

DISCUSSIONS ON *PLACES TO LIVE* IN PORTSMOUTH

winter
2024



STUDY CIRCLE DIALOGUE REPORT

Portsmouth Listens

City of Portsmouth

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1.0 Study Circle Group Dialogues Summary

The City of Portsmouth engaged Portsmouth Listens in the Fall of 2023 to have them lead a community engagement exercise focused on the housing challenges in the city. Named *Places to Live Study Circle Dialogue*, this effort was to inform and listen to community members about housing concerns. A series of events and study sessions were held across January and February to discuss existing places to live in Portsmouth, challenges in accessing them, ways to create more, and the impacts of doing so.

Portsmouth Listens

Portsmouth Listens is a Portsmouth based non-profit group that works at the local level to support civil and public deliberation of complex issues affecting the city's residents' everyday lives. This group of volunteers is committed to neutrality as part of their adherence to their mission of creating and sustaining a fair process for public engagement and action.

The group's facilitation of deliberative public dialogues follows two principles. These are as follows:

1. When citizens have a free exchange of ideas with one another over many hours together, the best ideas rise to the top. This notion underlies Portsmouth Listens' profound trust in citizens deliberating in small groups to arrive at the best ideas for the community.
2. Create a safe and respectful space for those with opposing views to reason together, and in providing trained facilitators, citizens with opposing views can find common ground. This creates a space where participants are willing to modify their views for the overall good.

Due to the group's commitment to neutrality, commitment to a fair and open dialogue, and principles of free and safe deliberations, outcomes of past efforts reflect where and how differences were solved, and dissent was channeled into a better final idea or solutions.

More about Portsmouth Listens may be found here: [Portsmouth Listens Website Homepage](#).

City of Portsmouth

The City of Portsmouth applied for, and received, grant funding from Invest NH in 2022 for the purpose of analyzing, identifying and implementing changes to increase the supply and diversity of affordable housing in the city. Awards from the InvestNH Municipal Planning & Zoning Grant Program provided two grants to fund the staffing of a Housing Navigator position and the hiring of professional services consultants. Both grants state a specific aim, among others, of modifying and adopting regulatory changes to help increase housing supply.

Both grants require involvement of the community and subject matter experts to ensure the voices of community members most impacted by regulatory changes are heard. This led to the Housing Navigator, on behalf of the city, engaging Portsmouth Listens to facilitate the Places to Live Study Circle Dialogue.

Study Circle Dialogue Effort

STEERING COMMITTEE

Portsmouth Listens established a steering committee comprised of volunteer members and the housing navigator to develop a process and timeline for the outreach and engagement of the community. This process was named Places to Live Study Circle Dialogue with an overarching framing question developed of "*What should the City take into consideration so that a variety of housing options contribute to Portsmouth as the best place to live and work for everyone?*"

The steering committee developed a study guide to further describe the purpose, intent and process of the dialogue effort. This study guide notes a framework of how participants will discuss the community's housing needs in depth, and brainstorm how we can meet those needs in an effective and equitable manner. This *Places to Live Study Circle Guide* is provided in the appendix of this report for reference.

OUTREACH

To initiate the outreach, a direct mailing appeal was sent to all residential addresses in the city along with flyers and notices posted in local business establishments. These materials outlined the dialogue effort and directed interested residents to register using an on-line form or to contact the Housing Navigator. In total, 173 residents enrolled using the on-line platform and three enrolled by contacting the Housing Navigator.

KICKOFF / HOUSING 101 EVENT

To bring the registrants together and provide a final opportunity for members of the public to enroll before the start of the four, two-hour study circle discussion sessions. On January 11, 2024, a Kickoff / Housing 101 event was held to start

the dialogue effort. This event was comprised of a group exercise followed by presentations to provide participants and the attending public with various perspectives on places to live in Portsmouth, how housing is part of a larger community system, finances and affordability factors, and an overview of the forthcoming study circle effort. To accommodate members of the public unable to attend, the event was broadcast live.

A recording of the event is located here: [Portsmouth Listens Kickoff / Housing 101](#).

STUDY CIRCLE GROUPS

Following the kick-off event and final registration, participants were assigned to one of 14 different study circles led by 10 different trained facilitators. These groups met using in-person and virtual meeting formats to understand the issues and develop solutions. Emphasis was placed on conversations not to be about specific housing types, properties, or demographic groups. Instead, conversations were encouraged to broaden participants' understanding of the character and variety of existing housing, and the needs and choices of places to live for all current and future members of the Portsmouth community.

The demographics of these groups were purposefully made diverse and balanced so various age groups, lifestyles and housing locations were dispersed and equitably represented in each group. The demographics of the participants who started the dialogue effort are described in Appendix 3.A. Demographics of each group are detailed in each group's written report provided in Section 2 *Study Circle Group Reports*.

Each study circle group was charged with tasks to be accomplished across the scheduled four, two-hour sessions. In brief, these assignments consisted of:

- **Identify and describe** the “state of housing” in Portsmouth today. What does it look like? Who is affected and how? What are some contributing factors?
- **Learn** from each other about the diverse experiences and needs of people regarding where they live and how it affects their lives, including benefits and challenges.
- **Envision** a Portsmouth in which a variety of housing needs are met.
- **Prioritize** needs and solutions then make recommendations and strategies for first steps the city can take and encourage in planning for existing and additional and places to live.

STUDY SESSIONS

Citizens in the 14 different study circles followed a series of four sessions that sequenced from higher level discussions on housing perceptions through to specific prioritization of goals and actions for the city to consider in addressing housing challenges in the community.

The structure of these four sessions is outlined below.

1. [Session One](#): Identifying Needs. (Week of January 15th)
 - Introduction of facilitators and study group participants.
 - Discussions on the life stages and types of places to live in the city.
 - Development of a problem statement: What is the housing situation in Portsmouth?
2. [Session Two](#): Continue Dialogue on Places to Live. (Week of January 22nd)
 - Discussion on what each participant is noticing with the discussions.
 - Review of 2015 Master Plan, 2017 Housing Dialogue report by Portsmouth Listens, and 2022 Housing Market Study by RKG.
 - Exploration of who and what is missing from the city's current housing conditions.
3. [Session Three](#): Visions for future Places to Live. (Week of January 29th)
 - Explore existing and potential examples of housing conditions.
 - Development of strategies the city should consider to address the identified housing challenges.
4. [Session Four](#): Priorities for Places to Live. (Week of February 5th)
 - Prioritize goals and recommendations.
 - Prepare and finalize findings in presentation and written report formats.

1.0 Study Circle Group Dialogues Summary

REPORTING

Insights from the four dialogue sessions were documented both in presentation at a community-wide event held in late February and in written reports that are included in Section 2 of this report.

Outcomes

INITIAL PERCEPTIONS

Study circle groups first started the dialogue process together in Session One and discussed their perceptions on the housing situation in Portsmouth. These perceptions may be summarized by an observation from Group D regarding the housing market as a mismatch of renter and buyer needs, wants, and demands. Many of the study groups similarly stated an initial perception that recognized there are too few options for affordable housing and there is a lack of housing diversity. These study groups outline how this “mismatch” has led to housing problems not necessarily limited to one segment of the population but is most challenging to those in lower income wage groups and of senior age.

Many of the groups recognize Portsmouth as an incredibly attractive place to live and how the city continues to experience an immense transformation that has been occurring for quite some time. These groups consider the high demand for housing production and dominance by high-end development for higher-end buyers the result. Other groups consider the high demand and lack of diverse housing options a result of rigid zoning regulations and how Portsmouth is very developed. Group B describes this situation as the “housing market ladder” is losing rungs (mid-market priced houses, and multi-family units) between subsidized housing and high-end expensive housing due to the increased gentrification of the city.

A few study groups perceive the character and economic health of the city to be increasingly jeopardized by their observed rising housing and living costs. Noted were how properties once considered within reach for working- and middle-class individuals and families, particularly starter and fixer-upper homes, are far less now and affordable housing for hourly workers is nearly non-existent. Combined with the current cost of living, it is challenging for anyone to get into the city and current housing conditions impedes the ability for residents to downsize and for seniors to age in-place. A few groups alluded to how all except the most fortunate are squeezed out and excluded from having a place to live in Portsmouth.

Several groups note how past efforts by the city towards more equitable outcomes have been inadequate. Their opinion is the city has failed to address housing demands of a socio-economically diverse population and there is an urgent need for a clear pathway and action plan, especially for mid and low-income renters and those wanting to own who are the most burdened, to address the existing complex housing needs.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

After study group discussions where members spoke of and heard of other's perceptions on housing, group facilitators worked with them towards reaching a consensus on the housing challenges in Portsmouth. This consensus was established in the form of a problem statement and would be used as a guiding thought as members proceeded through the series of sessions. While most groups established a problem, a few such as Group B and Group C did not and instead proceeded with multiple viewpoints.

Problem statements are summarized here with each group's specific statement detailed in their individual reports found in Section 2 *Study Circle Group Reports*.

Participants of Group A agreed on how Portsmouth is grappling with a variety of housing challenges, characterized by surging costs, a lack of affordable options and challenging zoning and land use regulations that are negatively affecting the workforce and impeding economic growth. Group L similarly notes how the character and economic health of the city is increasingly jeopardized by rising housing and living costs.

Group D, Group G and Group J recognized in their statement that Portsmouth is a vibrant community and incredibly attractive place to live that many are eager to join. Their assertions also address how housing demand is outpacing supply and there are not enough diverse housing options.

Several groups stated how the current housing situation in Portsmouth is a result of limited preceding and current efforts to recognize and address the challenges. Group E implicitly writes how the city has failed to address housing demands of a socio-economically diverse population. Equally, Group I writes current and past efforts to steer development towards more equitable outcomes have been inadequate. Group M expands upon this notion with how Portsmouth lacks a housing system design that can adapt to meet the needs of its residents, with more people than available housing and a lack of tools to address this issue. They later revised their statement to include there is not enough affordable housing to support our economically diverse community and there is a systemic inability to act on this issue. Group E adds how this has resulted in an urgent need for a clear pathway and action plan to address complex housing needs. The city has a moral

imperative to enable people who work here to live here, from service workers to professionals.

Combined, the study circle group problem statements reflect concerns on places to live in Portsmouth that may be summarized by Group F's statement regarding 21st century market forces and an ongoing shortage of affordable, workforce, and mid-level housing have resulted in decreased diversity in the City of Portsmouth, Group A's call for a unified city strategy to balance affordability with regulatory concerns, and Group N's question of "How can a wide spectrum of housing options help Portsmouth fulfill its mission of being 'The City of the Open Door'?"

CONSIDERATIONS

The 14 study circle groups explored the housing situation, needs and concerns in their community through the first three sessions. In the fourth session each group formulated strategies and recommendations to address their perceived housing challenges. They were tasked with organizing and prioritizing these as goals and actions with the directive that they are for the city to consider as it works to expand housing choices in Portsmouth.

For this dialogue effort, a goal is described as a desired outcome of the community to provide direction for future decisions. Groups were encouraged to establish a goal by responding to the question "*What does the group hope Portsmouth will accomplish in addressing housing choice?*"

Additionally, in this dialogue effort an action is described as an effort the community will undertake to meet that goal. Groups were encouraged to establish actions by responding to the request "*Provide supporting narrative for each goal to explain how the goal could be implemented.*"

GOALS AND ACTIONS

The goals and actions developed by the various groups for the city to consider are summarized below. These goals and actions noted below are not comprehensive to the entire dialogue effort or listed from highest to lowest priority. Rather this summary organizes the goals common to the 14 study circle group reports with associated actions listed below each common goal. The specific goals and actions of each group and how they prioritize them are detailed within their individual reports found in Section 2 *Study Circle Group Reports*.

Goal 1: Maintain and increase the number of affordable housing units for individuals and households below City's median income levels.

- Action 1:* Adopt specific targets for this broad goal so that progress can be measured.
- Action 2:* Prioritize the creation of affordable and middle-income housing units for veterans, aging residents, young families, and those with disabilities.
- Action 3:* Seek appropriate funding and invest in solutions to protect the 489 units in Portsmouth at risk of losing federal subsidies and their affordable designation by 2030.
- Action 4:* Work with Portsmouth Housing Authority to create more housing for a mix of the population and income levels.

Goal 2: Participate in innovative housing initiatives and models.

- Action 1:* Evaluate approaches adopted by surrounding communities as they address their housing challenges to understand additional potential actions Portsmouth may consider to address our own housing concerns.
- Action 2:* Participate and maintain involvement in regional and state housing oriented organizations and programs such as InVest NH and the recently formed Housing Champions program.
- Action 3:* Provide ADU construction incentives such as the grant program in Kittery, Maine to encourage ADU creation and increase affordable housing unit production.
- Action 4:* Consider a decrease in minimum lot area sizes and maximum floor-to-area ratios in strategic areas to provide for and encourage contemporary housing types such as small homes and tiny home communities, as well as micro-units, for both rental and ownership.

Goal 3: Improve, expand, and support a diverse transportation system throughout Portsmouth that includes alternative modes of transport.

