

FINAL

**LEBANON HOUSING TASK FORCE
MEETING MINUTES
Remote Via Microsoft Teams
[LebanonNH.gov/Live](https://lebanonnh.gov/live)
Monday April 13, 2026
8:15AM**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tim McNamara, Vice Chair,
Ryan Dube, Sarah Riley , Ellen Smith Ahern

MEMBERS ABSENT: Andrew Faunce, Vice Chair, John D’Entremont, Dave Duncan (Alt.),
Tia Winter

STAFF PRESENT: Nathan Reichert, Director, Planning & Development,
Cathryn Hembree, Associate Planner, Planning & Development
Chief Jim Wheatley, Fire, Deputy Chief Jeff Libby, Fire,
Leigh Hayes, Building Inspector, Planning Department

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. None

3. STUDY ITEMS:

A. Discussion of Rental Housing Inspections

The purpose of today’s meeting was to discuss rental housing inspections, and this discussion was led by Chief Jim Wheatley, Fire Department, and Chair McNamara.

Mr. Reichert shared that they have had clear feedback from the community regarding their concerns about the low quality rentals in Lebanon, added to a feeling of powerlessness by renters, to have their concerns for safety conditions in rental units addressed fairly and timely.

Today’s focus will be about

- the current inspection process in place in Lebanon (“the status quo”)
- the legal authorities that Lebanon could put in place, should the City Council, policymakers, and the legislative body choose to do so, and lastly,
- a review and discussion about resources and what would be needed in order to effectively implement a more dynamic, timely, and effective rental inspection program.

Chief Wheatley started by saying there is currently no rental inspection program. They have tried during the past couple of years to start a homegrown program. Currently, they focus on the common areas in the

big apartment buildings. They are allowed to get in and inspect individual units, which they plan to do, but it will require a logistical process and scheduling to contact landlords and the renters living in these units.

The State has decided though that individual cities and towns cannot decide on their own fire ordinances any longer. There is now one State, one Code. It no longer allows cities and towns to adopt their own model set of model codes. It limits local municipalities to tailor or add additional requirements. Chief Wheatley said that they now have a built in fee structure moving forward and will be asking the City Council to adopt this. This would include a certain fee per unit (charged to landlords) and if the property gets a clean bill of health, the landlord gets a certificate good for three years. If they do not get a “clean bill of health”, then the inspector will be back every year, until there is a clean inspection. One concern though is that these fees will simply be passed along to tenants.

With the amount of new units being built, along with their current workload, they would need an additional FTE to accomplish the proposed inspection program. Chair McNamara said that hiring an additional FTE at this point in time is probably not an option based on the current environment. He posed the idea of hiring out to complete initial inspections on all rental properties, e.g., 3 or more units (say 3,000 units) over a one year period which could entail 1,500 hours of initial inspections, but then all these properties would be inspected and have a baseline. Properties could then be reinspected on a predetermined schedule by City staff. The cost to do this should be substantially less than hiring another FTE which would entail salary, benefits, retirement contribution, continuing education, etc. The City would then have data on every rental, and based on that data, they could then decide what resources they need and where. This is a way to solve this problem for the short term and could inform direction for the future.

Chief Wheatley likes this idea and said that it is a way to do this right from the beginning of their new inspection program. “We start from the foundation. We develop a program that we all agree on and we start getting into all of them and then we can issue the three-year certificate” for those properties that pass. This initiative will be a study of sorts and give the City a snapshot and important information about all rental units.

Mr. Reichert added that some other considerations are to look at possibly more efficient and cost effective ways to handle landlords that are non-compliant. For example, using District court rather than Superior Court, and inside staffing versus hiring outside attorneys at a higher hourly rate. Also increasing penalties on those who do not comply with impact fees within the established timeframes. Financially disincentivizing those who do not comply, landlords who try to work around the laws, will cause those who choose not to comply to pay additional costs in addition to the original fees that they should have paid initially. He added that only about 5% of this group of landlords cause a majority of the problems with non-compliance.

Deputy Chief Libby concurred that having all units inspected would be a huge plus and then have a program in place for necessary follow ups and to have all properties reinspected every three years. Building codes are in place for safety reasons and have done a lot to prevent fires. He added that buildings will continue to age though so the ability to schedule regular inspections becomes even more important.

Historically it has taken a catastrophic event to organize people to avoid major events such as multiple people (or any person) dying in an unsafe property. Mr. Dube cited an example that happened just last year, where he told the landlord that he had 24 hours to install a smoke detector. The landlord promptly

put one in. 48 hours later a candle started a fire in the top floor unit. A neighbor heard the smoke alarm and went and put out the fire with a fire extinguisher. Lives were saved and property damage was avoided because of an active smoke detector.

Mr. Hayes added that prevention is always cheaper.

Mr. Dube will get a list of four or more inspectors that would have the capability to do something at this large scale and he and will give this to staff. They will get cost options on the various types of inspections. This Task Force has identified that there is a meaningful public concern about the safety of rental units. They will make the City Council aware of this issue and offer some potential solutions. It will then be up to the City Council what they want to do.

Mr. Hayes stated that they can also convey options on what the actual inspections are looking at which can be spelled out in a new “rental house ordinance”. Are they solely looking at the minimum housing standards that they adopted or the fire code, or the ICC property maintenance code, etc.

Once established, it will also be important to get the word out there to landlords about the new rental housing ordinance to all impacted parties. This can be done in a variety of ways including postcards to landlords, a piece in the Lebanon Times, etc., which can help many good faith landlords get out ahead of this.

Mr. Dube said that since the State of New Hampshire does nothing at a statewide level to help the disenfranchised, it might make sense for the Housing TF to prepare a list of fair housing lawyers, to help these families whose landlords retaliate against them. This could be a list of attorneys who are known to take these kinds of cases. This is one mechanism that the city might be able to make available, by having a list on the City website, as well as possibly providing a resource packet; neither of these would impact staffing. Renters can go to these attorneys since New Hampshire legal aid has been severely understaffed for decades.

Ms. Riley and Mr. Dube spoke about the legal aid 603 website; it is very powerful so this could be another resource the City could place on the Lebanon website and also include this in a resource packet. Things like you have the right to indoor working plumbing with no sewage backup, you have the right to live in a home without any infestations of bug or mice, or rats, and including information on helping people understand their eviction rights. 603 is written in layman’s term, particularly in comparison to RSA 48, which is not, they said.

Ms. Smith Ahern inquired about being able to establish a Housing Commission. Chair McNamara along with City Manager Andrew Hosmer are giving this serious consideration. This Housing TF will be discussing this in their upcoming meetings, including membership, tasking, among other things. For now, though, the immediate task at hand for the Housing TF is to complete the new Housing Chapter.

4. OTHER BUSINESS:

5. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

6. ADJOURNMENT:

*Ms. Smith Ahern MOVED for adjournment
Seconded by Chair McNamara*

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

The meeting adjourned at 9:47AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Cinda Mersel
Recording Secretary