

MINUTES
Durham Housing Task Force
December 12, 2022
10:00 am – Upstairs Conference Room in Town Hall

Housing Task Force

Heather Grant, chair
Charlotte Hitchcock
Al Howland
Sally Tobias, Town Council representative
Michael Behrendt, Town Planner

Others Present

Carden Welsh, Town Council member
Seth Reed, civil engineering student at UNH

Al said there are a number of new bills related to housing in Concord coming forward in January.

There was brief discussion about how to handle the requirement that the same bonus for senior housing be applied to workforce housing come July 2023.

Heather suggested applying for the \$5,000 mini grant to hire a facilitator for a community discussion about housing. There is also a grant for \$25,000 to pay for a data analysis.

Seth Reed, a civil engineering student, at UNH arrived. He said he needed to watch a Town meeting for a course.

Sally said she talked with Land Stewardship about the housing amendments. It would be a good idea to present the proposal to different boards to see how it could affect them.

Al questioned the idea that Durham cannot do more about housing because it is unique. Carden disagreed. He said that no other college town in New Hampshire houses only 60% of its students. He said that every town is unique.

Heather has looked at zoning in other towns. Al said it would be useful to see what kinds of projects are being done in other towns where some of the \$49 million for the Invest NH project [to support workforce housing] was given. He asked how these other communities overcame obstacles to housing. He said that Franklin has a broader strategy: they use RSA 79E, they have incorporated a water park into a project, and other things. Sally said that Franklin has been working on their strategy for 20 years. Dialogue takes time.

Al said that Durham is not close to having a potential project and being able to take advantage of money provided through Invest NH. Private developers apply for the money but they won't apply w/o support from the town. The grants are competitive.

Heather said that Chris Parker in Dover is sending examples of memoranda of understanding [that can specify terms between the municipality and the developer for workforce housing]. Dover approved 150 units of housing with a percentage that is workforce housing.

Michael said the statute does not state how to implement workforce housing. It could be for one year or in perpetuity. That would be up to the town. And it is up to the town how to figure out the rules for making sure the housing remains as workforce housing. Sally said she hopes that workforce housing would remain affordable in perpetuity. Thirty years goes by very fast. Michael said there have been numerous affordable housing developments across the country where the affordability requirement expired after 25 or 30 years and many people become threatened with eviction.

Charlotte said the state's definition of workforce housing [for units for sale in this area] of \$409,500 does not sound very affordable. [The state definition for housing that is for rent is a maximum of \$1,570 per unit in this area.] Heather said that in Dover they refer to "attainable housing" meaning that there is enough housing for a variety of people.

Al said that mixed use including people over 55 and workforce housing together would make sense. Sally said that nationwide a lot of seniors are struggling to find housing. We may assume that they don't need it [in light of discussions about removing the density bonus] but that isn't necessarily the case.

Heather said that to be more affordable the project needs to be more dense. She asked why when the Mill Road subdivision was approved years ago it included only seven lots on several acres where it could have included more houses on smaller lots. Carden said there were wetlands and septic constraints. Heather said there are innovations with new septic systems that are more efficient. It was noted that there is Town water and sewer at the Cottages and the Lodges.

Al said that Coe Drive was bought by investors and became student housing [even if that wasn't the intention originally]. Sally said that with duplexes you can sell two of them for \$500,000 whereas one single family house would cost more. This could be attractive to families, and not to investors, even though it does not meet the definition of "workforce housing." Plus the footprint would be a little less than for two houses.

Carden said there are unintended consequences with some uses like duplexes. Some are quite unattractive.

Sally said that developers will not come forward unless the zoning supports the project.

Carden said there is an assumption that these amendments are about creating more workforce housing. The proposal includes a lot more than that. Michael said that the term “attainable” is useful. The goal is enhancing housing opportunities of all kinds, not only for affordable or workforce housing. He said that he is on the board of the Seacoast Workforce Housing Coalition and board members now state that their mission includes more than workforce housing. It is to create more housing in general since there is such a shortage, expand housing types, create missing middle housing, and expand diversity. Even creating ten new houses for \$750,000 helps though that would not expand diversity nor types of housing.

