

FINAL

**LEBANON HOUSING TASK FORCE
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
Remote Via Microsoft Teams
LebanonNH.gov/Live
Monday March 16, 2026
8:15AM**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tim McNamara, Andrew Faunce, Vice Chair,
Ryan Dube, Sarah Riley, 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 8:15AM.

Ms. Catheryn Hembree read the Preamble.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. December 15, 2026

*Vice Chair Andrew Faunce MOVED to approve the December 15, 2025 minutes as amended.
Seconded by Mr. Ryan Dube*

**The MOTION was approved (4-0)*

B. January 29, 2026

*Vice Chair Andrew Faunce MOVED to approve the December 15, 2025 minutes as amended.
Seconded by Mr. Ryan Dube*

**The MOTION was approved (4-0)*

C. February 9, 2026

*Ms. Ellen Smith Ahern MOVED to approved the January 29, 2026 minutes as amended.
Seconded by Vice Chair Andrew Faunce*

**The MOTION was approved (5-0)*

3. STUDY ITEMS:

A. Housing Chapter Discussion

Mr. Steve Whitman, Resilience Planning & Design, attended this meeting in person to discuss the fiscal analysis and the housing impact market analysis. Many members of this Housing Task Force submitted their comments on these two documents and Mr. Whitman had agreed to provide an update. They've incorporated all input except for Chair McNamara's which they will work on. RKG asked to push back on though, from a budget perspective is if they were to change all the fiscal year to 2026, they would in all likelihood need more of a budget. They don't believe that the outcome is going to be any different though, if they were to go through and vet all the documents again.

The biggest concern is the vacancy data, and Mr. Whitman said if there was a better source of data, they would use it. Mr. Dube said his concern is that 2 different sources were used for this data, both with major problems, and yet this information has yet to be reconciled.

The vacancy rate in New Hampshire, as well as Lebanon, is realistically approximately 2% to 4%, or lower. It was acknowledged that the data is difficult to get; while further examination is preferred, given they are more than a year into this process, and there is not a gold standard data source, it was agreed that they will state disclaimers and acknowledge discrepancies, where needed with this information. Also, Mr. Whitman said that he will work with RKG (Eric and Allison), to try to improve on this or rectify it, possibly citing a more realistic rate.

The formatting and layout of this needs to flow better, and also, they need to provide interpretative language. They will also add the BEA Study (Business and Economic Affairs). This is a recent and good study of key housing topics and compares multiple counties and multiple municipalities within New Hampshire. Ms. Hembree will be working on this document (from RKG) so that it is easier to interpret.

Mr. Dube added that we should be able to align the BEA data with the Lebanon pipeline data and our actual permitting. Our own assessment data needs to be accurate. All the data needs to link together and simply have the most accurate data for a given point in time. Chair McNamara said that we can add something to the effect of "since this report was issued, these things have changed" or whatever is appropriate to note more recent available information. Mr. Whitman said that they will work with Planning and RKG, and double check all key data that is being included in the Housing Chapter.

Mr. Reichert added that Mr. Tim Corwin, Deputy Director, Planning and Development, has an accurate spreadsheet going back to 2004 so he and Ms. Hembree will utilize this data as well.

Mr. Whitman said that the information the TF gave was very helpful and resulted in some changes. Suggested additions that will strengthen the proposed actions include:

- Support for unhoused residents
- Emergency shelter assistance for homeowners
- Engaged strengthening housing rehabilitation programs
- Expanding employer supported housing initiatives (incl. idea of non-profit entity)
- Clarifying incentives to occupy vacant housing

Clarifying the term "missing middle"; explaining and showing what it means (or not using it) is also in order. This is a huge education opportunity and can be addressed in the Chapter.

Mr. Dube asked if this is the structure that they want to use. He suggested that the document open with the topics that are on the minds of most people, such as housing affordability to start. The Chapter should be in a logical, easy to follow format, with the key housing issues for Lebanon being laid out in a prioritized order. Bold headings make sense and possibly use their survey data and action lists.

Mr. Whitman suggested they move on to complete a Housing Chapter, and that in doing so, they might find more actions to include in this Chapter. Chair McNamara said that he thinks the document should start with the concerns and the goals and then follow with everything else. The average viewer will go to the bullet points and by starting with concrete concerns and goals, the reader will see that this Housing Task Force has understood what the public has been saying.

For example, it needs to be stated that there is a consensus and concern that the City has overbuilt studios and one bedroom apartments; both residents and some businesses agree on this and they do not want more large apartment complexes. This is not what they see as Lebanon's future.

Mr. Whitman added that actions will be organized in a matrix, and they can lead with the prioritized 4-6 or whatever the number of key topics/actions they want to lead with.

Mr. Dube specifically stated (in his comments to the consultants) that one action item is to incentivize or encourage the creation of family sized housing options defined as two plus bedrooms, units in both owner occupied and rental housing. He thinks they have a good starting document; Mr. Whitman will check but he thinks they have already incorporated Mr. Dube's feedback.

