

These minutes were approved at the February 5, 2025 meeting.

Durham Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
December 4, 2024

Members present: Chair Sally Needell, Administrator Todd Selig, Dr. Janet Perkins-Howland, Deborah Hirsch Mayer, The Rev. Richard Belshaw, Kathy Collins, Leslie Schwartz

- I. Call to Order
We welcome Leslie Schwartz as a new member of HRC
- II. Land Acknowledgement Statement
- III. Approval of Agenda
Commissioner Richard Belshaw: regarding Item #6 – is there a time deadline for a letter?
Commissioner Janet Perkins-Howland sent suggestions, and Commissioner Belshaw proposes that we move this issue to the next meeting.
Administrator Todd Selig – Gail Jablonski is not in today, so we'll move her presentation to an upcoming meeting.
Chair makes a motion to amend agenda.
Commissioner Belshaw seconds the motion.
- IV. Presentation of the Municipal Equity Index score by Gail Jablonski
This will be moved to a future meeting.
- V. Presentation on Housing by Sally Tobias, Chair of the Housing Task Force.

Per Sally Tobias: The Housing Task Force began after COVID lockdown.
State of NH conducted a survey to address future housing needs in order to assist municipalities and planning commissions.

Durham is part of a larger community and relies on workers who commute to and from Durham including those who have long commutes. Durham is not affordable to many, nor are there options for residents' adult children who would like to return to/live in Durham. For older residents, there are not many options to downsize (apartments) and stay in Durham, except for a few retirement communities.

Other towns have been building, while Durham has not. Many residents believe that Durham has moral responsibility to help alleviate housing crisis. Our 2015 Master Plan supported creation of affordable housing. We will not meet this benchmark in 2025 Master Plan. There are not many affordable options for older residents. There are retirement housing options, but there are waiting lists, limited supply.

Sally Tobias shares presentation with data regarding population movement according to age demographics in Durham.

Possibilities to relieve housing crisis/increase housing stock:

Should we allow detached ADUs in more zones?

Should we allow duplexes?

Should we allow Cottage Courts?

Should we allow multi-family residences?

Should we allow conservation subdivisions?

How do we increase vibrancy and diversity of downtown?

Opportunity to build housing downtown?

Sally Tobias asks, "What does the HRC want to see? What kind of housing is appropriate?"

Chair Needell recommends going to Back River Road -Uncommon Drive – and asks Sally Tobias to explain the number HUD uses to determine rents/costs.

Sally Tobias on work force housing (WFH): WFH has to be intentional; has to meet criteria in perpetuity; has to be set at HUD rates which vary from year to year and are not far off of the average of what people are already paying; Some developers use income averaging and take fair market rent (average rent/bedroom) to determine housing voucher amounts

Michael Behrendt asks HRC two questions 1) what's your perception of the housing situation in Durham? 2) given the possibilities for densifying housing, which of the options offered, if any, might work well in Durham?

Commissioner Belshaw – there are areas of Durham that are candidates for increasing density; expresses concerns for adults who want to return to Durham and can't find affordable housing; lack of studio space in Durham for creatives; lack of space for unhoused

Michael Behrendt says in the past there have been boarding houses with 10-20 units and shared bathrooms; it's an inexpensive way to create housing, but zoning and building codes have made it difficult to build; live/work units –

artists' and musicians' live/workspaces are being built in cities with empty historic buildings

Durham is more resistant because people treasure open space whereas new communities are more innovative; we'd like to see Durham allow more flexibility; well-designed and high density housing is very doable

Commissioner Belshaw: mentions tiny house developments

Chair Needell – downtown has commercial space but it's expensive to pay rent; what about live/workspace, in say, Wildcat Fitness?

Michael Behrendt: the first floor has to be commercial in central business district

Commissioner Leslie Schwartz: There's a strong ideology in Durham that is resistant to development and increased density. She asks how do we overcome the resistant ideology? In the long term, there are unsustainable aspects to this resistance. More ADUs is a no-brainer option

Commissioner Deborah Hirsch Mayer agrees there is a problem with housing with regard to affordability, diversity, etc. It's hard to make a leap from kinds of dwellings we need to where we would put these dwellings. She mentions Faculty Neighborhood which is high density. The benefit of this is that you can see neighbors regularly. It's imperative that different kinds of housing units are accessible.