Al said the goal is having more variety in housing that is suitable for Durham. We have student housing, senior housing, single family houses, and accessory dwelling units. But we have no entry points for people from about 24 to 50 years of age into the housing market. The market is constrained. Workforce housing is very hard to build.

Al said it is hard to build because it takes a great deal of time to get 30 workforce housing units built. Sally said that we have graduate students and post doctorate students in Durham and others who need affordable housing. That number will not meet these needs.

Carden said that we have to get a consensus in Durham for what people want. He asked if people thought that everyone should be able to live in Durham who wants to live here. People don’t want Durham to become like Dover. If you want to add duplexes in the Residence A and Residence B districts people won’t support that. And if you are building in the Rural district you are adding to the carbon footprint. He asked how building there is meeting other Town goals.

Heather said that if you build smaller units you could have three 1,000 square foot units instead of one 3,000 square foot house with a long driveway. The latter has a large carbon footprint.

Carden asked if that is causing sprawl. Al said the problem with developers going downtown is that many people don’t want to live downtown. Heather said she likes being further out, close to Route 4 which is convenient. Living a little further out is great for working families.

Al said if we have to be carbon neutral then we won’t build anything. He questioned if the Town is hearing from a broad cross section of people. He said most speakers are over 60 and we aren’t hearing from younger people many with children who are too busy to come to meetings.

Carden said that he is going by the Master Plan.

Al said the only big project since 2014, other than student housing, was Riverwoods.

Heather said there is not much land available in the downtown. Sally said you could do a big project on Beech Hill. Carden asked if Durham residents would want that. Charlotte said you want your kids to be able to live here. Carden asked why and said his kids live in Dover.

Carden said that older people want to live near the downtown. Al said a lot of older people want to live near open space.

Al said that there are limits to growth. Durham is not going to go from 6,000 residents to 30,000 residents.

Charlotte asked where workers in Durham live now, people who work at the university, in the downtown, at Riverwoods, and at Harmony Homes. They live far away. This makes it difficult to run a business here.

Sally said you could do a project on Beech Hill with say 150 units, including duplexes, garden apartments, some workforce housing that would not be near residential areas. How would that be harmful? Al asked about using a Planned Unit Development [PUD] for this kind of project.

Michael said that the PUD is a good tool that he has experience with. It provides a lot of flexibility and requirements can be tailored for the particular site. You can provide specific requirements in the Zoning Ordinance such as having a minimum of 10 or 20 acres, requiring some mixed use, a maximum density, and a certain amount of open space. It could be allowed by conditional use so that it would be created only in appropriate places.

Heather said that Hanover defines student housing and said specifically where it is allowed.

Seth said that Durham could specify areas for student housing, senior housing, and workforce housing so you know where everything will be located.

Al said that students want to be close to the downtown rather than being further out. He said they are looking for a particular type of housing. They want to be around other students. Michael said there are students in some small projects located further out but the students interested in partying would probably not locate there.

Heather said there was one comment suggesting we team up with UNH or that UNH build more housing. Look at the vision for Durham. It includes industrial zones but manufacturing is not coming here. We should embrace who we are. Allowing more people to live here is embracing who we are.

Charlotte said that a bigger project can also attract a business to locate there. Heather pointed to the large mixed use project in Dover near Patty B's restaurant.

Al said that New Hampshire is 20,000 housing units short of what we need.

Sally said that we need to define what we want. We could define graduate housing. Carden said we tried to do that [for 66 Main Street] and it did not work. Al said that graduate student housing is not market housing. Where will the incentive be for this? He said if we had money from Invest NH it might have worked for 66 Main Street. How do we get there? People are afraid that students will come in and destroy their neighborhoods.

Seth said he pays \$1,100 at the Cottages for one bedroom. There is a limit to what students can pay. He confirmed that students want to live near other students.

Carden said these broader issues were not explained when the housing amendments were presented. People thought that it was just about creating workforce housing but it is deals with much broader housing issues. The task force threw a lot of things in the proposal and people reacted. The task force should explain each part of the request and what it seeks to accomplish. Some parts of the proposal might be well received and rise to the top. Obviously this was way too much. Lots of people don't want more density where they live, more students, more traffic. But they probably would support having more diversity. The proposal was overwhelming. It needs to be broken down.

