

FINAL

**LEBANON HOUSING TASK FORCE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Council Chambers City Hall or
Remote Via Microsoft Teams
LebanonNH.gov/Live
Monday, February 9, 2026
8:15 AM**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tim McNamara, Ryan Dube, Andrew Faunce, Vice Chair, joined remotely 8:23AM), Sarah Riley (joined remotely, 8:35AM approx.) Ellen Smith Ahern, Tia Winter

MEMBERS ABSENT: John D'Entremont, Dave Duncan (Alt.),

STAFF PRESENT: Nathan Reichert, Director, Planning & Development,
Cathryn Hembree, Associate Planner, Planning & Development

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Tim McNamara, Chair, started the meeting at 8:15 AM.

Mr. Nate Reichert read the Preamble.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. December 15, 2025

Amendments:

Add: Tia Winter under Members Absent

Pg. 3, line 22, change Medical Center to **College** (Dartmouth)

Pg. 4, Line 12, **remove** "lower roofline housing"

Pg. 5, Line 39, change sentence to: **along with** Manchester, Concord, Portsmouth, and Keene **communities**

There was **no quorum** for the number of Housing TF members who **attended the December 15, 2025** meeting, therefore a motion and vote will take place at the March 16, 2026 Housing Task Force meeting.

3. STUDY ITEMS:

A. Housing Action Items Brainstorm Discussion

Chair McNamara provided an update of the City Council meeting that took place last week. A full house was in attendance, representing many from the business and financial community as well as many Lebanon residents. There was a great amount of dissatisfaction expressed by the residents, regarding the proposed rezoning to GC-1, and with what they felt were the unanticipated negative consequences of this, both fiscal (water, sewer, landfill, roadway maintenance) that would occur with residential development

and also, that it might have an adverse impact on the business community. Many in the business community were in favor of GC-1, including Dartmouth Medical, Mascoma Bank, and Hypertherm, to name a few.

There is a real dichotomy between the business community and residents. The City Council decided to take a step back to look at this in a broader scale and learn what the people want to see in Lebanon, including topics such as density, and where they want to see it. Chair McNamara thinks this will get flushed out over the next two months, and he wants to have the Housing TF also talk today about what role they should play in this initiative.

He said that this Housing TF sunsets in about six months, and so a key focus will be how to productively spend these 6 months to hopefully bring the community together on a shared vision for the City as a whole.

He just reviewed the RKG Fiscal Impact Analysis and Housing Market Analysis, that they got back in late 2025. He again requested the final version of these and then wants to get them posted on the City's website. He asked all TF members to review these 3 documents over the next week, including Living in Lebanon and provide their feedback and recommended changes, modifications and/or corrections they think need to be made and get them to the Planning office, who will in turn bring those changes back to this TF at their March meeting.

Ms. Ellen Smith Ahern remembered that there were a lot of concerns voiced about these reports and Mr. Ryan Dube added that he had given 7+ pages of specific feedback so he would like to see an updated version that incorporates this information as appropriate. The only update he has seen so far were disclaimers. There was some discrepancy in the RKG report, for example, the *vacancy rate*, and the RKG report needed some corrections or clarifications on some of their information. The City will rely on this information so it needs to be accurate and consistent.

This document could be a good marketing tool for future developers, do it is imperative that it be accurate,

Another tool that could be useful is the significant survey that was done in West Lebanon, about 3-4 years ago. And the raw survey data and summarization would be helpful utilizing all of the information that this Housing TF collected from residents over the past several months.

Chair McNamara's goal as a Counselor is to try to bring the business community and the residents together, and see,

What do they agree on?

What do they disagree on?

He does not want to see this devolve into an *us versus them* discussion. **Everyone needs to be pulling in the same traces, towards the common goal for Lebanon. Chair McNamara stated at the City Council meeting, that they can ask for anything they want, but if we are not doing things that support our City's economy, we are not going to have the Lebanon that we all want anyway.**

Lebanon's economy is largely dependent on the healthcare sector and has been since the hospital came here in 1991. Retail and manufacturing come in 2nd and 3rd. Some of the conversation that took place was hospital centric, with a mindset of some of "it's your problem so you solve it". This approach is not helpful and will not have the positive result that could happen with *residents and businesses pulling together*. Our economy and the City's success depend on this.

