

**APPROVED MINUTES**  
**Durham Housing Task Force**

**October 16, 2023**

10:00 am – Council Chambers

**Housing Task Force members present**

Sally Tobias, chair

Eileen Murphy

Al Howland

Paul Rasmussen, Planning Board representative

Chuck Hotchkiss, Council Representative

Charlotte Hitchcock on Zoom at 10:10am

Judith Spang on Zoom at 10:15am

**Others Present**

Nick Taylor, advisor, Workforce Housing Coalition

Michael Behrendt, Town Planner (“Michael B”)

**Members of Public**

Dan Keefe, Durham property owner

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Call to order 10:01am

**Approve Agenda**

Al Howland motions

Approved with consensus

**Public Comments**

none

**Approval of September 11, 2023 minutes**

Paul motions

Chuck seconds

Roll call: all yes

**Reports from Committee Members and Advisors:**

**Town Council** (Chuck): no debate around extending the Task Force term. Prefer the 2-year extension rather than 1 year at a time. A subcommittee was formed to review/revise the verbiage in the Task Force charge. Will be brought to discussion at the November meeting. *Preliminary suggested changes to the charge:* Council wanted to expand the inventory of housing to the Seacoast area, not exclusively Durham. Wanted to add language related to climate change.

Al: "Seacoast" is vague. Includes Strafford and Rockingham County.

Paul: Including Seacoast area may skew our analyses.

Sally: We were told at one point that Strafford County needs aren't specifically Durham needs.

Al: There have been arguments around student housing being "our part" to alleviate regional workforce housing needs, but we don't have data to support this. This data is needed.

Sally: We must consider needs of Durham landowners in addition to those who need housing.

Michael B: there was some discussion at Town Council on the term "fair share." Ideally there would be a formula to help us quantify what our "fair share" is. I like this term because it tells us we have to do our part.

Paul: I don't like "fair share" I prefer "healthy mix." Do we have the right mix of housing the support the various needs of our society?

Al: Agreed. "Fair share" has been used to argue that student housing has been Durham's "fair share" to alleviate housing demands.

Paul: Focusing on what we're lacking will help us arrive at what is needed.

**Planning Board** (Michael B.): Gerrish Drive subdivision – court ruled in the Planning Board's favor.

**State** (Al Howland): LSRs have been filed, review is underway. 200 bills were retained from the last session. Those will be discussed in January. Some housing bills are included. (Nick Taylor) More updates to come in November. Special

### **Housing and Smart Growth** (Nick)

Based on a presentation by Nick and Sarah Wrightsman – touches on conservation, climate and housing needs. These shouldn't be in conflict.

5 L's of housing development:

- Lumber
- Land
- Laws
- Lending
- Labor

Housing and the environment share a common enemy: Sprawl. The key is to be thoughtful about *where* housing is developed.

Smart Growth = this is outlined in NH State Law as our prevailing philosophy about how development should occur in the state. Includes preserving natural spaces, compact building design, and other principles.

Smart Density: economic win-win. Case study of Exeter – Urban 3 analysis of revenue positive vs. revenue negative areas. Looked at value per acre – mixed use and multi-family development has the highest value per acre; single family has the lowest value per acre. Most communities generate revenue from downtown. Big box stores and sprawling commercial developments take up so much acreage, their value per acre is not as high as it often seems.

NH Housing Toolbox: view this resource for sustainable housing ideas. Examples:

- Cluster housing in a conservation subdivision
- Adaptive reuse – convert older non-residential buildings into housing
- Mixed-use development
- Infill development – fill in existing developed land with denser development (more buildings; less parking, possibly)
- Missing middle housing types (Without more sprawl, can we diversify housing types in the same footprint? Duplex, triplex?)
- Accessory dwelling units
- Transfer of development rights – property owner is able to put a portion of land into conservation while developing some land more densely.

Zone for density, not for sprawl.

What type of growth do we want to see. Dover now allows for 2 ADUs, Exeter incentivizes downtown density. Rochester: Easter Seals and Forest Society partnership allows for preserved land (Champlin Forest), while Easter Seals develops a portion of the property more densely (Champlin Place). There is middle ground between development and conservation.

Al: Septic system issues are a clear example of the challenges sprawl creates.

Michael B: this emphasizes developing densely in the core, but also supports conservation subdivision/cluster development in more rural zones.

Sally: Keep in mind – single family homes in conservation subdivisions don't create a diverse housing mix.

Eileen: did the amendments proposed last year include smart growth principals?