- Action 1:* Create more bike lanes and encourage other alternatives to cars by providing spaces for scooters, ebikes, and similar.
- Action 2:* Consider and plan for how existing and potential new housing-oriented developments meet transit demands with various modes of transportation.
- Action 3:* Support financially the current shuttles and buses, and fill gaps in services such as a shuttle from remote lots similar to what has been provided from Connect Church on Market Street and

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- from Foundry Garage to offer residents and visitors alternatives to bringing cars downtown.
- Action 4:* Ensure transportation is accessible to all in terms of location and financially so the needs and demands of a diverse housing market is accommodated.
 - Action 5:* Complete and implement the comprehensive bike-pedestrian plan to expand both residents' and visitors' ability to access various destinations across the city without using automobiles.
 - Action 6:* Engage and coordinate with COAST and other public transit systems such as UNH Wildcat and C&J to revitalize and increase efficiency of public transportation into, around and out of the city to support accessibility by both residents and visitors.
 - Action 7:* Encourage a diversity of housing unit development and redevelopment in gateway districts and upzone corridors where multi-modal transit already exists, and may be readily expanded, to meet the needs and demands of the intended residents.
 - Action 8:* Encourage development that is near exiting infrastructure, transit, and lifestyle destinations to reduce traffic.

Goal 4: Sustainability of Portsmouth's resources.

- Action 1:* Determine how much growth Portsmouth can accommodate using metrics such as water/sewer infrastructure and police/fire resources to plan for and encourage appropriate housing creation.
- Action 2:* Consider the changing climate in establishing new zoning and housing requirements so that environmental factors are considered part of all housing developments.
- Action 3:* Continue to regulate against and enact stricter enforcement protocols of short-term rentals to ensure the limited housing stock is accessible to long-term renters and potential owners.
- Action 4:* Prohibit greenfield (undeveloped land) development to protect the city's existing woodlands, grasslands, and endangered biodiversity.
- Action 5:* Prioritize "greening" of existing development and require within new developments environmental sustainability and resiliency to provide for a higher quality place to live for current and future Portsmouth residents.

Goal 5: Integration with related communities.

- Action 1:* Improve coordination of the housing conversation with stakeholders comprised of city agencies, business owners both large and small, developers of various sizes and banking institutions to provide a more comprehensive approach to creating housing diversity.
- Action 2:* Evaluate and advance current tax-based incentives for the elderly, disabled, and veterans, along with first-time home buyers' programs, to encourage more participation in the programs and supplement monetarily annually.
- Action 3:* Implement additional tax-based incentives for current housing owners and potential housing developers to provide greater opportunities for creation of affordable and workforce housing units.
- Action 4:* Expand and formalize dialogue with neighboring communities to strengthen relationships that will develop a shared understanding of regional housing and transport challenges and to develop collaborative problem-solving approaches through joint partnerships.
- Action 5:* Provide incentives for the business community such as Pease, medical facilities, hospitality, and service industries to engage in solutions that develop housing solutions specifically for local employees.
- Action 6:* Organize efforts to lobby at the state level for changes to identified key housing policies such as inclusionary zoning to provide a mechanism to implement affordable housing minimums for new development.
- Action 7:* Partner with non-profit property owners such as churches and non-government organizations to create new housing sites in these specifically zoned areas.

Goal 6: Character elements of heritage and architecture.

- Action 1:* Review Historic District "restrictions" on housing density to provide "preservation without strangulation" that creates more opportunities for housing creation.
- Action 2:* Modify ordinances so vacant buildings don't become hazardous (Burger King) and ensure historic buildings can be maintained (Times Building) to prepare such properties for redevelopment that includes affordable housing units.
- Action 3:* Balance historical preservation requirements with developer needs to support sensitive, appro-

priate and equitable development that considers creation of housing.

Goal 7: Greatest potential use of undeveloped and underdeveloped properties.

- Action 1:* Accomplish strategic zoning and other regulatory changes that decrease or eliminate parking requirements, increase density (increase height limits in selective areas, allowances for single-family homes to become multi-family) to achieve the most effective use of space and opportunities for additional housing.
- Action 2:* Reconsider existing land use regulations and modify to accommodate and encourage mixed-use developments where such uses are not currently allowed in support of expanding diversity of housing types.
- Action 3:* Prioritize city owned properties, such as community campus, DPW yard(s), skate park, and city hall parking areas for creation of affordable and workforce housing.
- Action 4:* Strategically develop and retrofit properties to support expansion of affordable and middle-income housing.
- Action 5:* Increase allowed density and allowed heights on PHA and city owned properties to create additional housing.

Goal 8: Existing zoning reform for diversity in housing development.

- Action 1:* Review current zoning code and adjust to align with urban and transit planning, as well as housing advocacy, best practices to create a more attractive environment for housing creation.
- Action 3:* Evaluate parking requirements that create barriers to housing development and modify appropriately to increase the potential for workforce housing.
- Action 4:* Identify and remove structural barriers that restrict and may prevent implementation of development plans that would create more diverse housing.
- Action 5:* Remove barriers/restrictions to allow for more diversified housing that considers micro-units, “rooming” houses, manufactured housing, ADUs, and housing for those with special needs due to developmental and physical disabilities.

Goal 9: Reform existing development codes and regulations.

- Action 1:* Increase floor/area ratios and areas zoned for mixed use, multi-unit buildings to increase the potential for higher-density housing in appropriate areas of the city.
- Action 2:* Revisit land zoned as industrial or similar – much of this may be suitable for housing.
- Action 3:* Simplify the process for designing, permitting, and building ADUs and other more contemporary housing types to allow for additional affordable rental units.
- Action 4:* Create more incentives for increased housing density and building height, especially on previously developed land.
- Action 5:* Improve incentives for developers to construct social housing so that workforce, varied housing stock, and more affordable housing options are possible.
- Action 6:* Reduce the necessity of parking requirements and increase transportation/mobility options for specific housing types and locations to reduce barriers to housing development in the urban and corridor areas.
- Action 7:* Provide for and encourage existing homeowners to create ADU’s, convert under-occupied single-family units into duplexes, or to rent out unused rooms to increase the opportunities for affordable rental units.
- Action 8:* Evaluate proposed additions and other changes to the City’s building code to determine whether potential costs they may impose are worth the benefits.

Goal 10: Planning and permitting processes for housing diversity.

- Action 1:* Streamline the permitting and approval process, and increase incentives, to allow for a diversity of housing types that are distributed more widely throughout the city.
- Action 2:* Adopt by-right zoning to enable developers to build higher density housing faster so that housing permitting, development and units can be more affordable.
- Action 3:* Eliminate single-family zoning to allow duplex and triplex housing in all residential neighborhoods and provide for mixed-use in strategic residential and commercial areas to increase housing density and choices.
- Action 4:* Modify and create zoning regulations to discourage house-flipping and housing being used

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exclusively for short-term rentals.

Action 5: Expand form-based zoning to include all of Portsmouth to allow for appropriate multi-unit housing citywide.

Action 6: Adopt innovative regulatory and non-regulatory approaches such as “parking in lieu of” fees to encourage developers to support affordable housing.

Goal 11: Outreach and engagement

Action 1: Define “quality of life” for Portsmouth residents to potentially reduce NIMBYism and use the definition to ensure development aligns with it.

Action 2: Propose regulatory and non-regulatory changes with widely publicized and significant outreach efforts to achieve community understanding and buy-in.

Action 3: Seek proactive and continuous engagement with the community by designing long-term and ongoing initiatives to increase community input and shaping of local policies.

Action 4: Develop a community consensus for a diverse housing base through neighborhood meeting platforms such as the City Neighborhood Committees.

Action 5: Add to the City website a “one-stop-shop” for access to housing resources to help people learn about residential grants, financial incentives, low-interest loans, tax abatements and rebates, and creative housing solutions.

Action 6: Establish quantifiable housing goals and routinely publish information on the results of the efforts to achieve them using a “housing dashboard” on the city’s website.

Additional Considerations

Two of the last topics for the various study circle dialogue groups to contemplate was to voice their thoughts on what else they want the city to know about housing choices in their community, and what the group members learned that was new and surprising to them.

The various responses of the groups are outlined below with the various insights organized as themes with supporting statement in bulleted format. The specific responses to these two topics documented by each group are provided within their individual reports found in Section 2 Study Circle Group Reports.

THEME: IMMEDIATE ACTION

Recognized by most of the study circle groups is the need for immediate action. One group stated that action must be based on core values the community can agree with.

- *Equity:* Diverse representation and input in the decision-making process to ensure access to housing is provided across income ranges, ages, family situations, and backgrounds.
- *Direct:* Move from conversation to more effective action to better address Portsmouth’s housing deficiencies.
- *Implement:* Suggestions and actions are not new - participants are ready to see the plans for action to address these ongoing issues.
- *Approach:* Encourage an administrative “ATTITUDE OF YES” to facilitate new and innovative approaches to housing.
- *Priority:* Lack of significance on housing issue by the city as these discussions have occurred in the past with solutions identified multiple times, yet it appears that minimal progress has been made.

THEME: CONTINUED OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Overall, participants perceived contributing to listening circles, volunteering for, and attending committees and boards, voting provides opportunity for them to engage in addressing the housing concerns. Many believe a cooperative approach is necessary so residents can continue to feel and be part of the solutions.

- *Engage:* Keep residents current with effective marketing materials to educate the general public on the nuances of the housing crises, as well as with better access tools for them to understand the nature of the problem as it evolves.
- *Market:* Clear and concise advertisement of the problem will help generate the political will necessary to make change and accomplish goals stated both in the 2017 sessions and again here in this document.

- *Foster*: Use the progress and engagement success of the study circle dialogue process and reporting as a foundation to build community commitment, involvement, and political will to realize the opportunities addressed by the groups.
- *Outreach*: Housing is a national, state and regional problem and it is critical the City engage and partner with our neighboring communities to pursue a mutually beneficial regional and local transit system.

THEME: DEMOGRAPHICS

Many of the groups saw demographics evolving and impacting many facets of the housing market which will be impactful to the solutions that are considered to address the housing challenges.

- *Diversity*: Diverse demographics need diverse housing options while supporting unique solutions and diversity with housing.
- *Age*: Some seniors would like to downsize, but there is a lack of small, accessible homes/apartments. Including these in new projects/neighborhoods rather than in 55 and up developments would be desirable.
- *Options*: Senior housing options should be studied in greater detail given to our aging population.
- *Types*: Building smaller homes for families on smaller lots, rethinking boarding and multi-family uses for larger sized homes in single family residential zone districts and reconsidering manufactured homes as an option for affordable home ownership.
- *Complexity*: Housing problem is more complicated than originally thought and there is less confidence in the “easy, low hanging fruit” or single source solutions.
- *Data*: Rate of homelessness amongst NH residents, local and regional housing costs were shocking as was how the population is changing and housing crisis evolving faster in the state than any other area of the country.
- *Lifestyle*: Housing initiatives must include ways to maintain the livelihood of creators, farmers, artists, and all those other often low-income citizens who enhance our community.

THEME: HOUSING DENSITIES

- *Density*: Current property owners purchased their homes based on the area density at that time, and there are privacy, noise, and parking concerns with filling in every space with any type of housing, especially our precious Historic District.
- *Infrastructure*: Concerns about the effects increased density will have on our aging infrastructure and increased flooding, due to the increase in intensity of storms and the changing climate.
- *Quality*: Portsmouth’s housing choice problem ought to be considered qualitatively, not just quantitatively.
- *Type*: Mixed-use development concept where there is housing suitable for seniors, young families and others along with some commercial use such as offices or shops on the ground floor should be more present in Portsmouth.

THEME: COLLECTIVE VIEWPOINT

- *View*: Surprised by how much our group had in common.
- *Consensus*: Achieved far more consensus than opposition amongst each group’s members than expected.
- *Reached*: More optimistic and more informed understanding of the housing challenges in the city.
- *Solution*: Housing situations are “a lot less black and white” than initially thought and will require multi-pronged and likely expensive solutions.
- *Impression*: Recent housing development appeared to be influenced by previous housing plans and studies.
- *Perception*: Feeling of a continued gentrification of the city resonates in a growing wealth disparity in the community that creates a housing market for the wealthy.
- *Lifestyle*: Portsmouth is an awesome place to live, and we would like to enable more people to join and enrich our community.
- *Clarity*: Unclear on the barriers that are preventing forward progress.

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THEME: CLIMATE

- *Consider:* Effects of sea-level rise and changing weather patterns in planning housing and infrastructure. Factoring in climate change to housing decisions (weather resilience, reduction in Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions to provide support of the new Climate Action Plan through energy efficient building and reducing vehicle trips through walkable neighborhoods.
- *Stewardship:* All development, especially housing, should enhance and not harm our natural resources and well appreciated public green spaces.
- *Sustainability:* In building healthy, safe, accessible places to live, we build stability, resiliency, and sustainability and in turn help to preserve the biodiversity and quality of life we have in the community.
- *Recognize:* There is importance of greenhouse gas reductions in combination with the need for adaptation and resilience to extreme weather. Reduction in GHG through more sustainable forms of transportation such as public transit, walking and bicycling along with paired with energy efficient building materials will support the city's new Climate Action Plan (CAP) and with provision for valuable opportunities that advance the city's top two priorities identified by the current City Council -- affordable housing and addressing the climate crisis.

