

FINAL

**HOUSING TASK FORCE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Remote Via Microsoft Teams
LebanonNH.gov/Live
Monday, December 16, 2024
8:15AM**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Tim McNamara, Ellen Smith Ahern, John D'Entremont, Ryan Dube, Andrew Faunce (remote), Tia Winter

MEMBERS ABSENT: Susan Almy, David Duncan

STAFF PRESENT: Catheryn Hembree, Tracy Hutchins, City Manager Designee

1. CALL TO ORDER – Meeting was called to order at 8:21AM by Mayor McNamara.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. Andrew Faunce MOVED to approve November 18, 2024 Minutes as amended. The motion was Seconded by Mr. John Dentremont.

Amendments:

Susan Almy was absent from the meeting.

** The MOTION was approved (7-0)*

3. STUDY ITEMS:

A. Building Official - Minimum Housing Standards

Mr. Leigh Hays, Chief Building Official and Health Officer role, came to discuss State minimum housing standards, under Title III, Chapter 48-A. His department gets the complaints about buildings and investigates only these specific complaints in his role as a safety officer. He applies the minimum standards and can only enforce the health officer capacity of his roles. If he sees other issues or violations, he sites these under other Item numbers, such as Item 3 for electrical violations. He elaborated about how things work and the fact he brings in others as needed, such as the Lebanon Fire Department.

Mr. Faunce asked which violations he sees most frequently, and he said currently heating issues and ongoing roach infestations. He has limited authority within owner-occupied single-family homes. In these cases, he might try to pull in other partner agencies to help.

B. Continued Discussion of the Housing Master Plan Chapter

Mayor McNamara recently read the 2012 version and realized they need to have and utilize the 2020 census data, utilizing the same format as 2010. It would also be helpful to have a spreadsheet with both 2010 and 2020 data on it, side by side, along with any updated information since 2020, so that they continue to see the trends.

Mayor McNamara said that the City is below 1% vacancy rate now. It was agreed that this task force needs historical data wherever possible, and this information over a span of time can also provide trending insights as they prepare a Master Plan 2.

Ms. Almy said suggested Jim Kenyan from the newspaper could provide some history on homelessness, but it would need to be factual to be relevant. Mayor McNamara suggested The Haven as another source as well.

Mark Farnham, Ward 2, (virtual) said the Police Dept used to keep rough numbers in their logbooks so these records could be another source of historical information.

Mayor McNamara noted the key takeaway is that they need a more thorough discussion of the homelessness situation, and expounding on trend data for housing supply helps, including that of new home construction, multi family home apartment construction, etc., as they prepare their Master Plan 2. This could be a guide for them, utilizing year to year as opposed to decade to decade.

Mr. Faunce provided the names of other vetted sources for data including New Hampshire State Housing Finance Authority and the American Community Survey (ACS). This is the same group that conducts the census. They conduct these annually and their data point on housing is extensive.

Mr. Faunce will get the ACS report out to this task force, in advance of their January meeting.

Two other considerations posed by Mr. Farnham are the inventory of unbuilt lots on City services, as well as the capacities of water and sewer needing to be considered and how much room the City has for more housing within the current context of the existing infrastructure. The goal is *intelligent infill*. Ms. Almy said that the Conservation Commission has documentation about properties that could prove useful in this matter.

A routine commute is up to about ½ hour, before it is considered a burden, so if this can be improved, you have improved the housing situation for Lebanon. This too needs to be a consideration in their new Master Plan 2.

Mr. Faunce would like to encourage our neighbors (e.g. Hanover) as well as regional cooperation around meeting the housing needs and likewise encourage housing considerations by our key employers such as DHMC and Dartmouth College. And the Master Plan 2 overall needs to tackle the issue of sustainability, addressing the overall rise in population, standard of living, expectations, waste generation, overall consumption, etc.

Mayor McNamara next shared some history about a prior project, Rivercrest Project in Hanover. There was a plan for 234 housing units (multi family, duplexes, et.), it was ready to go, but then got declined by the trustees due to the recession in 2008. Nothing has happened there since then and it is still sitting completely unutilized. He is hopeful it will be resurrected. This type of project would positively impact the area and have an enormous positive impact on housing.

He also shared his concerns about the “missing middle” and cited Lebanon Housing Authority and Twin Pines as examples of what can be done with subsidized housing. The latter is a small-scale effort to utilize municipally owned property, one 5-unit cluster of cottages on Barrow Street that will be sold at cost, and have a restriction on resales, This has been a successful model nationally. The hope is for this to serve as a model for other property owners and builders.