Chair McNamara disclosed that he was recently appointed to the Alice Peck Day Board of Trustees, so he is starting to learn more about that as well.

An interesting fact is that approximately half of Lebanon residents actually work in Lebanon, which is a much higher number than was anticipated prior to the study.

Mr. Nate Reichert said that the West Lebanon survey is posted on the City's site. Also, there is the Northern Lebanon Plan which provides substantial background data.

Vice Chair Andrew Faunce will be on the City Council for Ward 1, running uncontested. He said that he attended the recent City Council meeting remotely, and he thinks that one of the things that are missing and was wanted was an overall vision of how the City is to develop, and specifically an updated Master Plan Chapter, including land use. He thinks the City was missing a broader context that was referenceable of what exactly was being proposed. He suggested that this Housing Task Force along with the Planning office focus some attention on this. He agrees that the documents referenced in this meeting today will all be very useful.

Mr. Dube reminded them that the survey raw data provided a diversity of viewpoints, including employees saying they have the same housing issues as others, then you have people blaming the hospital and scapegoating. But there was also a lot of consensus on numerous issues, those that many care about.

He asked if there is a way for them to find common ground, because knowing this could inform their work and it could become much more efficient moving forward with a vision for Lebanon. Mr. Reichert noted that some are posturing right now since there is a local election here on March 10, 2026. Once that is behind, whoever prevails will be those that move forward getting the work done. Three seats on the City Council will definitely turn over March 10th, possibly five, or in other words a majority. These tools from this Housing Task Force can help with peoples' understanding of the visions being discussed.

Next, they started the Brainstorm Discussion and turned this over to Mr. Steve Whitman. He said that he has only received draft action items from Vice Chair Faunce. He asked other TF members for their actions they think really should be driving the writing of the Housing Chapter.

Ms. Smith Ahern said that she and Ms. Sarah Riley had a conversation and shared their ideas such as incentivizing houses, duplexes, cottage clusters, etc. and focus the larger apartment complexes where some already exists. A focus for them was not just new building but also a focus on current housing and how they can improve the quality of these. Also, possibly making it easier for seniors to downsize, and increase shared housing opportunities, How can the City encourage employers (including mid to smaller ones) to work together for cooperative approaches to *improve already existing housing*. She cited a neighbor whose home is much too big for her. Perhaps a local employer does work on that home, and it gets built out to become housing for 2-3 households. There needs to be a way to make it easier for residents to make these changes; address zoning so that the City can work on a workable, cooperative structure. Another goal is vital, active, community centered neighborhoods.

Chair McNamara added for consideration the redevelopment of existing housing as a way to both increase stock and improve the quality.

Mr. Dube reiterated the importance of a *true minimum standards ordinance in the City of Lebanon*. Under the section of what they want to regulate, restrict or otherwise modify, they can have an impact on fixing this. He thinks this would benefit Lebanon not only in terms of the quality of the housing, but in terms of

getting a *standardized set of rules* that everybody is following and that *can be enforced* within the City of Lebanon.

Ms. Catheryn Hembree said that she recently talked with a local modular home company, and they are willing to work with local employers and offer them a discount for purchasing multiple homes.

Ms. Smith Ahern posed that they take a cooperative or nonprofit approach and consider buying up local lands and properties, versus continuing to allow the land grabs from outside developers.

Chair McNamara agreed that anything that encourages local ownership is a plus, acknowledging that for some projects, you have to have a large outside investor.

Mr. Dube suggested the possibility of many local businesses working together as a development group (amalgamation of several LLCs) so that they pull their resources (like outside investors are doing), to initiate building new housing in Lebanon. This idea can also work for the City where they can access money through the housing authorities or their own municipal tax-exempt status and they could then be eligible for renewal funding over the course of 20 years, So for example, that original investment of \$250,000 could bring back \$10 million of masked funds for the community by the federal government. These are the types of opportunities that you cannot get without the initial investment. There is local opportunity for our City and for our local businesses/investors.