Supplemental Engagement

Portsmouth Listens and the City's Housing Navigator performed supplemental engagement efforts with known groups of Portsmouth residents who were unable to participate in the study circle effort but have an important voice to add in the community wide dialogue on places to live in Portsmouth. Questions asked during these round table discussions and responses provided by the participants are provided in the last four reports of Section 2 Study Circle Group Reports.

SECTION 2

Study Circle Group Reports

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GROUP A

Reporting

2.1 Group A

A. GROUP DESCRIPTION

Format: Virtual

Six participants; 4 males and 2 females. Age ranges from young millennials to baby boomers. Working backgrounds in non-profit work, government/military, real estate, and building supply. A range of educational backgrounds which includes participants with advanced degrees. Majority of participants live within Portsmouth, with one individual living in Greenland, and another who lives in Rochester, who's work in Portsmouth gives them a vested interest in this discussion.

B. SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE GROUP'S DISCUSSIONS

I. SESSION ONE

The group agreed that the focus would be concrete proposals based on current regulations and constraints, while also expanding to ideas that would require larger changes to implement. Many participants shared experiences of going from childhood home -> apartments -> single family homes. There was a common theme of current cost of living impeding on the participants' ability to find balance between bills, savings, and enjoying life. Population of individuals who work, but cannot afford to live in Portsmouth, were discussed. Concern about the inability to downsize and remain in Portsmouth was voiced, as there is a lack of affordable options to do so, potentially forcing a relocation outside of the city. Portsmouth building codes were described as prohibitive, with high taxes, renovation constraints, and strict zoning regulations.

II. SESSION TWO

Significant discussion around a lack of affordable options, and the unsustainability of having a working class that can't afford to live in the city that they help support, while understanding that commuting times directly impact an individual's cash-flow. It was expressed that there are too many high-end developments in Portsmouth, with little focus on middle-low end options. Stigma's surrounding project-based housing were mentioned as a barrier. The trend of multi-family homes being converted to single family homes was also highlighted as an example of the development climate: at least some individuals prefer single-family homes. a barrier. Suggestions were made to investigate how other communities are handling low-income housing were made. The need for dynamic housing that supports various stages of life and accommodates non-traditional family structures was noted. Potential options of deed restricted property, community land trusts, and real estate transfer tax were all discussed.

III. SESSION THREE

Discussed the data discrepancies in housing needs assessment between NH regional planning commission and the Portsmouth Housing Authority. Concern over the mismatch and highlighted need for clearer summaries. Lack of progress from the 2015 Master Plan, many issues still present. Discussed changing ADU provisions to increase developers' desire to work in Portsmouth. State laws impose limitations. Challenge to get approval from planning board for specific location developments. Discussed lack of diversity in land use & planning and zoning boards and that, larger representation is required. Need for prioritizing transparency and intent in city planning, a dashboard to track housing progress was suggested. More discussion on low wage workers in Portsmouth. being forced to live elsewhere due to unaffordability and the need for, work force housing in a need. Discussed simplifying building codes to incentivize developers.

IV. SESSION FOUR

The team discussed the development of a PowerPoint presentation for the City Council on affordable housing problem identification and goal setting. They emphasized the need for balance between specificity and accessibility in their recommendations and considered incentivizing the construction of multi-family homes. The team also discussed potential involvement beyond the presentation, assigned a presenter for the upcoming City Council meeting, and highlighted the importance of defining their goals and objectives for the City of Portsmouth.

C. PERCEPTIONS

Early in the group discussions, we agreed on the following problem statement. This served to guide our discussions and was not changed over the course of our four meetings.:

Portsmouth is grappling with a variety of housing challenges, characterized by surging costs, a lack of affordable options (particularly for households at or below 100% of the area median income) and challenging zoning and land use regulations, making it undesirable for developers to considering such projects. These issues are negatively affecting the workforce, impeding economic growth, and require all for a unified city strategy to balance affordability with regulatory concerns.

To foster a thriving community that accommodates the diverse needs [and ages] of its residents [today and in the future].

Group A quickly agreed on the outlines of the housing problem. The desirability of living in Portsmouth leads to a high demand for available housing. Market forces are a key factor, as higher income buyers drive up prices for existing housing and developers target this end of the market. These pressures are exacerbated by regulatory requirements and administrative processes.

Zoning ordinances are part of the regulations that prevent make development difficult. The emphasis on single-family lots in many of the zoning districts severely restricts the development of projects that could provide a range of options to increasing housing, from duplex or similar projects to multi-family buildings. These are not, however, the only restrictions. Portsmouth has adopted several building requirements that exceed International Residential Code standards. These drive-up prices for construction and , contributing to inflated housing costs. For example, the requirement that multi-family units use shielded electrical cable more than doubles the cost of wiring in those dwellings.

The administrative process to review projects can be costly and time-consuming, increasing the costs for developers, and discourages smaller projects proposed by homeowners. Reports indicate that c There are numerous reports that the contractors avoid bidding on Portsmouth projects because of the unfavorable building climate, attributed to both the land-use boards and city inspections department. These perceptions, real or not, discourage competition and drive-up building costs.

D. CONSIDERATIONS/GOALS

We identified three goals.

GOAL 1: IMPROVE THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT ENVIRONMENT BY REMOVING BARRIERS.

It's clear that existing zoning and building requirements limit development options and, when development does occur, increases costs. Portsmouth's Land Use Committee is already proposing some zoning changes to the Planning Board and this effort should continue. To be accepted by the residents, proposed changes must need to be widely publicized and accompanied by a significant outreach effort to achieve community buy-in. This would help prevent stalled progress from being stalled when city government changes priorities change due to a result of the two-year City Council election cycle for the Council. Absent this outreach effort, the city risks backlash if residents are surprised by changes that they do not support.

The City's additions to the building code needs to be reviewed to determine whether if the costs they impose are worth the benefits. This should not be done in-house, rather through an independent review that includes construction experts.

GOAL 2: INCREASE AMOUNT OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR INDIVIDUALS BELOW MEDIAN INCOME LEVELS.

Ideally, improving the development environment would help address this goal, but market forces make this seem unlikely. It's obvious that this general goal must be refined: the city should adopt specific targets for this broad goal so that progress can be measured. It is likely that public/private partnerships and./or external funding may be necessary to make meaningful progress.

GOAL 3: PARTICIPATE IN INNOVATIVE HOUSING INITIATIVES.

Portsmouth is not the only community facing a housing crisis. There are numerous examples throughout the state and the country that could inform future actions. These should be explored and the most promising approaches adopted. Portsmouth should participate in the recently formed Housing Champions program. It should also consider to examples from Dover NH and other communities, such as the Dover NH Transfer of Development Rights program. In addition, there must to be a recognition that this is a regional problem that requires regional solutions. This is highlighted by the recent report from the New Hampshire Department of Business and Economic Affairs ("Current estimates and Trends in New Hampshire's Housing Supply," updated 2023). In 2022, Portsmouth issued building permits for over 400 units, while many surrounding communities issued 10 or fewer.

The establishment of goals does not guarantee progress. During our study circle, we were surprised at how much has been written and discussed on this topic over the last few years, and yet there is does not seem to be any consistent summary on the needs and progress. Various reports give different estimates of the housing needs faced by the city; and in some cases the differences are large enough to lead to different conclusions. There does not appear to be a comprehensive summary on the progress (or its lack thereof) that is tied to specificity objectives. This made it difficult for Group A to understand what has already been tried and what is under development. Portsmouth should establish quantifiable goals and routinely publish information on progress towards meeting those goals.

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GROUP B

Reporting

2.2 Group B

A. GROUP DESCRIPTION:

- A. Format: Virtual
- B. Size: How many participants?
 - iii. Demographics: All home owners, one was also a landlord.
 - iv. Age ranges: 30s to 60s.
 - v. Working and educational background: Working, semi-retired, retired.
 - vi. Neighborhoods where they live in Portsmouth: Felt like we represented many areas of town.

B. SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE GROUP'S DISCUSSIONS:

I. OVERALL

Respectful of differences. "Agreed to Disagree". Overall a lot of information was shared among the group from various resources.

II. SESSION ONE

Majority expressed interest in staying in Portsmouth but had concerns about where they would find housing if they needed to transition from their current situation. Most stated that they couldn't afford to buy here if they hadn't been here a long time already.

Consensus that "housing market ladder" is losing rungs (e.g. mid-market priced houses, multi-family units, etc) between subsidized housing and high-end, expensive single family houses and condominiums due to the increasing gentrification of the city.

"Quality of life" is a concept that resonated with group members but there were differences in how to define what it means for each person.

The impact of increasing tourism on resources and traffic was discussed

Consensus is that Portsmouth's location is commuter-friendly

III. SESSION TWO

We all love downtown, but also other areas where amenities are easy to access (walking, cycling, scooter or where parking isn't troublesome). Development should be mixed use (stores and services mixed with housing) and housing should be mixed economically (i.e. lower income/affordable/workforce/luxury housing in the same development). Transportation and housing are linked. But not everyone needs a car. Parking space requirements should be eased. With adequate transportation available (private and public funded), lack of parking for every unit could discourage car ownership, which would benefit sustainability goals. The city should adjust zoning to encourage mixed development within limits of infrastructure.

IV. SESSION THREE

Session Three was primarily divided between discussing how other communities were solving issues related to housing and what priorities we thought the city should have in future development. Austin, Texas and Keene, New Hampshire were brought up as examples of communities where direct cash payments to residents were tried as a way to make housing more affordable. Minneapolis and Syracuse increased density by eliminating parking requirements and constructing tiny homes respectively, while Los Angeles converted empty hotels into "supportive housing." Mixed-income social housing and mixed-age social housing projects were discussed as ways to bring greater diversity to communities.

In the second phase of the session, our group identified five priorities for Portsmouth's development: transportation; sustainability of resources; quality of life; historical architecture and heritage; integrated communities; and maximizing use of space. The group largely agreed that improved transportation (through public transportation, walkability, and bikeability) was an important consideration for future development, the group's discussion on the remaining priorities was more nuanced. For example, the group agreed that quality of life was important, but conceded that it was difficult to define or ascertain.

V. SESSION FOUR

During session 4, Group B recapped our findings from our smaller group discussions and aligned on some key themes for our recommendations: 1) Create mixed-use hub communities with economically integrated housing options beyond downtown. 2) Create more effective and efficient public transportation options that will get people into town to work, open other options to live, and reduce traffic. 3) Review parking regulations tied to zoning and housing that limit options. Other key themes that emerged in the group conversations were: 1) Quality of life matters: We need more affordable housing

options in Portsmouth, but do we need to add a lot more housing density? 2) How do we preserve the city's distinctive character and keep Portsmouth "Portsmouth"?

C. PERCEPTIONS

1. WHEN THE GROUP FIRST STARTED THE DIALOGUE PROCESS, HOW WAS THE HOUSING CHOICE "PROBLEM" PERCEIVED?

- A. What was the group's first "problem statement?"

Varied among the participants.

- B. Was that first problem statement revised?

Yes to: *"How to increase variety among housing types and costs in Portsmouth, facilitating income diversity and the opportunity for residents to transition between types as their needs and life circumstances change?"*

2. DID THAT PREDOMINATE VIEW CHANGE BY THE END OF THE FOURTH SESSION?

- A. How does the group describe the Portsmouth "housing situation" now?
 B. As the group explored different housing needs beyond affordability what did the group find?

D. Considerations

1. WHAT ARE THE GROUP'S GOALS FOR THE CITY TO CONSIDER AS IT WORKS TO EXPAND HOUSING CHOICES IN PORTSMOUTH? HOW WILL THE CITY MOVE TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS? PRIORITIZE THE GROUP'S GOAL AND ACTIONS FROM WHAT IT CONSIDERS THE MOST IMPORTANT TO WHAT IT CONSIDERS LESS IMPORTANT.