Commissioner Kathy Collins agrees with comments so far. There is space for more dwellings in Durham and there is a need for more dwellings. She agrees that Faculty Neighborhood's density is net positive for quality of life.

Commissioner Janet Perkins-Howland commends Sally for presenting to various committees in Durham; She says she hears a lot of people in favor of workforce housing, yet people won't give anything up – it's an "I have mine, now it's good" sensibility. How do we change hearts and minds? There are challenges in alleviating the housing crisis both dollars and sense wise and changing people's views. We can't say we are for affordable housing and not change anything. Additionally, Commissioner Perkins-Howland expressed interest in transitional housing options for people with disabilities, those in recovery,

Sally Tobias - Things aren't the same as they were before with regard to student housing – we have more now. Shelter is a basic need and an important issue. We have a moral obligation to provide more housing, and we have the ability to do it;

Commissioner Deborah Hirsch Mayer asks how can we do more from a public relations point of view? Also, the term – work force housing – might be problematic itself. How can we provide more diverse opportunities for people across the life span?

Sally Tobias shares that workforce housing is an old term and agrees that there might be better ways to frame it. She says that homelessness went up in NH and in our school district. If you have more money, you can push out the first-time homebuyer by making a huge offer on available housing. We need to offer a place for our children to land if they want to stay nearby;

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer asks Sally Tobias if this presentation will be shared with community members. to other places?

Sally Tobias responds that she'll be at The Freedom Café on 12/10 and other possibilities are in play.

VI. Discussion of writing a letter to Durham's legislators regarding Durham's observance of Indigenous Peoples Day vs. Columbus Day

Administer Todd Selig understands that local NH Representatives will bring forward a bill - Tim Horrigan, Wayne Burton, and a Newmarket representative expressed an interest.

Commissioner Belshaw suggests inviting Reps. Horrigan and Burton to our next meeting and is hesitant to write a letter at this point before hearing from the Representatives.

Administrator Selig will reach out to Reps. Horrigan and Burton to invite them to our next meeting.

VII. Discussion on the Definition of Antisemitism

Commissioner Perkins-Howland – if something comes up, do we have a process to review/filter, and what is the process for putting it on the website?
Commissioner Perkins-Howlands departs.

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer understood that we were putting multiple definitions on the town website as a resource in case the town is faced with a question about Antisemitism, and that it wasn't posted just to provide information for the general public. Commissioner Hirsch Mayer understood that these are resources to be used if there are questions about Durham's work with regard to Antisemitism.

Commissioner Schwartz asks if the original request was for us to adopt a definition. If the town does, in fact, adopt a particular and specific definition, does that lead to something legally binding? Do we have a process and mechanism around this, and could there be unintended consequences?

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer says we adopted several definitions rather than one single definition to guide us.

Commissioner Needell acknowledges Commissioner Schwartz's concerns.

Commissioner Belshaw apologizes for not properly acknowledging the urgency of this matter, and suggests that this is still an open topic. It would be a good idea to keep track of antisemitic offenses (destruction of property, comments, etc.) as this affects people living in Durham. He suggests we might post a Q&A that speaks to the issue of antisemitism and our need to stay attentive to it.

Administrator Selig appreciates the apology but doesn't think it necessary. We followed up on a resident's request. Administrator Selig thought that the definitions would be a resource for everyone – the community and the town.

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer felt badly that it took as long as it did. Workings are slow, understandably, but she still understands resident's frustration with the time it took; She acknowledges that anything short of adopting a resolution would be disappointing to the resident.

Commissioner Schwartz asks about the catalyst for the request for an Antisemitism resolution.

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer responds that there were several catalysts –

Commissioner Belshaw reiterates that If there are things happening in town related to Antisemitism, we should keep be keeping track.

VIII. Approval of Minutes – October 8, 2024

Commissioner Belshaw makes a motion to approve the minutes.

Commissioner Hirsch Mayer seconds the motion

IX. Other Business

Next meeting – Wednesday, February 5, 2025 – 4:15 – 5:45

We have a Zoom option, but there needs to be quorum – at least 3 in person.

Chair Needell and Administrator Selig don't vote on HRC matters.

X. Adjourn

Commissioner Belshaw makes motion to adjourn.
Commissioner Schwartz seconds the motion.