilor Moreau recommended Committee members review 79E
- e. Also recommended Committee members attend the Sep 15 Master Plan public meeting with the consultant at the Library.
- f. Matto suggested getting more feedback from property owners and how the City might ease restrictions – empowering them in a discussion on easing burdens might be a ramp to the density discussion.
- g. Also consider a case study of the property on Ocean Road that might be multiple units – what are the restrictions preventing that?

X. Public Comment

- a. Gerry Duffy, commented on the Housing Advocates recommendations for quick fixes and creative solutions to recommend to Planning and the Council. [Memo starting on page 9 in Committee packet:
https://files.portsmouthnh.gov/agendas/2025/Housing+Committee/Meeting_Packet.pdf]9]
- b. Robin Schnell – An advocate for the past 4 years for those living rough or in their cars. Don't forget the homeless and programs like South Church shower program and other ideas from Homes For All.
- c. Jim Smalley – Developers will calibrate to the market more effectively than government solutions. Simplify the process – New Rochelle NY as a model. Allowing more flexibility will increase the supply.
- d. Ton Nies – Need effective, practical solutions. Be realistic and take advantage of the Master Planning process.

Adjourned at 7:17 pm.

Next meeting: September 11 at 5:30 pm.