- A. Goals: What does the group hope Portsmouth will accomplish in addressing housing choice? (In this effort, a goal is described as a desired outcome of the community to provide direction for future decisions.)
- B. Actions: Provide supporting narrative for each goal to explain how the goal could be implemented. (In this effort, an action is described as an effort the community will undertake to meet the goal.)
- i. Improved Transportation
 - ii. Create more bike lanes
 - iii. Encourage alternatives to cars by providing space for scooters, ebike, etc.
 - iv. Consider transportation in any new development
 - v. Shuttle from Foundry Garage
 - vi. Support financially the current shuttles and buses
 - vii. Find gaps to alternatives to bringing cars downtown (shuttle from Church on Mkt St Ext.
 - viii. Be sure transportation is accessible to all (location wise and financially)

2. QUALITY OF LIFE

- A. Define "quality of life" for Portsmouth residents
- i. Use this definition to ensure development aligns with it
 - ii. Definition could help reduce NIMBYism
- B. Sustainability of Resources
- i. Determine how much growth Portsmouth can have (water/sewer resources)
 - ii. Consider the changing climate (new zoning/housing requirements)
 - iii. Determine how much growth Portsmouth can have and still have adequate police/fire resources
 - iv. People that work in Portsmouth should be able to live in Portsmouth (workforce critical resource)
- C. Integrated Communities And Mini Communities
- I. Work with PHA to create housing for mixed income levels
 - II. Create incentives for developers to construct social housing
 - III. Review/change zoning to facilitate social housing
 - IV. Review tax incentives for social housing
 - V. Encourage development that is near resources to reduce traffic (old Christmas tree shop)
 - VI. Encourage development of mini communities offer alternatives to going into town for various services, providing moderate-priced housing and commercial draws/resources

2.2 Group B

- D. Historical Heritage and Architecture
 - i. Review Historic District “restrictions” on housing density
 - ii. Modify ordinances so vacant building don’t become hazardous (Burger King) and historic buildings can’t be unmaintained (Times Building)
 - iii. Compromise on historical preservation and developer need to develop (ex. stone wall on Court St.)
- E. Maximizing Use of Space
 - i. Zoning Changes
 - Decreasing/eliminating parking requirements
 - Increasing density (by increasing height limits in selective areas or allowing single-family homes to become multi-family houses)
 - Reconsidering use across the board (requiring mixed-use and allowing co-housing where not allowed now.)
 - Review each zoning area that does not have housing and add housing where appropriate (housing above retail, housing within office parks etc.)
 - ii. Prioritize City owned property for housing (community campus, DPW yard(s), skate park, city hall parking lot)
- F. What goal is first and why?
 - i. Sustainability (C above)
 - ii. Transportation (A above)
 - iii. Mixed Demographic Representation (D above)

G. What else does the group want the city to know about housing choices in the community?

Not knowing how many people are forced out of their homes due to tax burden, we suggested a tax deferment for these individuals. In general, the city should help current residents stay in Portsmouth (rent control?, rent subsidies?)

3. AS THE GROUP WENT THROUGH THE STUDY CIRCLE DIALOGUE PROCESS, WHAT STRUCK THE GROUP MEMBERS AS A NEW VIEW AND WHAT SURPRISED THEM THE MOST

We were struck by how much similar ground had already been covered by the previous housing study

We were surprised by how much our group had in common

We were also impressed that new housing development appeared to be influenced by the previous housing study (but much work remains)

GROUP C

Reporting

2.3 Group C

A. GROUP DESCRIPTION

Study Group C had ten participants and met virtually. The Group ranged in age from 30s to 70s, with diverse work experience including city jobs, municipal jobs, county jobs, university experience and corporate roles. Although we did not detail our educational experience in our introductions, several participants hold advanced degrees. The neighborhoods represented included people in apartments, condos and single-family houses from the West End, Atlantic Heights, Wibird and Little Harbor neighborhoods. One group member was a beneficiary of the HomeTown program for first time homebuyers in Portsmouth.

The group's discussions centered around all the wonderful attributes we love about Portsmouth, tempered by a deep concern that our housing crisis will make it impossible to sustain what we love most. Clearly, the problem is thoroughly studied and reported on. Initially, we were overwhelmed by so many reports to read and videos to watch, and thankful to have data to work with. This quickly turned to dismay upon realizing the problem is thoroughly studied yet limited changes have been made and progress seen only in pockets – not in the systemic manner required.

In session one, we each discussed what we love most about Portsmouth: our neighborhoods, walking and biking ability, “stoop culture,” and the feeling of safety. From there the discussion focused on the current problem with affordability.

In session two, the discussion shifted to sharing what we reflected on over the week using the “See, Think, Wonder” framework, where transportation was particularly singled out as an invisible housing cost, and how reliant most residents are on cars in order to get around the city. We also discussed some of the material we read, much of which seemed to echo what our group had discussed the prior week, so there was a feeling of ambivalence from participants who felt a lot of talking has happened over the past few years, but little action.

In session three, along with discussing the character of Portsmouth and what we've been learning from outside videos and content, we also broke out into two separate rooms and worked on the group's problem statement and what the city should consider when making plans. This problem statement and considerations are addressed in our presentation and in this document.

In session four, the group discussed what recommendations we wanted to make to the city based on the problem statement from the previous week, as well as all the learning that had happened over the past four weeks. The group got started on our presentation.

Additionally, most members of the group met for a fifth (in-person) session at the public library to complete the presentation together. This was something we felt was unique to our group and our shared desire to be part of the change we want to see in our community. We all care deeply for Portsmouth and want to see it continue to maintain its character for generations to come.

B. PERCEPTIONS

Group C members all agreed that there is a problem with housing affordability in Portsmouth. It has steadily become more and more out of reach for a diverse cohort of people to live here. Not only is the supply of housing very limited, but new development caters to higher-income people. This occurs in part because developers are able to charge a lot, thanks to the desirability of Portsmouth, but also because their costs are high and as a business they have to justify the investment of capital they make. Group C understands there is a lot of complexity that goes into this problem, but right off the bat one of the participants recognized that rigid zoning regulations and long wait times for housing approvals add to the cost for developers, which they then pass on to the consumer (hence one-bedroom apartments starting at around \$2,500 to rent, and new condos starting at around \$700,000).

The group did not state a specific “problem statement” in their first discussion, but the lack of housing affordable to all, convenient public transportation options, and safe biking lanes were common themes. Additionally, the group felt that there is a big gap between the downtown area of Portsmouth (including adjacent neighborhoods like West End, Little Harbor, Wibird, etc.) and the surrounding neighborhoods, which aren't as connected to the center of town and so require most residents to commute in by car if they want to take advantage of the entertainment, restaurants, and arts as well as the employment opportunities available in the downtown area. Due to the desirability of Portsmouth, group members also shared that they have seen an uptick in house-flipping and single-family houses being turned into full time short-term-rentals, which further drives the cost up and the supply down, leading to a spiraling effect that if left unchecked by the city could have adverse effects on the makeup of our neighborhoods, pushing out lower-income residents, who are essential to the vibrant functioning of our city, including hospitality workers, artists, young families, and even essential-service providers like firefighters and police officers.

The predominant view of the group did not change by the end of the sessions – in fact, the overall sentiment was one

of disappointment and frustration that the same things we addressed in our first session echoed those of the groups that preceded us, and that little has been done in the time since to address these problems. If anything, the problems have only gotten more pronounced with the housing boom just after COVID-19.

The “housing situation” currently was described by Group C as lacking in affordability, diversity, and transportation options. The word “inertia” came up quite a bit because there is a sense that the problems that started to chip away at Portsmouth’s affordability 15+ years ago have been allowed to spiral and we are now finding ourselves in a situation where we’re approaching maximum gentrification (if we’re not already there). As one participant observed, other “quaint sea-side towns” have experienced boom-and-bust cycles when the factors that attract people to them end up pricing out the diversity of residents that made them attractive. Once restaurant workers, artists etc. can no longer afford to live in town, the community loses its character. The participants of Group C all joined this study circle to ensure this does not happen to Portsmouth, a place that many of the residents have lived in for decades.

Several recurring themes came up in our conversations:

- The need for more connection for different age demographics came up (housing that allows senior citizens to live next to or alongside young families), as did a need for greater density and more freedom to build diverse housing in the same neighborhood (building duplexes or apartments next to single-family homes).
- The current minimum mandated parking requirements to develop housing was also vehemently opposed by the group, with most participants agreeing that not only should that zoning regulation be abolished, if anything, a maximum on parking should be imposed, to remove this roadblock from the house planning process and allow for the construction of future-minded housing.
- Our group also strongly felt that the city really needs to be intentional about building an environment that doesn’t cater to cars and is forward-looking and sustainability-minded. Along with that, the need for transportation, pedestrian- and bike-friendly streets and connections from ALL neighborhoods to downtown was a big priority for the group, because the future that we envision is one that caters to the humans who live here, gives them open spaces that are safe to walk and bike, and provides options to get into town without a car, and without the need to find parking. We want a sustainable and people-centric Portsmouth for the 21st century.

C. CONSIDERATIONS

The group’s goals for the city include:

- A. Removing structural barriers that prevent us from implementing plans to create a more diverse housing base;
- B. Creating a planning process that facilitates the development of affordable housing including an inclusive zoning ordinance, permitting process and an incentive structure that promotes the development of housing affordable to all;
- C. Creating a diverse transportation system that supports multiple modes of transport throughout the city.

Group C hopes that the city will be accountable for actions that will enable us to reach these goals. These actions include:

- A. Identify the structural barriers that prevent movement towards the creation of a more diverse housing base.

ACTIONS:

- Blue Ribbon Committee for Housing meets with the zoning board to identify zoning changes that will support a diversity of housing throughout the city.
- Reach out to builders to understand why they are not interested in constructing more diverse housing
- Develop a community consensus for a diverse housing base through neighborhood meetings perhaps using the City Neighborhood Committees.

ITEMS TO CONSIDER:

- Is the current 2-year term limit for the city council a hindrance to change? It seems in the past that the turn over on the city council has stopped progress on action to address these issues.
- Is the planning process cumbersome? Does it need to adopt a mission to create the most affordable housing possible to make any impact here?
- What other structural barriers exist that our group is unaware of that prevent more affordable housing from being developed?

ACCOUNTABILITY: Blue Ribbon Committee reports back in 3 months on all items. We recommend they meet monthly

2.3 Group C

until they get this underway.

Once these barriers are recognized the aim would be to remove them.

B. Change the zoning rules to encourage housing that is affordable by:

ACTIONS:

- Streamlining the approval process, allowing a diversity of housing types distributed more widely throughout the city and by increasing incentives;
- Adopting by-right zoning to enable developers to build higher density housing faster so that it can be more affordable;
- Eliminating single-family zoning entirely;
- Creating zoning that discourages house-flipping and housing being used exclusively for STRs;
- Eliminating parking minimum requirements;
- Increasing floor/area ratio;
- Adopting form based zoning to allow multi-unit housing citywide;
- Adopting an Innovative approach such as “parking in lieu of” fees to get developers to support affordable housing and related improved transportation connectivity, through public transit and other types of service.

ACCOUNTABILITY: The Blue Ribbon Committee on Housing reports back in 6 months on all items. We recommend they meet monthly until they get this underway.

C. Implement an infrastructure that supports alternative forms of transportation.

The Blue Ribbon Committee on Housing (or a subcommittee focusing on transportation) will advocate for the following

ACTIONS:

- Complete and implement the comprehensive bike-pedestrian plan;
- Engage with COAST and other groups to revitalize public transportation;
- Include more bike- and pedestrian-friendly updates in the City Communications including the weekly email newsletter and social media;
- Create a bike network that enables transportation to daily activities.

Only by changing the environment can we help residents change their behaviors. We’d like to see a city less reliant on car transportation.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Blue Ribbon Committee on Housing (or a subcommittee focusing on transportation) reports back in 6 months on all items.

D. CONCLUSION

The first goal is to identify and remove the structural barriers, because these have hampered progress to date. Despite years and multiple dialogues and studies which have all reached similar conclusions, very little has happened to move the needle, and so our group feels strongly that the issue is really with the systems in place that are preventing change from happening. The systems in place must be understood and audited before we can move on to other goals.

Our group agrees that creative and innovative solutions fostering community buy-in are urgently needed. The 14 group presentations on February 22nd demonstrated great civic engagement, it behooves the City Council and Staff to keep this momentum going and leverage the groups’ expertise and energy.

GROUP D

Reporting

2.4 Group D

A. GROUP DESCRIPTION

Format: In person

Size: 12 participants

A. Key terms

Affordable housing: “Market-rate or subsidized housing units that cost less than 30 percent of a low- or moderate-income household’s income and provide residents with a healthy, safe, and stable place to live” (HUD’s Creating Connected Communities, page 16).

Workforce housing: Permanent housing, intended as a primary year-round residence that is available to households regardless of age, and is best provided near places of employment; it can include, but is not limited to, subsidized and affordable housing, as well as market rate and mixed income housing (as defined by New Hampshire Housing)

B. SUMMARY OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Personal motivations for addressing Portsmouth’s housing situation

Participants, which included Baby boomers, Gen X and Millennials, represented new and long-term Portsmouth residents. During the first study circle meeting participants shared why their reasons for participating:

- Feel lots of change in Portsmouth and want to regain some visibility and sense of the options forward
- Want to see more direct connection between ideas and actions—with more accountability
- Want to feel heard
- Worry about affordable housing
- Currently rent and want to buy a house and can’t
- Want to see their children to be able to live where they were raised

Defining Portsmouth’s housing situation, challenges and contributing factors.

Participants discussed how a person’s needs, wants and demands for housing will change over time. In an ideal market, renters could grow their wealth over time and eventually buy. As families grow (e.g., children are born, aging parents move in), more space and different needs arise. As families contract (e.g., children move out, older adults downsize), less space is needed. Participants concluded that renter or buyer needs (e.g., housing features required for lifestyles such as rooms for multiple children or one floor living for older adults), wants (e.g., housing features desirable but not required) and demands (wants backed by renting or buying power) evolve over time. In the current market, low inventory and mortgages with high interest rates have made it hard to execute the ideal housing moves in conjunction with the evolving needs, wants and demands throughout lifetimes.

Participants reflected on the high demand for housing in Portsmouth outpacing a low inventory as well as high rents and increasingly high sale prices. Many participants characterized Portsmouth’s housing situation as dominated by high-end development. Participants felt that developers are incentivized to focus on high-end development despite the City Council’s initiative implemented to incentivize workforce housing. Participants commented that some workforce housing initiatives are hard to manage as people out earn requirements and need to move. It was noted that there is a lack of assistance available in managing the workforce units.