Chair McNamara asked that they clarify modular homes as they are quite different from manufactured housing (if this is included in the Chapter); modular homes are essentially stick built homes constructed in the factory assembled on site. They are subject to the same building code as a stick built home. Manufactured homes, typically referred to as mobile homes, are constructed in a factory on a steel chassis and are subject to a different set of building codes. As an aside, at a State level, both types of housing can go in any zoning district that allows single family homes, as of January 2026.

Ms. Smith Ahern mentioned City policy to prevent source of income discrimination as something they had talked about previously and she thinks this needs to be mentioned, acknowledged, and have this aspiration reflected in their Housing Chapter. Ms. Winter said that many landlords do not want to accept Section 8 vouchers, because they do not want the State coming in and telling them to fix up a unit or a property. As previously stated, one of Mr. Dube's suggestions is that they include minimum standards for renting; this aligns with key feedback from many residents- a top 4 issue among this group; a minimum ordinance standard and what that might look like. He provided some specifics in his document to RKG.

Mr. Reichert added that there are some "powerful" landlords in Lebanon, and some of these landlords bully their tenants. He said that the City could rework this balance of power and make things more equitable and the living conditions acceptable, if the City gets behind this and aligns the needed resources to accomplish this. The goal is to have their own set of standards for the rentals here in Lebanon, not to necessarily prescribe exactly how this is accomplished. This will be an action item at the City level, and the City can then decide if they keep the same enforcement regime but with more options because of the minimum standards, or if they want to go with an increased enforcement capacity. This Task Force can lay out the problem, and the City Manager will oversee the solution.

Ms. Smith Ahern suggested they dream or aspire to bigger goals and be sure these are articulated in the Chapter. Lebanon can be a role model for other towns.

Mr. Dube spoke of the predatory landlord practices for fee structures that he's been seeing over the last approximate 10 years. For example, the landlord advertises the rent at \$1,400 a month. Then there is a \$400 least signing fee and a \$40 a month maintenance fee, even though these are not HOAs, where one would expect to pay for 24 hour maintenance for the unit. These fee structure practices dramatically and negatively impact the affordability of housing. Mr. Dube suggest that these fees should be prominently

disclosed as part of the monthly rent; be transparent. It affects the families signing up to rent units. Many lease contracts are 40 pages long and most laypeople do not have the ability to understand these in their entirety.

Chair McNamara wants to be sure that a pathway to home ownership, and wealth building along with aging in place, or having a place to go, are all moved to the forefront of the Chapter as they are all key issues brought to this Task Force's attention again and again. Given this is the number one problem moving forward with housing, he thinks that establishing the desirability of that continuum early on in the forefront of the document, and very prominently, as critical bullet points is of utmost importance.

Ms. Tia Winter asked about cooperative housing and Chair McNamara said it is in the proposed document. Rent to own was discussed, but it was agreed this is a conversation for Concord or the Federal Government; there is some narrative on this topic under Co-Housing that can open the conversation.

The desire of preservation and enhancement of new and existing neighborhoods needs to be included in the Chapter, again as a key point. Ms. Smith Ahern revisited building a sense of neighborhood in more far flung parts of Lebanon. We also need to be sure that these places have public transit (not stranded if they do not have a vehicle) and safe, connecting bike paths as well. At the same time, Mr. Dube said they can highlight some of the things that Lebanon does very well, by utilizing these same things, public transportation and bike paths.

Chair McNamara said that there are limits to growth because we have a set amount of land. We know what the limits of our existing infrastructure are and we are not going to significantly expand this beyond where it currently is. So, with respect to Route 120 and North Lebanon, what does this group want to see within these remaining areas? Do they want less dense, two story buildings, with a fewer number of units? Or do they want to max it out? Based on what he (and this Task Force) have heard, from the community, they want neighborhoods built with fewer units, available for ownership, rather than blocks of apartments. This community has this choice, and now is the time for these choices to be made.

Vice Chair Faunce said regarding infrastructure, there are plenty of places for new housing to be, so he proposes a vision of building in areas such as on Spencer Street, Main Street in West Lebanon, the Mall in Lebanon, etc.; this can help residents build wealth by property ownership, and so a mix of these and also very dense housing in a walkable downtown area. From this vision follows what we have as levers of incentives and disincentives to try and move in the direction that Lebanon needs to go with housing. We need to stop just plunking down properties that are disconnected from any other neighborhoods. Chair McNamara said that one of their goals needs to be what is the end state. And the end state is *not* to build as many units as possible everywhere you can. This end state needs to be in this Master Plan now, front and center.

Vice Chair Faunce said that "if we allow ourselves not to chase the easy, we might get that which we desire". Mr. Dube added that people are creative, and they will come up with solutions to things that we are thinking of right now. Chair McNamara added that if creating that quality of living enhances the value, it provides more incentive for people to get creative and do those things. He cited Portsmouth having the graphic of economic vitality. It's because it is so densely developed in its downtown, and there is so much value there and for the most part the outlying area remains as it has been.

Vice Chair Faunce said that they cannot be soft on describing what they want; they need to contain these ideas so that they can work together and produce the desired end goal.

