

APPROVED MINUTES
Durham Housing Task Force

November 13, 2023

10:00 am – Council Chambers

Housing Task Force members present

Sally Tobias, chair
Chuck Hotchkiss, Council Representative
Eileen Murphy
Paul Rasmussen, Planning Board representative
Michael Saputo
Judith Spang

Others Present

Nick Taylor, advisor, Workforce Housing Coalition
Michael Behrendt, Town Planner (“Michael B”)
Mimi Kell, Golden Goose Properties

Call to order 10:03 am

Approve Agenda

Paul motions
Chuck seconds
Approved with consensus

Public Comments

none

Approval of October 16, 2023 minutes

Judith motions
Paul seconds
Approved with consensus, (Michael S. abstains)

Reports from Committee Members and Advisors:

Town Council (Chuck): approved HTF charge, moved toward becoming part of community power coalition, appointed new alternate member of the Planning Board (Sally) to the HTF Charge – they added verbiage about our requirement to look at the Climate Action chapter of the Master Plan, and advising where in town the development of housing would be ill-advised.

State (Nick): Michael B and Nick Taylor attended Northern New England Association of Planners - presented on the activities of HTF.

55 bills have been proposed for this session. The bipartisan Special Committee on Housing has 5 or so bills that look promising. (Topics: septic regs, ADUs, reduced sprinkler requirements).

ADUs in Durham discussion: (Sally, Michael B.) in Durham detached ADUs are not allowed in RA and RB.

Student Housing (Mimi): 2024-25 year will be first season where sophomores will be required to live on campus. UNH has reserved building space on campus for sophomores, and as a result juniors and seniors who would like to live on campus are finding there are no available rooms.

Sally: with decreased enrollment and on-campus living requirement do you see “excess” student housing being converted to workforce housing?

Mimi: No, 2026-2029 there is likely to be an “enrollment cliff” in colleges across NH. If anything, a consolidated of colleges across the state may stabilize UNH’s enrollment.

Paul: The likelihood that an entire housing development (like the Cottages) would be vacant and available for retrofitting into workforce is not based on any real analysis.

Sally: In addition, most of these places wouldn’t be able to offer workforce-level rental rates. They wouldn’t choose to take that hit.

Paul: Maybe they could be offered at market rate to non-students and that would help?

Michael S.: it would take significant vacancy for a property owner to choose to reduce rents.

Chuck: It’s reasonable to assume that if there are fewer student beds required off-campus, it’s possible we’d see students move from Dover to Durham, depending on rental rates. So that wouldn’t free up Durham housing.

Discussion About Current Outreach Effort

Michael S: looking for a contact at Olson. Michael B will follow up

Judith: still trying to reach a couple churches

Michael B: How do we respond to the comment that this is a targeted sample?

Michael S: That question anticipates we’ll get that question. If this is presented as trends instead of specific data, we shouldn’t get pushback.

Sally: We have to continue to do outreach.

Paul: Getting business owners to speak was very challenging.

Sally: We need to reach more employees.

Judith: Is this outreach to people who have to commute here more important than reaching the people who are already town residents?

Paul: Can we use other forms of data and analysis to get stats about how unattainable housing is for people who work here?

Judith: I think the qualitative data we need from the community is how they feel about certain solutions to the housing problems.

Nick: this should be considered the personal stories behind the data. RKG's analysis is going to provide stats/data.

Paul: We need to ask questions that give us a sense of what the community thinks about what the housing issues are.

Chuck: at one point weren't these interviews intended to help inform questions that should be asked in a more systematic survey.

Judith: do we have to turn over every little stone?

Sally: I would like to see input from employees at UNH, Harmony Homes, Riverwoods.

Michael S: We need a deadline when we can start analyzing what we have.

Judith: Can we begin analysis then figure out which populations we should reach out to more?

Michael S: Yes, we are missing important perspectives.

Eileen: We're not going to get a representative sample. We should target leadership in certain groups – like leaders in Graduate Student Senate who know what graduate student needs are.

Michael S: I can try to reach HR at UNH and specific departments. Maintenance roles are often contracted roles or hired for short term needs, like summer cleaning.

Judith: what if we accept what we have so far and then all target aspects of the UNH population?

Sally: I think we should give our current targets through the end of the year.