There are a number of contributing factors to Portsmouth’s current housing choice problem. New Hampshire’s policies prohibit cities and towns from enacting regulations to support expanding affordable housing supply and provisions. As previously discussed, market movement is limited due to low supply and high-interest rates for mortgages, which is keeping residents in long-time single-family homes when they otherwise might have downsized. Portsmouth attracts a number of individuals looking to reside in a state without an income-tax. With the growth of remote work, this has attracted additional residents from larger cities, where incomes are higher.

Portsmouth’s 2025 Master Plan

Participants shared reflections on Portsmouth’s 2025 Master Plan:

- 1% of land is available to build on without demolishing existing structures
- 55% of residents cannot afford to buy in town, based on income and costs
- 39% of residents live alone despite small units comprising just 20% of the market
- Portsmouth is an N of 1 in New Hampshire—it attracts and employs an out-sized population that helps keep the state economically viable

- Portsmouth’s housing challenges are unique in comparison to some towns in New Hampshire; for example, some towns are focused on preserving four-acre zoning while Portsmouth residents are considering accessory dwelling units (ADUs)
- “New Hampshire municipalities are not authorized to mandate inclusionary zoning, so incentives are currently the only means by which local governments can promote such development.”
- In 2024, Portsmouth continues to face many of the same housing challenges identified in 2015; while this is normal for a community, how can Portsmouth accelerate solutions and growth?
- To understand the Master Plan, is it a prerequisite to be acutely aware of municipal nuances and have watched every public meeting over the last few years?

Successes of the 2025 Master Plan were noted as the procurement of recreational spaces, preservation and expansion of open spaces and purchasing of the 10 acre Community Campus. Some participants identified the Master Plan’s desire to support a strong local and regional transit system. Participants discussed what next steps could be—namely, how could the city explore partnerships to build or strengthen between Portsmouth and its neighboring municipalities in regards to expanded bus service and a micro-transit system.

Finally, participants would like to see more data (with interpretation) regarding short-term rentals in the city. There was some discussion regarding Portsmouth’s current short-term rental policies. Overall, participants felt that short-term rentals keep potential inventory for long-term rentals or sales out of the market.

Regional approaches to housing challenges

Participants shared learnings on how other local communities are addressing housing. Recently, there have been a range of decisions and announcements, which speak to the varying attitudes and priorities across the state. For example, New Hampshire’s Housing Appeals Board recently overruled Epping’s zoning board and soon an apartment complex will be built; Manchester will undergo a complete review of its zoning ordinances; Exeter is considering an amendment to encourage mixed use development beyond its downtown.

C. PERCEPTIONS

Perceptions of Portsmouth’s housing choice “problem”

The group felt strongly that Portsmouth has recently experienced and continues to experience an immense transformation. Portsmouth’s housing choice problem was noted as representative of the challenges felt community-wide with the city’s evolution, which is acutely demonstrated by a competitive renter and buyer market with raising prices. Participants reflected on concerns such as:

- Affordable and middle-income housing matching the needs of the community
- Affordable and middle-income market-rate rent that allows individuals to grow their wealth and buy property (often articulated as a fear for their children’s ability to return to the community as adults)
- Current homeowners’ ability to afford to age in place
- Matching housing want or need with available inventory (such as homes as families grow and smaller homes as older adults downsize)

Overall, participants agreed that the housing choice problem is reflective of an overall market mismatch of renter or buyer needs (housing features required for lifestyles such as rooms for multiple children or one floor living for older adults), wants (housing features desirable but not required) and demands (wants backed by renting or buying power). In the current market, low inventory and mortgages with high interest rates have made it hard to execute the ideal housing moves in conjunction with the evolving needs, wants and demands throughout lifetimes.

Many participants characterized Portsmouth’s housing situation as being dominated by high-end development. In addition to the city’s changing streetscape, these characterizations reflect data on recent developments and their market effects as indicated in the PHA’s 2022 Housing Market Analysis. Despite the recent addition of high-end apartment buildings with units for rent or sale, demand for housing far outpaces supply.

While the City Council implemented incentives for affordable housing, including rent restricted workforce housing units, developers have not been incentivized to build accordingly. When initial development plans included provisions for affordable housing these intentions were abandoned due to other considerations. Some participants identified constricting income requirements for residents (e.g., once a resident out earns the income limit, they must move) as well as lack of assistance available in managing the workforce units as rationale for the lack of affordable housing built by developers.

2.4 Group D

PROBLEM STATEMENT

During the initial meeting, participants defined a problem statement to guide conversations:

Portsmouth is a vibrant community that many are eager to join. Housing demand, however, is outpacing supply.

Today, there is a lack of both housing inventory and diversity of units. Renters looking to buy and grow their wealth face too-high barriers to entry, affordable units are not moving on the local market, and new units are generally inaccessible.

To keep pace with the rate of change experienced by our families, our neighborhoods, and our communities, we hope to help each other understand the challenges Portsmouth is facing, hold each other and our elected officials accountable, discover more affordable opportunities and make our city a better place to live.

Following weeks of discussion, sharing and discovery, the group revised its initial problem statement to a vision statement:

The state of housing in Portsmouth is full of challenges and opportunities.

Today, a lack of housing inventory and diversity of units prevents our city from retaining and welcoming more residents. In the short-term, we must respond with urgency and close these gaps.

Longer-term, on top of advocating for more housing stock and access to more affordable units, we encourage our community to seize this opportunity to consider: what should housing – what should life – look like in Portsmouth in 10, 25, 100 years?

To keep pace with the rate of change experienced by our economically diverse families and ensure that our community continues to live its values of radical welcoming, environmental sustainability, financial stewardship, and leadership by example, we hope to help each other understand the challenges Portsmouth is facing, hold each other and our elected officials accountable, discover more housing opportunities, and make our city an even better place to live.

D. Considerations

Participants prioritized the top needs for the city to address, which include increasing housing stock throughout the city, empowering the public with more knowledge of land use and zoning regulations, and embracing a regional approach. To address these needs, participants defined key goals and actions.

KEY GOALS

- Increase the number of affordable and middle-income housing units:
 - Due to ongoing trends and pandemic-induced market changes and migration, demand for housing in Portsmouth far outpaces supply which yields ever increasing rental and sales prices. Approximately 50% of Portsmouth residents rent their home and 55% of those residents cannot afford to buy in town. Additional affordable and middle-income housing units—whether increased through development or redevelopment—are desperately needed to retain and grow Portsmouth’s community. Specific groups to prioritize include veterans, aging residents, young families and those with disabilities.
- Utilize undeveloped and underdeveloped property:
 - With just 1% of land available to build on, Portsmouth must strategically develop and retrofit to support expansion of affordable and middle-income housing. The Portsmouth community should be empowered with land use and zoning regulations.
- Embrace a regional approach to affordable housing:
 - Portsmouth is geographically, economically and socially entwined with local communities throughout Rockingham and Strafford Counties in New Hampshire and York County in Maine. Given close proximity and overlapping challenges an open dialogue and strong sense of camaraderie would benefit the region.

TOP ACTIONS

- Restrict short-term rentals:
 - Participants noted the increasing number of short-term rentals across the city and the potential for that number to grow, as indicated by similar communities. Short-term rentals limit the available housing stock for potential long term renters. The city should regulate short-term rentals and enact stricter enforcement of existing regulations.
- Design ongoing and impactful community engagement series with an emphasis on zoning knowledge sharing:
 - Portsmouth should seek proactive and continuous engagement with the community by designing long-term and ongoing initiatives to increase community input and shaping of local policies. Initiatives should be designed to support a range of interaction types (e.g., in person, digital) and time commitments. As an early priority,

Portsmouth could develop informational sessions and booklets on existing ordinances. A newsletter would be useful in keeping the community updated on how ordinances encourage affordable and middle-income housing, new developments and related initiatives (e.g. transportation, climate resiliency).

- Pursue partnerships with surrounding communities throughout Rockingham and Strafford Counties in New Hampshire and York County in Maine:
 - Portsmouth should make a deliberate effort to expand and formalize dialogue with neighboring communities. With strengthened relationships, local communities can develop a shared understanding of regional housing and transport challenges and develop collaborative problem-solving approaches through joint partnerships.

E. ADDITIONAL ACTIONS

- Preserve current subsidized housing
 - As noted in PHA's 2002 Housing Market Study, participants concluded that the 489 units at risk of losing federal subsidy by 2030 should remain as subsidized, affordable units. The city should invest in and seek appropriate solutions for protecting that status.
- i. Update existing zoning
 - Several participants felt that outdated zoning ordinances are negatively impacting the city's availability of affordable and middle-income housing to better meet demands. Participants recommend the city review current zoning and make adjustments in line with urban and transit planning as well as housing advocacy best practices. Participants hypothesized some zoning changes may need to be approved by a ballot referendum.
- ii. Disallow greenfield development
 - Participants noted the importance of planning for Portsmouth's future by prohibiting further greenfield development. Given limited undeveloped land in Portsmouth, it is important to protect existing woodlands or grasslands and endangered biodiversity.
- iii. Retrofit and develop for environmental sustainability and resiliency
 - Participants noted that Portsmouth should prioritize "greening" of existing development and new development supported by a holistic city vision for environmental sustainability and resiliency. Considerations for existing development retrofitting and new developments include carbon sequestration, water retention and filtration, and urban heat-island reduction. Visioning would necessitate coordination across Portsmouth's existing boards, commissions and committees (including Economic Development Commission, Historic District Commission, Housing Authority, Land Use Committee, Parking and Traffic Safety Committee, Zoning Board of Adjustments) as well as City Council.
- iv. Advance transit-oriented development and diversified transportation options
 - Participants noted cars as the predominant mode of transportation for most of the community. To support improved quality of life and access to goods and services for existing and potential residents, Portsmouth should refine a comprehensive joint housing and transportation vision in addition to neighborhood-by-neighborhood comprehensive planning. This would include diversifying current transportation options across existing development and promoting consideration of transport needs for new developments. Transportation options to prioritize include pedestrian access, non-motorized modes (e.g., protected lanes for bikers), micro-transit, para-transit, and buses. Portsmouth could pursue public-private partnerships. Additionally, adherence to these priorities would necessitate collaboration and coordination across Portsmouth nonprofits and businesses (such as COACH and C&J), Portsmouth's existing boards, commissions and committees (as described above) as well as City Council.
- v. Continue to advocate at the state level
 - Participants recognized a number of state regulations and provisions limiting Portsmouth's ability to solve its housing choice problem. Portsmouth community members and businesses should continue their organized efforts to lobby for changes to key identified policies. A key opportunity is to expand the number of involved community members. In particular, participants noted the restrictions for cities to enact a \$15 minimum wage, to mandate inclusionary zoning and to implement affordable housing minimums for new development. Participants also discussed lobbying for revised monetary distributions associated with the "pillow" tax.
- vi. Examine best practices for key learnings
 - Affordable, workforce and middle-income housing challenges are a nationwide issue. Portsmouth can review initiatives from other municipalities for inspiration and guidance. For example, cities like San Diego have

2.4 Group D

addressed workforce and middle-income housing as well as assisted renters to build equity as if they were homeowners. Portland, Maine, Lakewood, Colorado and Gonzales, California offer additional perspectives.

F. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Many participants are keen for the city to recognize how the lack of housing choices is experienced and felt by the local community. Participants referenced rising house prices and taxes, which consequently lowers the availability of middle-income housing options and makes living in Portsmouth inaccessible for many interested new residents and long-term residents. As a result, participants identified a feeling of continued gentrification identified through a fractured and growing wealth disparity in the community. With the increase in high-end apartments, “mom and pop” landlords face new competition and a struggle to keep affordable rates. The pros and cons of rent control were discussed as well as first-refusal for tenants when a property is put on the market.

Those affected by Portsmouth’s housing choice problem were identified as low income; Portsmouth’s workforce (e.g., teachers, workers at downtown restaurants and shops, first responders, medical professionals, municipal employees); middle-income young people, expanding families and older adults; low- and middle-income taxpayers. It should be noted that this is a broad stroke representation of the affected Portsmouth community and not a comprehensive reflection of affected demographics. Portsmouth should consider solutions that address the needs of people currently impacted by the housing choice problem.

VALUES TO PRIORITIZE

vii. Environmental sustainability:

- When we build healthy, safe, accessible places to live, we build stability, resiliency, and sustainability. This helps us preserve the biodiversity that protects a strong ecosystem and quality of life and, importantly, prepares us for the volatility of climate change.

viii. Financial stewardship:

- We will not always achieve 100% alignment on what constitutes “responsible financial decision-making”. Some of us would prefer to see the City Council prioritize solutions that avoid overall public spending that would lead to higher taxes. Some of us would be more amenable to higher taxes in support of public investments. Overall, participants agreed community stewardship, such as through participating in listening circles, volunteering for committees and voting, encourages us to engage in a cooperative approach to Portsmouth’s future so that we can feel part of that success.

ix. Quality:

- Portsmouth’s housing choice problem ought to be considered qualitatively, not just quantitatively. We should constantly push ourselves to move the conversation beyond strict costs and numbers of units. This is an opportunity to thoughtfully respond to, engage with and enrich the fabric of a beautiful city and community with novel ideas.

x. Legacy:

- We are eager to recommend decisions that fellow residents, subsequent generations, and neighboring cities and towns throughout New Hampshire will notice. We want to continue Portsmouth’s long tradition of leading by example. Portsmouth is city desirable to live in due to its historic downtown, working waterfront, thriving arts and culture scene, strong schools and convenient location—in short, Portsmouth is an awesome place to live, and we would like to enable more people to join and enrich our community.