This could also provide a degree of control on how projects on City land develop and align with our vision.

Chair McNamara said that the City is not distinct from the taxpayers and so taxpayer approval is needed. The opportunity is to bring people along and show taxpayers the benefits from the taxpayer standpoint. This is not simply the City subsidizing as the City has been accused of in the past.

There is a lot of work needed to get to that point, and he is aware of a movement of local businesses to get together with a common fund and he thinks Mascoma Bank is playing a critical role in this initiative.

Ms. Smith Ahern reiterated that mixed housing and trying to find common ground will be a much more inclusive approach for the future of Lebanon. Mr. Dube posed the idea of incentivizing developers to include unit mixes as well as income mix for any new developments, so that desirable housing becomes more accessible to more people. Currently there is an inordinate amount of 0 and 1-bedroom apartments, yet many people are demanding family style housing.

He cited the example of the Romano Circle development, which is one of the very few affordable 2-, 3-, and 4-bedroom complexes. *There is a waiting list of more than 400 families, so the demand is clearly massive for those types of units.*

Ms. Catheryn Hembree provided some updated pipeline numbers completed by Mr. Tim Corwin, Deputy Director, Planning & Development as follows:
Currently in the pipeline, there are 354 studios and 1-bedrooms, 124 2-bedroom pluses, and 600 unknown units. Two other locations mentioned were River Park and The Brickyard. She said that out of the hundreds of units she just cited, only about 80 are affordable (no definition provided).

Mr. Nate Reichert noted that one of the issues in New Hampshire is that State law does not allow the City to mandate, rather the City needs to utilize incentive-based programs.

Chair McNamara said the preference is for local control (New Hampshire) for a more acceptable “product”. He was surprised to see that many single homes are now owned by outside investors, many in Connecticut., so a focus on local, New Hampshire ownership/control is a goal.

Mr. Dube said that looking at just the last 15 years, 85% of the change of ownership for affordable rentals have gone to larger, out-of-state investors; this is the trend.

We are missing the “financial middle”, resulting in a big hole that needs filled, for those not qualifying for subsidized housing, but not able to spend whatever they want to find appropriate housing. Many of these are rent burdened because they make too much to qualify for any housing subsidies (singles \$23,000 or less, couples \$35,000 or less annual income), but not enough to reasonably afford the high rent costs here.

Ms. Tia Winter said that many families are forced to move out of Lebanon, as they incur substantial rent increases. This puts financial pressures on the School District. She said ideally people setting rent prices or housing prices would actually care about who is here and who is staying here, because of this.

To her, it also feels more like a local control issue.

There will be a warrant article in the March 10 election that would limit the initiatives that Lebanon is working towards, if it gets passed. Lebanon School District’s warrant article is that they will choose to be an open enrollment school to gain control of that. But when they get to set the rates, what they are proposing is to accept 1% of students (additional) and they will send out 0% of students. The additional 1% will be taken into Mount Lebanon which is the school in the area that has the space.

The increase in enrollment in Lebanon specifically needs to be included in the Housing Task Force initiative. The New Hampshire numbers are for statewide. Lebanon is the number 2 high school in the State, second only to a private charter school who is very selective with their students. *This reinforces the need for local control and ownership.* Currently, Lebanon will take in 1% into Mount Lebanon Elementary School, if allowed to remain as open enrollment.

Part of the City of Lebanon’s warrant article is taking care of your neighbor.

Concord is proposing that local school districts would not be able to set these enrollment limits, so for now it is wait and see what happens there. Concord is also trying to take away all local control of zoning by towns, so it would eliminate all good zoning, that contributes to home valuations. Thoughtful zoning has proven beneficial for those Cities that utilize it.

Mr. Reichert reiterated that the quality and desire of local schools positively impacts home values in Lebanon.