Chair McNamara said that it's important that they don't let one chapter of the Master Plan get done now, and another one three years from now. We really need the Master Plan redone now and he thinks that we probably have support for that kind of investment now, because it is critical to everything else.

Vice Chair Faunce said that currently the Master Plan is a "grab bag" of many people saying anything about any particular area of interest. The Chapters are not reconciled with one another. And perhaps they cannot be reconciled because for example you have economic development and conservation -fish and fowl. So, do we even attempt to reconcile the Chapters, or do we simply declare that our Master Plan is limited to the vision and to the land use chapters? They don't necessarily need to be reconciled but they need to be bold statements about what it is that are of interest in those areas, because right now, it's in between.

He went on to say that he thinks if they look at the Master Plan as being vision and land use, and that they put their attention there, and update this regularly, the other chapters are effectively appendices. They are informative but they are not required by statute. This would be a way of managing the tension.

Mr. Reichert said that the Master Plan from 2012 simply does not reflect this post COVID Lebanon, and what our reality is here today. He too thinks it would be appropriate to redo the Master Plan. This would entail a massive engagement with the community along with the City Council and other key parties. Layered conversations from a planning perspective is key.

We all know that the pandemic had a dramatic impact on housing and these changes need to be reflected in the Chapter. Also, the fact that we have had incredible growth of the hospital and some very successful businesses that did not exist 10 years ago. These too are driving the demand for more housing, because we have so many more people working here. Also, post pandemic, people can live here and work here on a day to day basis for a company anywhere (e.g. silicone valley). This sort of dichotomy is something that is very new and post pandemic. Also, these types of high paid, high skilled jobs frequently attract people to positions in Lebanon and not necessarily be filled by residents of Lebanon. There are limits to growth and a conversation/plan about these factors needs to be had.

The economic disparity for many of the jobs that are being created are forcing a portion of the community out of the community, and yet an economically diverse community is a goal by many people; there is a benefit to that. Diversity should be reflected in housing.

Many people that get forced out of Lebanon are in the lowest income categories, whereas previously there was affordable housing for them here in Lebanon. He cited an example over the last 5 years where a \$900 a month unit now cost \$1,700 a month, for the exact same unit, with no major improvements. The demand here has vastly outstripped the supply. This has displaced our current Lebanon residents that did not have the same level of economic ascension that the incoming population has.

The economy might not keep growing here if Lebanon cannot house families and provide other options for people that work for local businesses. For example, perhaps a single professional started working here, then starts a family and will then need completely different housing and ownership than they needed previously. Mr. Dube said that housing and the economy go hand and hand, and yet we cannot exactly predict either. Chair McNamara added that the Housing section needs to reflect that we want to retain and enhance a diversified housing mix, so that we can have an economically diverse population.

Mr. Dube said that May 1st, 2026, the government is coming out with an official median income determination for the current 2026 cycle. He'll be interested to see if their data shows any spikes, and in

particular what they show for Lebanon. This new survey will have data completely post COVID. Their survey data usually skews low given they use a 40th percentile median, not 50%.

Vice Chair Faunce added that another suggestion that will be included in this Chapter is a recommendation to look at tax relief as a means to make it easier for current residents living on fixed incomes. Elderly exemptions could be increased. This could help augment the imbalance of supply and demand and allow people to age in place in their current homes.

Mr. Reichert added that not acting, “doing nothing”, will get the City of Lebanon closer to \$1,000,000 average sale price than \$400,000 average sale price. We are at an inflection point. The status quo is not getting us anywhere.

Mr. Dube stated if we really want to see change, they should make a point in their Chapter and consider a reimagination of the tax structure. Also, he would like to see wording that encourages the desired results for local ownership rather than a negative disincentive for large out of town developers. Flip the current wording around and encourage local ownership and management practices that enhance resident stability. There are a few areas in the document that this mindset could be used for – flip the stick to a carrot and this can also help get support for the Housing Chapter.

Mr. Whitman said that this conversation was extremely helpful for him. He will attend the Planning Board meeting next week. He proposed they work on writing the first Draft of this Housing Chapter and they will work with the Planning staff to accomplish this. This first Draft will be provided to the Housing Task Force, in advance of their next meeting.

4. OLD BUSINESS:

5. NEW BUSINESS:

6. OTHER BUSINESS:

Chair McNamara proposed that they still need to vote today on the remaining schedule for the Housing Task Force. The new Spring proposed schedule for Monday meetings is:

- April 6, 2026
- April 13, 2026
- May 4, 2026
- May 18, 2026
- June 1, 2026
- June 15, 2026

*Vice Chair Faunce **MOVED** to adopt this revised schedule
Seconded by Ms. Tia Winter*

The **MOTION was approved (6-0)*

7. ADJOURNMENT:

*Vice Chair Faunce **MOVED** for adjournment
Seconded by Ms. Tia Winter*

The **MOTION was approved (6-0)*

The meeting adjourned at 9:47AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Cinda Mersel
Recording Secretary