Shifts in mindset and an envisioned future

Several participants shared reflections regarding their assumptions that have changed through the course of the study circle:

xi. More optimistic and more informed

- One participant was initially worried about finding consensus among the group and a sense that government is not always the best route for change and that there is a gap in competency—they have been pleased with the Portsmouth Listens experience and are feeling more optimistic overall
- One participant shared how much more nuanced their understanding of housing situation is following the Portsmouth Listens circle
- One participant felt that that it was not too late for Portsmouth to address the housing choice problem and noted that planning and incremental change makes progress

xii. Impact of New Hampshire regulation

- One participant felt that there was more that could be done at a city level but feels that city is more hampered by the state than they previously understood
- Other participants also learned how Portsmouth's ability to address the housing situation is hindered by the state

xiii. Concerns about short-term rentals

- One participant cited more concerns about short-term rentals and their impact on the market. They noted that there is a "fight" for apartment buildings with twenty units but also a number of short-term rentals lowering supply for long-term rentals. Perhaps this is something that could be addressed.
- Another participant noted a shared concern about short-term rentals and felt reassured that others are also questioning their impact on Portsmouth's housing situation

xiv. Ongoing concerns

- One participant commented that solutions to the housing situations are "a lot less black and white" than initially thought and will require multi-pronged and, likely, expensive solutions
- One participant noted, that in addition to addressing low-income and workforce housing, the city needs to address challenges in the middle-income housing market

As participants discussed goals and actions for the city to take, they brainstormed an optimistic vision for Portsmouth in 30 years. They envisioned a city well practiced with public engagement due diligence with the community and city in dialogue regarding its evolution. Portsmouth will maintain/ regain its economic diversity. As a resilient city, Portsmouth will remain responsive to climate shifts—from major infrastructure updates or restrictions to localized food production or home gardens. In addition, Portsmouth will be less car-centric and multi-modal with better transit (such as light rail, micro-transit, buses), and prioritize non-motorized travel (pedestrians, bikes, etc).

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GROUP E

Reporting

A. GROUP E'S PROBLEM STATEMENT

"The city has failed to address housing demands of a socio-economically diverse population. This has resulted in an urgent need for a clear pathway and action plan to address complex housing needs. In particular, renters with mid- to low-incomes are most acutely burdened, with increased rents taking more out of income. We feel the city has a moral imperative to enable people who work here to live here, from service workers to professionals."

B. SUMMARY OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS

PORTSMOUTH'S HOUSING ACTION PLAN

To meet head-on a housing situation of crisis proportions, the city must develop a clear pathway forward, built on specific actions and measurable performance.

- A. Harvest low-hanging fruit immediately (example: the Sherburne School project) – we want to see progress in 2024.
- B. Measure results for City use and public consumption – how many units of various housing types are proposed, approved, under construction, and completed at any one time? (We highly recommend the City creates a "housing dashboard," like this example from Kirkland, WA.)
- C. Identify barriers (example: multi-family projects currently not permitted in single-family neighborhoods) and pursue strategies to remove them (fast-track zoning reform). Public support for adequate and affordable housing is significant; engage the community to support these efforts using communication tools like social media and FlashVote.

PERSONAL STORIES, BUILDING A SHARED REALITY

Our group included homeowners and renters both young and old, as well as professionals working in the housing industry – we felt like a microcosm of the broader Portsmouth community. We shared personal stories and diverse perspectives. These anecdotes added to the wealth of housing data provided and helped us understand the difficulties in finding, affording, and keeping a home in Portsmouth – how these things affect both our neighbors and those who want to be a part of our community.

SENSING POLITICAL WILL IN THE COMMUNITY FOR ACTION AND URGENCY

The number and diversity of participants in the overall Portsmouth Listens process reassured us that our community has the will to address a complicated challenge. We believe the city is capable of implementing positive change, this in spite of the disappointment and frustration we felt about past failures to make headway with housing. Some group members have lived in the community for decades and witnessed firsthand how the same roadblocks continue to stymie progress. It's worth some of the main impediments: resistance to any form of change, bias against lower-income residents, and a lack of control over market forces and statewide legislation. Any efforts to make progress will need to face and negotiate this reality.

PORTSMOUTH MUST REMAIN "A CITY OF THE OPEN DOOR"

Common themes emerged from our shared understanding of the issues. First, our housing problems are getting worse. The longer we delay a response, the more difficult it will be to make meaningful progress. It is high time to move ideas and concepts – many long articulated – into concrete action. Second, we all feel fortunate to live in Portsmouth and want to stay, if possible, for the rest of our lives. Third, we want to welcome others to share our community, especially those essential workers who work here and help make it a vibrant place.

HEART OF THE MATTER

We summarized our response to this complex challenge as follows:

The city has failed to address housing demands of a socio-economically diverse population. This has resulted in an urgent need for a clear pathway and action plan to address complex housing needs. In particular, renters with mid- to low-incomes are most acutely burdened, with increased rents taking ever more of their income. We also feel the city has a moral imperative to enable our essential, frequently lower-paid workers – from service workers to professionals – to live here.

MULTI-PRONGED APPROACH TO A COMPLEX CRISIS

We considered a variety of ideas to address housing problems. For example, we discussed recent efforts to encourage accessory dwelling units (ADUs) by easing the sometimes burdensome and expensive permitting process. Zoning regulations were another focus. We concluded that a legacy of rigid zoning regulations may unnecessarily restrict housing supply and hamper creative housing solutions. We recognized there is limited space in the city to add new units; however, zoning reform that allows for increased density or height of buildings could enable more housing on previously developed land. In addition, we need diverse types of housing – including everything from courtyard-style clusters of homes to duplexes/triplexes, condos, and townhomes. We saw the potential of adding mixed-use buildings to new construction and

existing properties.

UNMET DEMAND FOR OVER 3,200 LIVING UNITS

We discussed proposed, in-construction, and completed housing developments, noting with disappointment how some promising projects had been rejected or reduced in scope. This was especially frustrating in light of available hard data about unmet demand for living units. For example, according to data provided by the 2022 Housing Market Study commissioned by the Portsmouth Housing Authority, by 2030 Portsmouth will need an additional 3,200 housing units, of which more than 2,700 units are needed to satisfy rental demand. Renters currently make up half the population of Portsmouth. To meet that unmet demand the city would need to construct 391 units; in 2024 Portsmouth is on track to construct less than 150 units.

REALITY OF INCOME-RELATED ROADBLOCKS

Housing data shows significant shortages in housing for workers below the median regional income. In addition, the desirability of living in Portsmouth means that a shortage of high-end units causes downward pressure and substantial price increases for what should be mid-level or traditional “starter” homes. This specific aspect of the housing crisis is often referred to as the “missing middle.” Some of our own group members spend an inordinate amount of income, increasingly above the recommended threshold for the amount of gross monthly income devoted to housing and related costs.

At the lower-income end, some residents fall off the benefits “cliff.” If they improve their income even marginally, they might no longer qualify for subsidized housing and are then unable to afford even the lowest priced homes on the market. The dynamics of income and circumstances can bump into basic notions of fairness and are often overlooked in conversations about housing and policy-making. Our group is concerned that Portsmouth could be accessible only for those who already own a home here, qualify for the available subsidized housing, or are able to spend large amounts of money on a home.

SUCCESS IS A TWO-EDGED SWORD

Every member of our group knew someone who was not able to stay or live in Portsmouth due to the cost of housing. The lack of affordable housing affects different constituencies of our population: young families, an aging generation moving to fixed retirement incomes, and many people in the mid- to low-income range. Portsmouth has evolved into a highly desirable place to live. And with good reason. We have become a recognized center for the arts, a wide range of dining, theater and music, history, and recreation. Ironically, the increase in housing prices that result from our diverse and popular culture is driving away the people who work to make that culture successful. In addition, high entry barriers to housing prevent expansion of our city’s cultural diversity.

STRENGTHENING THE QUALITY OF SOCIAL LIFE IN COMMUNITY

The group quickly realized that housing is intertwined with other vital aspects of our lives. By addressing the housing crisis in well-thought-out ways, we can actually strengthen community relationships, combat social isolation, and encourage contact between our aging population and the next generations of Portsmouth residents. Wages, transportation, access to and quality of education, healthcare, and responding to climate change all affect the quality of life of our residents. Addressing housing without consideration of these related and interdependent factors can be at best inefficient and at worst exacerbate problems in our community.

HOUSING IS PART OF COMMUNITY ECOSYSTEM

Alternatively, addressing connected factors can complement and reinforce solutions to our housing problems. For example, data shows a significant number of Portsmouth residents would like to “age in place,” to remain in the homes they love. By recognizing the connection between, for example, the increased availability of transportation, as well as accessibility to community resources and healthcare, the city can plan in a holistic way. For example, making it easy for property owners to build an ADU for family or home caregivers could allow an existing home to remain suitable for an aging resident. In addition, the creation of local “pulse” intra-city small bus service would potentially increase mobility and reduce the problems related to the dependence on automobiles and where to park them.

CALLING FOR AN ACTION PLAN

A successful plan will include multiple long-term, city-wide endeavors. However, to meet head-on a housing situation of crisis proportions, the city must develop a clear pathway built on specific actions and measurable performance. We identified four main priorities:

- A. Build and preserve. Not only should we increase our housing stock, but the city should also take action, with the necessary partners, to preserve the number of existing affordable units. This includes protecting housing subsidies and vouchers that are currently available.

2.5 Group E

- B. Reform and simplify zoning. In order to enable and encourage more affordable and workforce housing options, it is essential to revise our zoning ordinances. Reform can help Portsmouth increase housing supply that includes diverse types of homes. Here are six ideas for the city to evaluate:
 - iii. Increase areas zoned for mixed use, multi-unit buildings.
 - iv. Revisit land zoned as industrial or similar – much of this may be suitable for housing.
 - v. Further simplify the process for designing and building ADUs and remove unnecessary design restrictions.
 - vi. Create more incentives for increased housing density and building height, especially on previously developed land.
 - vii. Work with large employers to increase opportunities for workforce housing – it is advantageous for employees to live near where they work (think of service workers finishing late shifts).
 - viii. Partner with non-profit land owners (churches, NGOs, and so on) to create new housing sites in these specifically zoned areas.
- I. Collaborate with PHA. The PHA has decades of experience in creating housing for low-income residents. Because it is a non-profit that uses government funding and incentives, it is free of the profit motive. The City of Portsmouth is one of the largest landowners in Portsmouth – available land can be evaluated and through favorable leasing made available for PHA to develop.
- J. Community-wide crisis. The housing crisis in Portsmouth affects the entire community, not just individual neighborhoods. There are many stakeholders in the housing conversation and the City must work with all of them, including:
 - xi. City agencies
 - xii. Portsmouth Housing Authority
 - xiii. Business owners (large local employers such as Lonza, PNSY, healthcare facilities)
 - xiv. Business owners (small businesses)
- O. Banks, particularly local.

BUILDING SOLUTIONS AROUND CORE VALUES

We quickly recognized the need for immediate action. But we also agreed that action must be based on core values the community can agree to. We propose the following values as a start:

- A. Equitable
 - ii. Access to housing across income ranges, ages, family situations, and backgrounds.
 - iii. Diverse representation and input in decision-making process, especially accommodating residents unable to attend meetings due to demands of work or family, or lack of transportation – input should not be limited to those with the most time or resources.
- D. Durable
 - v. Long-lasting development, limiting planned obsolescence or short-term construction.
 - vi. Effects of sea-level rise and changing weather patterns in planning housing and infrastructure.
 - vii. Built-in sustainability and avoiding hazardous waste.
- H. Comprehensive
 - ix. Development should work in tandem with physical infrastructure, such as schools, transportation, and utilities.
 - x. Consider expansion or modification of infrastructure to address existing housing problems and expand opportunities.
 - xi. Development should enhance and not harm our natural resources and well-loved public green spaces.
- L. Local
 - xiii. Affordable housing for key workers can help our city thrive and remain a cultural hub. These workers include public employees, police, fire, and healthcare workers; artists, creators, and service workers; and teachers who grow Portsmouth's future generations.
 - xiv. Housing initiatives must include ways to maintain the livelihood of creators, farmers, artists, and all those other often low-income citizens who enhance our community.
 - xv. Portsmouth needs to balance the fiscal effect to taxpayers of proposed housing solutions, both positive impacts to the tax base and negative impacts of city-funded enterprises.

C. WHO WE ARE

Our group, which met in person, is made up of nine Portsmouth residents ranging in age from 30s to 70s. We live in multiple neighborhoods and are both professionals and retirees. Group E is Portsmouth in microcosm: equal representation of renters and owners. We are indebted to our facilitator.