Vice Chair Andrew Faunce said that anything the City of Lebanon can do to encourage local control would be well received by residents, since he is seeing a huge appetite for this. He suggests we “make it happen ourselves” and he thinks this will resonate well with our neighbors and is a more sustainable approach.

Invest NH was cited as a possible resource for this. Now is the time for all those who are concerned to become part of the process and the solution.

Mr. Whitman again asked the Task Force members to provide the Planning Dept. with each of their “Action List” within the next week so that they can create a master set, and review that with the staff

during the next two weeks and then put those actions together into a matrix. Then together they can use this working document to make their edits and decide on which actions to keep.

Mr. Whitman would like to attend the March 16th Housing Task Force meeting in person. He's concerned about the completion of their Master Chapter so that needs to be their focus moving forward.

Lastly, aside from Ryan's document, any specific feedback concerning the information provided by RKG, he's asking that TF members get those completed and submitted now. Chair McNamara stressed the importance of the in-depth information provided by RKG, and so they need to be sure all information is consistent and accurate.

Mr. Reichert said that there are some who are positioning themselves on the opposite side of this discussion and could immediately discount the value of the reports that have been done and offered by this Housing Task Force. Since they don't agree ideologically, they simply dismiss valuable information. We need to create a volume of truth on what is happening in the City of Lebanon, and this can help educate and bring them along, rather than ignore, or cherry pick what they choose.

This Task Force will sunset July 2026. It was agreed that they will start having 2 meetings each month. They want to have a Master Chapter draft by May and allow time for necessary edits. They will work towards the July 2026 end date.

Chair McNamara ask Vice Chair Faunce about Housing Chapter versus Land Use Chapter, and how he and other Council members see these two coming together. Vice Chair Faunce said that from a logistical standpoint, the only requirements are vision and land use, and he thinks they can be updated on a more regular basis. It is to be understood that there will be some conflicts amongst perspectives that are presented in those offerings, and he thinks some focus should be given to this. He said this responsibility will need to be given to those who have this responsibility moving forward.

Mr. Reichert added Tim Corwin and staff are trying to get a central core of people thinking about the updates and whether the one-off updates are the best strategy or perhaps a larger revision of the Master Plan; that decision has not yet been made and it will require a sizeable financial commitment in order to do a true Master Plan update. Work continues on this initiative with no decisions made yet.

Chair McNamara said that they will need to be extremely sensitive to both these Chapters in what they have Mr. Whitman's group prepare for the Housing Chapter, because it will be part of this bigger discussion on Land Use.

Mr. Reichert noted that they have a contract with Urban Land Institute, that starts after this Housing Task Force ends, to do some work things relative to the implementation of the Housing Master Plan and some things they can do to adopt some practical boots on the ground. This is a logical progression of the work that has been done over the past 3-4 years. A unified vision for the community amongst the Housing Task Force members would be helpful in organizing decision making and policy making.

The Master Plan Chapter (Final) needs to be delivered by July 1, 2026.

Future Housing Task Force dates discussed (tentative):

April 6, April 13

May 4, May 18

June 1, June 15

4. OTHER BUSINESS:

Mr. Dube reported that they finally have a federal housing budget in for the US Congress for fiscal year 2026. Public Housing operating fund increased, capital fund decreased, which means there is less likely to be new public housing developments moving into the area. Regarding rental assistance, there are tenant-based and project-based programs that saw inflationary adjustments, which is much better than was expected. CDBG (Community Development Block Grants) was not entirely eliminated; they saw cuts. These are critical for the municipalities in the area. HOME, a program for the modification of existing homes and development of energy efficiency in new homes, was entirely eliminated. He thinks some of that funding got rolled into other programs that might be available to New Hampshire as a State, and if so, it would be a timely idea to get Lebanon in line for some of those funds. Overall, it was a much better than anticipated budget.

5. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

- A. February Planning Board Work Session Housing Chapter Discussion

6. ADJOURNMENT:

*Ms. Ellen Smith Ahern MOVED for adjournment
Seconded by Ms. Tia Winter*

**The Vote on the MOTION was approved (4-0)*

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 AM

Respectfully submitted,
Cinda Mersel
Recording Secretary