Between skyrocketing construction costs, limited construction workers, etc. this is a way to move the market some now, and perhaps the market will catch up. Demand is up, but since costs are up as well, this impacts supply. The new Master Plan 2 needs to address increasing costs of construction and the impact on supply.

Ms. Almy stated her concern about us losing our middle in Lebanon, since many are moving to neighboring areas, and seniors to both North and South Carolina. She is encouraged about the new initiative housing plan that focuses on infill and goes through the planning board faster. Ms. Almy said she is pushing this at the State level.

Mr. Hayes came here from Claremont, NH (there since 2009) and has been here a few months. He thinks Lebanon has a lot more going on with construction than Claremont, but the trends of higher property taxes, people moving away, etc., is the same in Claremont as in Lebanon. Vacancy rates, illegal rentals, as well as homelessness also appear to be similar. He commented that since property values are higher in Lebanon, builders would have more profit margin in Lebanon than in Claremont. Both cities have similar trajectories though, including vacancy rates around COVID-19.

The State of New Hampshire has started a builders' association and had their first meeting in November. Mr. Dube suggested they have a stakeholder(s) in this group, to help them with their efforts and to gain better understanding. They need to get some meeting summaries or reports, and so this task force will reach out to the Housing Finance Authority. Mayor McNamara suggested they invite them to come speak to this Lebanon Housing Task Force and he will get this information to Catheryn Hembree so that she can invite them.

Lebanon is receiving a second Champions Housing Award, BEA and is being recognized as using what tools we have available to expand our housing stock. This recognition gets us to the head of the line for grant money and there are four (4) specific programs we can be considered for, and it gets us to the head of the line. This brings funds back into the system so that it can be revenue neutral, rather than on the backs of taxpayers. Mayor McNamara is going to Concord to receive this award.

A policy question for this task force is how best to help people become homeowners. Most construction projects are rentals, as opposed to single family homes. A recent example is the Prospect Street project, which are small single-family homes that will be rented out. Most of the stock coming in is for rentals, not homes. This needs to be a policy issue given consideration for the new Master Plan.

Mayor McNamara observed that while home values go up, market rentals are going up even more. This too needs to be part of their discussion in their Master Plan 2. New Hampshire does not have multiple tax rates. There is only one tax rate for all properties, residential, commercial, industrial, etc. Mayor McNamara said it could be timely to bring this topic up again.

There is growing sentiment in the State that perhaps was non-existent 20 years ago. This task force needs to address this, such as external factors with people, hospitable area, climate refugees, unsafe rental conditions, the need to address remote workers versus where they live, short term rentals, (no way to evaluate these except antidotal, many are unsafe and the landlord is not telling the City so perhaps no fire inspections, enforcement concerns, reactionary, complaint driven due to staffing limitations, permitted only (they do not see the non-permitted ones). While this is a concern, it is not at the same level of other areas, due to the current low number of units involved.

Another resource for accurate housing information would be the Taxing Authority.

It was agreed that their Master Plan 2 will need to check off what they have achieved (current outcomes) along with new goals.

C. Discussion Re: Upcoming goals for the January meeting with consultants

The January meeting will be their initial conversation with Steve Whitman, a Plymouth, New Hampshire consultant recommended by Tim Corman. Lebanon residents can tell him what is important. It was agreed to get Mr. Whitman the former Master Plan, in advance of the January meeting, where they want to take this, etc. The scope is still open, but the core will be statistical background (all in the packet) and outlines what the next 18 months will encompass. He will work for the task force

Catheryn will look up the consultants' notes for the task force to review.

Mr. Farnham (virtual) suggested a non-binding referendum question "do they (residents) favor highly density housing?"

The City is trying another approach to get feedback, a DHMC zoning public engagement session as 7:30 AM Wednesday mornings for employees to participate and educate them on. The public wants to understand. From the two meetings thus far, public feedback has been positive.

Mayor McNamara suggested they would need to provide people some background information to give property owners perspective since it is a complicated situation and ask. This task force needs to find a way to present this to residents in a way that they fully understand and not be put off by it. This will be a "municipal" election, so the turnout tends to be a bit skewed compared to general elections.

Catheryn said it will be up for vote in March 2025, to increase density, cut lot size, reduce setbacks, etc. The writing of exactly what will appear on the ballot will need to be thoughtful. Public feedback so far has been positive based on neighborhood sessions.

4. OTHER BUSINESS:

5. ADJOURNMENT:

Ms. Susan Almy *MOVED* for adjournment.

Seconded by Mr. Andrew Faunce.

****The MOTION was approved 8-0***

The meeting was adjourned at 9:46AM

Respectfully submitted,
Cinda Mersel
Recording Secretary