GROUP F

Reporting

2.6 Group F

A. GROUP DESCRIPTION

- A. Group F met five times, all virtually
- B. We generally had 9 participants (more in the first meeting, fewer in the last)
- C. 3 men, 6 women 50+ in age
- D. Plus Lowell MA resident commuting to Portsmouth, trying to move young family to Portsmouth where he had a new job, who was unable to attend morning meetings but made valuable contribution by email
- E. Diverse backgrounds: finance, social welfare & homeless youth, real estate, transportation, and the arts
- F. Residing in Little Harbor, Downtown, South End, West End, North End, Greenleaf neighborhoods.

B. SUMMARY DISCUSSIONS:

Focused on housing issues, concerns, and problems in Portsmouth, and how to address

SESSION 1

Reviewed ground rules, learned about each other's housing experiences, concerns about housing now and in the future, explored shared interests, and how we characterize the current housing situation, including:

- A. For seniors: difficulty of aging in place or down-sizing to smaller, safer homes in town
- B. Poor prospects for family buying into the area
- C. Difficulty of younger workers to find affordable rentals
- D. Housing capacity needs to increase but space to build is limited
- E. Greenery adds to livability and can't be overlooked
- F. Need zoning to support diverse and innovative housing solutions
- G. Housing supply can be increased through "smarter" management of current stock
- H. Need to change "not in my backyard" attitude
- I. Incentives needed for first time home buyers
- J. Value neighborhoods and ability to walk or bike to foster community connections

SESSION 2

Reviewed the 2015 Master Plan and realized the City is trying to meet the needs of a broad cross-section of interests and how little there is in this document on addressing climate change, identified by the Mayor and Council along with housing as the top priority. Reviewed the 2017 Portsmouth Listens Housing Dialogue and concluded that it contained many excellent ideas, similar to what we will try to generate, disappointed at lack of implementation, but appreciative of the opportunity to update and expand on the ideas. Noted that it's to the City's credit to broaden engagement.

- A. Identified priorities and values the City should consider in plans to expand and improve housing options. Including:
 - ii. Achieve input from diverse demographic groups to ensure opportunities for living, working and playing for residents of all ages and income levels
 - iii. Support the unique character, natural resources and historic assets of individual neighborhoods and the City as a whole
 - iv. Provide equity and accessibility to work and other daily destinations to improve connectivity by supporting for forms of mobility, including alternatives to cars (public transit, walking, biking)
 - v. Create the resilience necessary to address climate change for the long-term public health and the quality of the natural and built environment
 - vi. Encourage sustainable building practices and ways of living that minimize environmental degradation,

energy consumption, and the effects of climate change

SESSION 3

Highlights of the meeting include:

- A. Peer best practices: how other communities are addressing housing issues.
- B. What the City needs to consider with regard to creating more places and more diverse places to live.

Other communities are:

- A. Building multi-generational, intentional communities
- B. Working with developers/builders to create tiny home communities
- C. Facilitating the building of accessory dwelling units (ADUs)
- D. Flexible zoning to permit a variety of co-housing options, including the ability to change large single home to multi-units, and ability of unrelated adults to share space
- E. Providing incentives for increasing affordable housing; accessing available government and non-profit programs
- F. Alternative/flexible financing options
- G. Along with housing costs, transportation combines for 50% of typical household cost

Considerations when creating more places to live:

- A. Creating a diversity of housing types
- B. Providing connectivity to services
- C. Preserving the character of Portsmouth
- D. Collaborating regionally (regional problems needs regional solutions, housing and transportation), to complement what Portsmouth can do within City limits; leadership role working with regional planning agencies (Rockingham Planning Commission and Metropolitan Planning Organization to consider housing and transportation combined).
- E. Creating zoning with incentives (e.g., tax breaks, increasing density, support for public transit, walkable neighborhoods) to encourage diversity in housing types
- F. Collaborating between employers/developers and City to address housing issues (public transit tax deductible benefits/passes for employees)
- G. Re-using existing structures to create housing (converting large houses to multi-units, re-purposing under-used malls and parking lots to housing or mixed use)
- H. Considering the needs of existing homeowners
- I. Factoring in Climate change to housing decisions (weather resilience, reduction in Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions in support of new Climate Action Plan through energy efficient building and reducing vehicle trips through walkable neighborhoods)
- J. Focusing on co-benefits of decisions: housing strategies the improve diversity, equity, reduce GHG emissions, and foster neighborhood cohesion (Livable Communities)

SESSION 4

Focused on specific topics to be considered and actions to be taken to help alleviate the affordable housing situation and provide additional housing options

C. PERCEPTIONS

- A. The housing problem was perceived as a lack of affordable housing and housing diversity in Portsmouth and the surrounding region

This was revised to state that *“21st century market forces and an ongoing shortage of affordable, workforce, and mid-level housing have resulted in decreased diversity in the City of Portsmouth.”*

- B. We held this view but expanded and refined it throughout the five sessions

2.6 Group F

- C. Lack of affordable housing leads to many effects, including difficulty finding employees for local businesses; weakening the arts, restaurant, and recreation character of the City; lack of socio-economic, ethnic, and racial diversity; growth of a primarily older population; and increased risk of homelessness.

D. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. **Goals:** Improve housing capacity, diversity and inter-connectedness to strengthen neighborhoods and “livable communities”
- i. **Actions:** Promote more and varied housing types for all household income levels throughout the city, including:
- Providing ADU construction incentives such as following Kittery, ME grant program. Link: [Town of Kittery Launches ADU Grant Pilot Program](#)
 - Decreasing lot sizes for small homes and tiny home communities (e.g., Back River Rd. Cottages, Dover, NH) micro-unit rentals or ownership. Link: [Cottages at Back River](#)
 - Looking regionally for buildable land and existing structures for housing and combine with expanded City and regional transportation, working with COAST, UNH Wildcat, and C&J bus operators
 - Permitting conversion of 1 family to multifamily homes and allowing for or facilitating co-housing and shared housing options
 - Reducing the necessity for parking spaces for specific housing types and by increasing transportation/mobility options to reduce household transportation costs (“a better bus can be part of the housing solution”)
 - Providing incentives to developers by reducing costly parking minimum requirements exchange for support for affordable housing or “parking in lieu” of contributions to city operations, including public transit or walk/bike infrastructure that improve affordable mobility
 - Encouraging building in gateway districts and corridors where transportation already exists or can easily be expanded to be easier to use (e.g., a shuttle loop connecting major destinations and neighborhoods without the need to transfer, with greater frequency)
 - Promoting creative use of existing space (malls, parking lots, under-used buildings) not just open / green-space, combined with accessible alternative transportation. Link: [Commercial to Residential Conversions Guidebook](#).
 - Create the resilience necessary to address climate change for the long-term health of the City’s natural and built environment
 - Encourage sustainable building practices and ways of living that minimize environmental degradation and the effects of climate change through adapting to future weather conditions and reducing GHG emissions
- ii. Improving housing capacity through supply and smarter and more flexible use of housing assets is the first goal because it has a direct effect on the other two goals of increasing diversity and interconnectedness.
- B. **Goals:** The City needs to encourage an administrative “ATTITUDE OF YES” to encourage and facilitate new and innovative approaches to housing
- i. Diverse demographics need diverse housing options while supporting the unique historic and while supporting the unique historic and aesthetic character of Portsmouth
- Marketing & Messaging: nurture attitudes that value all forms of community diversity and invest in these values; build community engagement from foundation of Dialogue
- ii. Increased Connectivity: connect people to people, people to jobs, people to services. A co-benefit of increased connectivity is a healthier community.
- Need connectivity between suburban areas of Portsmouth, not just to downtown.
 - Provide equity and accessibility regarding connectivity and support for all forms of mobility
 - Encourage housing in gateway corridors which are on current public transit, or in areas where public transit can easily expand
 - Work with local businesses and hotels to subsidize shuttles to get around town (“car free tourism,” C&J links, amenity for housing development). Shuttle loop could connect neighborhoods, affordable housing, and

other priority destinations. Shuttle to Down East rail stations in neighboring cities, and to C&J

- Center for Neighborhood Technology establishes critical housing-transportation connections, with metrics and models to show inter-relationship between housing cost, placement, and transportation with diversity and GHG reductions; models allow analysis of current to proposed conditions relative to current situation. Same for AARP Livable Communities program, as described in Session 1 homework.
- iii. There are many mechanisms and resources to fund and finance more diverse and affordable forms of housing. There are important opportunities for the City to take a more proactive approach:
- Identify one city staff member as a resource on all things related housing to provide direction to "Who, What, Where" for residential and commercial housing, encouraging flexibility and innovation, helping navigate barriers, and suggesting best practices
 - Add to the City website with "one-stop-shop" for access to housing resources to help people learn about residential grants, financial incentives, low-interest loans, tax abatements and rebates, creative housing solutions
 - Tap into the State of NH's comprehensive public and private resources and data already identified through their current extensive R & D by starting with: (Link) [Resources for Increasing Housing Opportunities in New Hampshire](#)
 - Devote a Housing Resource Shelf within the Library and continually update - Offer Free educational presentations by housing experts from NH Housing, PHA, etc.
 - Identify public consultants to work with the City to identify and develop financial incentives for affordable and diverse housing from public, private, non-profit sources
 - Actively advocate for state reforms to support local flexibility and innovation
- iv. Portsmouth should aspire to be a "best practice" for innovative housing solutions, where we can provide ideas for peers
- v. Build on progress and engagement of Dialogue process and reports as the foundation for building community commitment, involvement, and political will to realize the opportunities addressed by the groups

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GROUP G

Reporting

2.7 Group G

A. GROUP DESCRIPTION

1. 7-8 people in each circle- ages between 60-85 years old
2. Participants have lived all over the country & world- MA, MI, NH, PA, WI, WV, CA, Europe to name a few
3. Currently reside in variety of Portsmouth neighborhoods: Woodbury, South End, Spinnaker, Bartlett St. Atlantic Heights, Plains Neighborhood
4. Varied professions: real-estate, IT, graphic design, education, hospitality, scientists

(SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AFTER NOTES SECTION)

B. SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE GROUP'S DISCUSSIONS:

OUR CHARGE WITH THESE STUDY CIRCLES:

What should the city take into consideration so that a variety of housing options contribute to Portsmouth as the place to live and work?

NOTES FROM STUDY CIRCLE 1

Discussion Prompt:

Think about where you and your family live now, your own (and family's) needs and how they may change.

1. Ideas around Accessibility
 - A. Ease of getting one place to another (stores, services, within a radius)
 - B. Parking – options for residents, for workers, consider cost , considerations when there are new developments*
 - C. Safety- safe walking and biking options
 - D. Buildings to grow old in--- i.e. multiple floors may become less accessible

*multiple opinions on this- some believe parking spots must still go with housing others do not

2. Multi-generational Housing
 - A. "Stuck" in home/price point/considerations of property taxes
 - B. Some who wouldn't be able to make a move to another property
3. Accessory Dwelling considerations
4. Micro-houses- smaller spaces but is this appealing to enough people?
5. Location/Proximity- idea of a "10-15 min city"
6. Gateway Communities – possibilities here? Creating walkable/accessible areas
 - A. On Lafayette.
 - B. Newington.

Discussion Prompt:

How would you characterize the "housing situation" here in Portsmouth?

1. Very attractive place to live, people want to be here; coming in especially during covid
2. Limited stock/not enough to go around
3. Housing stock is not diverse enough (\$\$) need more choices for types of housing on market
4. No controls on pricing, rent, etc...
 - A. There are a few... PHA does provide some of this
5. Zoning limitations- ex) no more than 3 unrelated people can live in single dwelling
6. Lack of the variety of housing
7. People spending too much of their income on housing
8. Increase in unhoused / individuals living on the edge of being pushed out of their current situation
9. Age of the housing stock

"Problem Statement" given what we know now?

Portsmouth is an incredibly attractive place to live and demand is high. There are not enough diverse housing options (type and price point) in the City of Portsmouth for people to live and work here. Demand climbs and so do prices.

NOTES FROM STUDY CIRCLE 2

Connection before Content: What do you like about where you live?

1. Having neighborhood, a backyard, and some green space
2. Diversity- South End- PHA, young, old, residents in neighborhood
3. Barlett St- her neighbors
4. Swett Ave off Middle- narrow road, not a thru street so no traffic, small neighborhood
5. Spinnaker- neighbors, access to gym
6. Manning St/Meeting house- historic nature of the neighborhood

Updated Problem Statement

Portsmouth housing market is limited (stock, variety-type, zoning) and not sustainable (weather, climate changes, age of housing stock) and expensive- making it more and more exclusive and difficult for many to live here.