Michael B: will try to reach out to Cari Moorehead specifically.

Paul: there's an important response in the survey that touches on international student issues and transportation issues.

Judith: It sounds like transportation is an important part of this, but we may be getting too far into a "solutions" conversation.

Sally: We aren't going to solve all aspects of these issues, but having empathy for people experiencing these things is important. Owning a car and affording rent here is very challenging for a lot of people. We should try to make other more aware of what's happening on a regional and statewide level.

Paul: But, some of those things aren't within the town of Durham's control. It would be nice if there were better transportation options. Bringing attention to these issues is the best we can do.

Sally: it sounds like we should forge ahead with current outreach efforts though the end of the year.

Michael B: Recently toured the Naval Shipyard - 8,000 employees come to the shipyard daily. They are wrestling with very similar housing and transportation issues. Very interesting similarities to the challenges in Durham.

Discussion About Task Force Plan Going Forward

Michael B: RKG Status – currently held up by new parcel map. The town hasn't been able to upload the map in a usable format. Should RKG use the data we have or wait? This depends on how long the map upload is going to take.

Michael S: We should definitely wait for the new assessment data to be uploaded. Some properties had significant changes that should be included.

Michael B: I'll report back in a month about progress.

Paul: It doesn't make sense to use data that isn't representative of the current state of affairs.

Other ideas:

Paul: Start looking at education efforts. And identify what sort of wall we're up against (using outreach).

Michael S: Could we put a webpage out there that becomes a place for education and for comments?

Paul: can we use data from the interviews we have to create a survey with “agree/disagree” questions?

Michael S: Yes, we could easily say, “we have heard _____. Do you agree this is a reasonable amount to spend on rent? Or what percentage of income should go toward rent?”

Michael B: But I don’t want to do too many surveys.

Paul: We are tasked with educating the community, but it’s hard to educate them without knowing the baseline.

Judith: Nick – can you tell us what the community of Durham is going to see as problems? Is Durham so unique that we have to chase down the attitudes of our citizens, or can we use existing general data?

Nick: local outreach is always important. People will ask where our ideas are coming from, so supporting our efforts with stories is important.

Judith: Does using other community information as a baseline help us move forward more quickly?

Nick: I think you need to move the community along with you.

Paul/Judith: How much detail are we going to get? It depends what questions we ask.

Michael B: Should we update the community through Durham Friday updates?

Sally: Can we use Durham Friday updates for educational efforts? We could share videos or presentations we’ve seen here?

Paul: We don’t want to oversaturate the community

Eileen: But the Integrated Waste Management Committees efforts with signage and events and blurbs in the Durham Friday Updates are interesting and varied. It’s an effective community outreach effort.

Judith: We are supposed to be more transparent. We should be sharing what we’ve been doing.

Sally: But we have to be careful about people getting upset about not being included.

Michael B: I was thinking about doing something this week about ADUs in Durham. What if I touch base with Sally or the committee things I'm thinking of sharing every couple weeks?

Judith: I think people think the HTF's original efforts were a disaster, and parts of the community think we're just doing more of the same. We have to reestablish credibility.

Michael S: can we say generally we're in a phase of community outreach?

Paul: If we say "community outreach," we have to be specific about what we've been doing or we'll get questions.

Sally: We're not going to change the minds of this group of people who are upset.

Eileen: I think reducing our transparency because of 20 people who are opposed to any change in housing isn't fair to all the people in the community who want to hear what we've been doing.

Michael S: Keep it simple. Touch on a few bullet points and focus on education

Paul: we don't have a timeline, so we can't be specific about that.

Nick: It will also be helpful to work backwards from the community forum as far as timing. That will help us demonstrate that this isn't happening in a vacuum.

Judith: Would it be helpful to say we're keeping up with UNH's plans?
Others agree.

Judith: Nick – what happened in the final forum in Somersworth?

Nick: They used forums as well as surveys. They have a HOP grant, but don't have a committee like this.

Judith: are they a good model for us?

Sally: Going forward, what else should we be doing at meetings?

Paul: Some questions for the survey.

Michael S: Agree. How long will the survey be? What topics? Then ask UNH survey center, how should questions be phrased?

Michael B: what if in December we start looking at survey questions?
Others support this.

Adjournment 11:38am

Judith motion

Chuck second

All yes.