Al/Sally: they intended for density to increase across all zones in town. Smaller single family lots in conservation subdivisions were part of it. There's a chance those changes wouldn't have actually led to more affordable housing.

Al: One thing we certainly didn't include is the benefit of developing near transportation corridors and public transit. We can do that better.

Paul: With single family homes, and development in some areas, septic systems really need to be factored in. A number of acres of forest are impacted when a septic system is installed next to a single family home. And that only benefits one family.

### **Outreach to Individuals and Organizations in the Durham Community**

Paul: Businesses seem to be falling into 3 categories

- 1) I need a stable workforce and I can't afford to pay living wage for Durham. Now my employees are commuting and transportation costs are extremely high.
- 2) I work off volunteers; I don't mind turnover among UNH students.
- 3) I'm a family-run business: I don't need more employees, I'm okay.

Al: I was struck by ORCSD feedback. They want teachers to live in the community, but it's impossible. Only 59 out of 218 teachers live in Durham, Lee or Madbury. ADUs are not designed for couples. Listings for ADUs are at \$1600 per month.

Paul: Hannaford and Clarks said similar things - they don't have a lot of UNH students working for them. They have dedicated, skilled employees. Hannaford only hires 2 students, others are long term and the cost of living in this community are too high.

Judith: Thinking back to Nick's first slide where some areas are determined to be a tax positive area. There used to be a theory that open land essentially costs the town money, glad that these ideas are being revised.

Nick: Correct, the least tax-beneficial land is single family sprawl.

Judith: We need to think about how we'll tax land being considered for affordable housing development.

Al: a point made by the Randolfs was that commercial, tax generating properties won't exist if we don't have housing to support the businesses.

Sally: Some businesses will ultimately leave the state if they can't maintain their employee base. This happens in assisted living with the need for nursing staff.

Sally: one manager she spoke with may not have been aware of the housing problems their employees are experiencing. Strategies for further outreach?

- Firefighter/police union?
- UNH Faculty union? – Michael Saputo?
- Bilingual survey for UNH staff? (Charlotte may have a connection)
- Sally: what about older adults in the community who are over housed?

### **Next phase of Community Outreach? Community meetings?**

Results will come in from RKG next month. We need to compile stories from business and employee surveys for presentation to the community.

Paul: When we begin conversations with Durham residents, we need to capture what their beliefs are. What their challenges are. This group should be included in the community meetings.

### **The Cottages in Dover Tour**

Nick: 5-6pm Thursday, October 19, another tour of the Cottages through NH Housing (54 Back River Road). SeacoastWHC.org

Al: very interesting experience. Asked primarily about funding – how this was made to be financially feasible. The Randolfs aren't really making an immediate profit off the development. They will see profits in their business, so that's a perk. They received density credits from Dover. They benefitted from the streamlined process. They could not have afforded a years-long planning/zoning battle. Didn't use housing opportunity zone credits or state credits. They put \$500k of their own into the development. They have had multiple requests from other communities requesting similar developments, but they will not go to any town that does not want them. Town must show commitment and a streamlined planning process.

Sally: A similar development would be impossible in Durham with the current zoning code.

Michael B: To be clear, Gerrish Drive development was not slowed down because of zoning/planning restrictions. The process for a conservation subdivision is very long, and abutters opposed the development, dragging it out further.

Sally: PUDs would be a workaround.

Judith: We know we want more ADUs at a minimum. Can we begin working now on this amendment?

Sally/Paul: It seems too early/too rushed to propose a change to ADUs

Al: This seems premature given the pending legislation at the state level. In the spring a few things will come together and we'll be ready for this to move forward. This is a painfully slow process, but it's worth it to put the effort in.

Nick: Seacoast WHC is hosting a summit on Thursday, November 2, 8-10am with Breakfast (at Dover Mill at River Landing) – theme is ADUs.

Michael B: in Durham we worry a lot about new housing being taken over by undergraduate students. The Randolfs are requiring that their employees who are in their residences work at least 16 hours/week for Harmony Homes. They also may not allow a guarantor. It became clear that through various restrictions, we could ensure that new workforce housing could not be leased by undergraduate students unless they were working part time.

Sally: property owner/landlord can background check the person on the lease, including employment checks.

Eileen: did we ever see results of the undergraduate student market survey from Spring 2023?

Al/Sally: No. Undergraduate students are now required to live on campus through Sophomore year.

### **Adjournment**

Al motion

Chuck second

All yes.

Prepared by Eileen Murphy, Housing Task Force member