Al said they wanted to stimulate discussion. Carden said "You did!" Al asked what ideas the task force should focus on. It was suggested that obtaining the mini-grant to hire a facilitator for a community conversation about housing would be helpful.

Sally said that if we are only afraid of what might happen then we won't do anything. How do we prevent those things from happening? How do we get what we want?

Carden said that it might be better received if the task force shows particular areas, like Beech Hill, that could work, rather than making changes to the entire zoning district. Sally said we should show how a project would work on a particular site.

Michael asked about the Rural district. He said that most people seem to support building in the downtown but there is not much land left downtown. Some people say they don't go downtown anymore because there is a lot of student housing. There are potential opportunities in the Rural district. He said that the minimum lot size is almost 3-1/2 acres. That is a lot. The Town requires a conservation subdivision for anything with four lots or more and that is great. But the density for a conservation subdivision is even less than one unit per 3-1/2 acres because the unusable portions of the tract are removed before calculating density. In addition, the process for a conservation subdivision is very cumbersome. There has not been one conservation subdivision in the Rural district in the last ten years, since he has been here. Maybe that is what people want. He asked if it is desirable to effectively

have no development there. Carden said that a lot of people don't understand the zoning and the process. If this is explained then people might be open to making some changes.

Al said that developers are not banging down the doors in Durham. They go where it is easier. We have gotten good information from the public hearing and we will get more comments on Wednesday.

Carden said that in the overview of the changes the form said there would be somewhat less open space in the conservation subdivisions. He said that people don't like that. Michael asked if people would accept more density in the Rural areas if the amount of open space remains the same and the development is buffered from the road so that you can't see it. Charlotte said that the open space should allow for agriculture. Sally said that we should increase density where we can.

Michael said in response to Carden's comment about sprawl that allowing development in the rural area is not sprawl if it is done correctly. The conservation subdivision is the right way to develop. You can have density and a variety of housing types if it is clustered. It is smart growth in miniature with a small development surrounded by open space. Charlotte said, "Like a village."

Michael asked two questions. Does Durham want to do something with zoning about housing? Do people in town support some growth in population? Al said it is not about growth necessarily but about having more diversity.

Al said he hopes that the Planning Board will not approve or deny the proposal but rather put forward some kind of process to review the proposal.

Charlotte said that we don't want to be reactive but rather to plan for future generations. We want to keep the schools full.

Al said the Oyster River school projections are pretty accurate. They get less accurate in the out years. If we lost the tuition agreement for the high school we would lose about \$3-1/2 million. They looked at the enrollment cliff and brought in Barrington. There is capacity at each school level. Adding housing does not necessarily mean we will get lots of new students all of a sudden.

Al said school capacity means different things – for the buildings, for the teachers. Stability is what we seek.

Charlotte said we should talk about separate pieces of the proposal – the Rural district, accessory dwelling units, and combining senior housing with workforce housing.

Michael asked if we should apply for the larger grant to do an analysis of the situation. Al asked why we wouldn't do that noting that it would provide more information. Carden said that getting good data will be helpful. Heather said the housing problem must be big if the federal government is providing these funds.

Michael asked if holding a facilitated community discussion is the right approach. He asked if people would come to it. Al said we would need a remote [zoom] option. Carden said it is hard to get people out. Some are in Durham a short time, some are too busy. And others trust that the Town is doing the right thing and they don't need to get involved. A small percentage are active and come to meetings.

Al said he wants to hear from the community. He said we have to do outreach to encourage people to come.

Michael asked about the Planning Board creating a committee with representatives from both sides trying to find good solutions. The others did not support that idea. Al said the Planning Board could ask the task force to address specific concerns. Sally said we could invite others to join the task force. There are several vacancies now. Carden said that if the task force breaks the discussion down to separate pieces then we could let people know in Friday Updates when certain things will be discussed so they can come to the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 12:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted.

Michael Behrendt, Town Planner