1. Q1: review of master plan/PHA study
 - A. City edict/developers/what possible with regulation for low income housing
 - B. Way to impact--- transportation --- this is a place where we have control (versus price of housing and wages)
 - C. Zoning ordinances need to change
 - D. Role of PHA moving forward--- this has been successful
 - E. Infill- need to think about density
 - F. Discussion around wages- raising minimum wage ; importance of state legislation
 - G. Opportunities for leveraging tourist economy further in Portsmouth
 - i. Taxes?
 - ii. Ideas about different tax rates for primary versus secondary home owners
 - H. This is a regional issue--- given lack of space downtown
 - i. Need to think about new housing further out (gateways in Portsmouth and surrounding towns)
 - ii. Malls?
 - I. Concerns about infrastructure- do we have enough on the utilities; shared Tabor's thought- still debate about this
 - J. Water Treatment Plant- no large enough to cover need over time- limited space.
2. Q2: what are some ideas you have about what city take into consideration in expanding housing?
 - A. Offsets- developers and regulations
 - B. Transportation *** all agree--- this is a big one that City could have influence over
 - C. ADUs
 - D. Gateway Community development- Pease, Newington, South Gate Plaza--- create communities where you can walk to groceries, other services here
 - E. Subsidy mechanisms- continue to ensure Section 8 accepted
 - F. Explore ideas about property taxes
 - vii. Grandfathering in
 - viii. Sliding scale
 - ix. Primary Owners (versus those who own and leave NH for 1/2 the year)
 - G. City Owned Properties- esp
 - i. Sherburne
 - ii. Community Campus
3. What Values and Priorities need to be considered?
 - A. Equity (places for all to live here*)
 - B. Diversity – multi-generational , racial, socioeconomic
 - C. Sustainability – energy efficiency (can influence other values- lowering heat bills, for example)
 - D. Historic Value
 - E. Connected--- community, transportation, etc...
 - F. Safety

*some tension around this but majority agreed; although not realistic to think everyone can live anywhere

2.7 Group G

NOTES FROM STUDY CIRCLE 3

Connection before content:

Any changes in thoughts/mindset in through process so far?

1. Not really
2. Fighting windmills--- bigger than us
3. Challenge of the rich get richer--- really illuminated here
4. Wages are so critical- how can we address any of this without addressing minimum wage?
5. It's a regional issue
6. Inflation
7. Ideas around commercial to residential
8. Climate and sustainability hasn't been central to our conversations and that's surprising
9. Idea of the limits of growth

What is the infrastructure limit for Portsmouth? Should this just be defined and work w/in those means

Need to prioritize city properties

Need to have the city think about regulations and zoning and systems working together – this is not only for those looking for places to live; developers too--- there are so many barriers and they lose the ability to follow through at times (examples about workforce housing #s decreasing or projects changing b/c it takes so long to get through the regs)

Other communities-

1. Long Beach- changing zoning so that single family homes could be 4 units
2. North Country (from NH Business publication)
 - A. 8 employers (businesses) came together and built housing for employees
 - B. Cross section of sectors- hospital,
 - C. Good model of the biz community coming up w. solution

Portsmouth needs to review zoning & ordinances for more than 3+ unrelated persons in 1 dwelling

Question about the Women's League

Idea of Gateway Communities

1. Newington
2. Ensuring that zoning can support commercial to residential
3. Building up in places

Parking changes-

1. Austin, Gainesville, Anchorage – examples where all did away with parking requirements for new units
2. Positive change

Can city do parking subsidies for residents? (given that it happens now for workers)

Underutilized lots – use them!

Increase density at Gosling Meadows- there was a conversation about building up – where did that go?

Weatherization and climate attention of current stock

1. Think about energy
2. Solar Panels
3. Insulation
4. Need to ensure this is front and center with any city building
5. Zoning changes

Safety

In spite of good efforts- these conversations haven't reached all people- still many don't engage; need to go to neighborhoods ; use existing neighborhood conversations

C. PERCEPTIONS

1. When the group first started the dialogue process, how was the housing choice "problem" perceived?
2. What was the group's first "problem statement?"

Portsmouth is an incredibly attractive place to live and demand is high. There are not enough diverse housing options (type and price point) in the City of Portsmouth for people to live and work here. Demand climbs and so do prices.

3. Was that first problem statement revised?

SLIGHTLY

4. Did that predominate view change by the end of the fourth session?

NOT MUCH

5. How does the group describe the Portsmouth "housing situation" now?

Portsmouth is an attractive place to live and housing demand is high. There are not enough diverse housing options (type, price) in the City for people to live and work here. Additionally, the City has very few sources of funding (essentially just property taxes) and no control over prices and rents.

SUMMARY OF PROBLEM OF CONSIDERATIONS/PROBLEM STATEMENT AND ACTIONS**D. CONSIDERATIONS**

What are the group's goals for the City to consider as it works to expand housing choices in Portsmouth? How will the city move to accomplish these goals? Prioritize the group's goal and actions from what it considers the most important to what it considers less important.

PRIORITIES:

1. An increased stock of a VARIETY of housing options (at all price points/sizes/types)
2. A more robust public TRANSPORTATION system
3. REGIONAL mindset and approach to solutions – Portsmouth cannot do this as an island

GOALS:

1. REZONING CONSIDERATIONS so that workforce, varied stock, more affordable options are possible (i.e. rezoning from single family to multi; commercial to residential, allowing "boarding" house model)
2. Consider incentivizing BUSINESS COMMUNITY to engage in solutions (develop housing solutions specifically for employees, consider Pease, medical, hospitality communities) – great examples from up North (in notes)
3. Further develop GATEWAY CORRIDORS (Lafayette Rd, Newington for instance) to create communities w. walkability, transportation, grocery/services connection--- ensure that these places meet the criteria of where diverse group of residents would want to live and then make sure there is good, consistent transportation – particularly into downtown from these communities

ACTIONS:

1. Incentives for developers/corporations- related to density, tax incentives
2. Attention to weatherization/energy efficiencies for existing properties – ensure that costs are kept down by making existing stock more efficient, ensure good insulation, windows, etc... which will cut costs for renters
3. Increase density on PHA and city properties – look to places where we could build up
4. Remove barriers/restrictions to allow for more diversified housing (micro-units, "rooming" houses, manufactured housing, adus)
5. Incentivize (private owners) use/development of vacant lots – use tax credits, benefits, programs

What else does the group want the city to know about housing choices in the community?

2.7 Group G

1. SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES and CLIMATE need to be front and center and underlying all considerations and actions
2. WAGES and NH low minimum wage was significant concern and one that needs to be part of conversations even not directly within our locus of control (beyond ballot box)
3. IS THERE A LIMIT TO GROWTH? Need to have an evaluation and conversation about this

As the group went through the study circle dialogue process, what struck the group members as a new view and what surprised them the most?

Conversations of the limits of Portsmouth as a City --- given state law or barriers were surprising. The biggest view, however, that came up is an idea around “what is holding up the action?” In reading Portsmouth Listens notes from 2007, Master Plan 2015, PHA Housing Study, State Level Housing evaluations, and so much more---- the problems and conversation are not new. And suggestions and actions are not new---- participants are ready to see the plans for action to address these ongoing issues.

GROUP H

Reporting

2.8 Group H

A. GROUP DESCRIPTION

We met virtually

Size: How many participants?

The group started with 5 members and one had to drop out.

All women

College educated professionals and business owners. Mix of working and retired.

West End and downtown.

B. SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE GROUP'S DISCUSSIONS

Overall- There is a lack of affordable housing.

SESSION ONE

Participants like their mixed-age neighborhoods. They are great for raising families, socializing and walking to town or other shopping. All participants want to stay in Portsmouth but one would like to have someone to look after her and is considering a boarder or an ADU. May not be a reality to stay here in 10 years due to high taxes. Desirability has brought influx of wealth and low inventory of homes driving prices up. Second homes are vacant much of the year. In the past, large employers provided housing for their workers and Portsmouth had multi-family homes and boarding houses. Zoning now prohibits multi-family in most neighborhoods. Many residents are afraid of "low income" housing and yet these are the only solution for some of our essential workers who are often one paycheck from homelessness. All options for affordability should be considered including manufactured homes.

SESSION TWO

Participants all appreciate the proximity to friends and the closeness to restaurants, theater and shopping and feel a sense of community in their neighborhoods. There is a huge discrepancy between locations in Portsmouth and the city will need to invest money into affordable and deeply affordable housing if we are to solve the problem of homelessness. Portsmouth Housing Authority cannot keep up with building needs so developers should be given incentives to build deeply affordable housing. Seems like these are the same issues brought up in the past Portsmouth Listens Sessions as well as the last Master Plan. Lack of housing is a state as well as city issue when it comes to the number of units built and allowed. Developers complain that there are too many boards and want the process simplified. Change zoning some areas to allow multi-family, mixed use and smaller lots. Some suggestions: Incentives for businesses to build workforce housing; change parking requirements; require large homes to have an ADU; incentivize home sharing; build at Pease; purchase abandoned or derelict properties for revitalization; and allow conversion of office or retail space into apartments. Encourage the building of accessible housing and a high end continuing care facility like Riverwoods. Engage the state and surrounding communities in finding and supporting solutions particularly around public transportation. Group values stress everyone deserves a place to live and want diversity and a vibrant arts scene to thrive in Portsmouth.

SESSION THREE

Stress outcomes over process and strip away unnecessary regulations. Emphasize multi unit developments with no density regulations; allow higher lot coverage; encourage ADU's and home sharing; partner with employers; change parking requirements; support public transportation and provide shuttles from satellite lots or garages to downtown. Encourage mixed use developments and homes that meet ADA requirements and use existing buildings. Educate residents on who are the essential workers that we all rely upon and how "housing first" initiatives have better outcomes for those experiencing homelessness. Use the 4 C's moving forward: Collaboration among public, city, developers and non-profits to find creative solutions; Compassion towards those in need of deeply affordable housing and essential workers who cannot afford this community while we cannot afford to be without them; Communication and education with residents involving them in working towards housing for all; Create Community to meet multiple layers of needs. It was disheartening to see hoe many of these solutions have been proposed before and met with roadblocks such as NIMBY and zoning restrictions.

SESSION FOUR

It's important to include diverse needs and other considerations to address all members of the community: workforce; seniors; mobility challenged and so forth. To be more open minded. The importance of regional solutions, particularly regarding transportation. Put brakes on more hotels and focus on getting more housing built. Learned that there was a prior Portsmouth Listens forum focused on housing in 2017 and that Common Ground of the Seacoast provided a report to the city in the fall of 2023.

C. PERCEPTIONS

WHEN THE GROUP FIRST STARTED THE DIALOGUE PROCESS, HOW WAS THE HOUSING CHOICE “PROBLEM” PERCEIVED? WHAT WAS THE GROUP’S FIRST “PROBLEM STATEMENT?”

There is a lack of affordable housing.

WAS THAT FIRST PROBLEM STATEMENT REVISED?

No

DID THAT PREDOMINATE VIEW CHANGE BY THE END OF THE FOURTH SESSION?

Yes.

HOW DOES THE GROUP DESCRIBE THE PORTSMOUTH “HOUSING SITUATION” NOW?

That there is a lack of affordable housing and housing options.

As the group explored different housing needs beyond affordability what did the group find? That there is a need for small, starter homes, accessible homes for seniors or others with mobility issues, and a need for deeply affordable housing. That mixed use and mixed age neighborhoods would be welcome as a way to build community.

D. CONSIDERATIONS

What are the group’s goals for the City to consider as it works to expand housing choices in Portsmouth? How will the city move to accomplish these goals? Prioritize the group’s goal and actions from what it considers the most important to what it considers less important.

GOALS:

What does the group hope Portsmouth will accomplish in addressing housing choice? Revamp zoning throughout the city. Change parking requirements for downtown neighborhoods. Use the existing housing stock more efficiently through home sharing. PHA cannot keep up with the need for deeply affordable housing so the city should provide significant incentives to developers willing to build affordable and deeply affordable housing. Engage with local businesses and Chambers of Commerce to encourage them to build or financially support housing for their workers. Collaborate with the Pease Authority to build workforce housing on-site.

ACTIONS:

In order to meet housing needs the city needs zoning that allows multi-family and mixed used neighborhoods and must simplify the process of navigating the system for developers. Once new zoning is in place training should be provide for volunteer board members to ensure consistency in applicant treatment. Parking requirements are creating a barrier to increased housing. Portsmouth is an old city that was not designed to accommodate cars. Instead, long term leases at garages or satellite lots should be encouraged. Community engagement around who workforce housing is meant for, those essential workers we rely on and who make our city livable and vibrant as well as the success of housing first programs for those experiencing homelessness. Encourage home sharing as a way to make best use of the current housing stock by providing training and incentives to homeowners.

What goal is first and why?

Zoning. Developers have proposed multi-family homes in different areas and been refused. This included on lots where multi-family homes had just been demolished in order to build new. At a recent round table held for developers they all identified the application process as cumbersome and costly. The city has vacant office spaces that could be converted if zoning allowed.

What else does the group want the city to know about housing choices in the community?

Some seniors would like to downsize, but there is a lack of small, accessible homes/apartments. Including these in new projects/neighborhoods rather than in 55 and up developments would be desirable.

As the group went through the study circle dialogue process, what struck the group members as a new view and what surprised them the most?

The “mixed use” development concept where there is housing suitable for seniors, young families and others along with some commercial use such as offices or shops on the ground floor.

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GROUP I

Reporting

A. GROUP DESCRIPTION

1. We met virtually via Zoom.
2. Our study Group consisted of five people.
 - A. We are one woman and four men, white and middle to upper middle class.
 - B. We are all in our 70's.
 - C. We are all retired, college educated and formally worked in various professional occupations including corporate executive, finance, insurance, accounting and engineering.
 - D. Our group participants include one renter, two who own condos and two single family home owners. We live in the West End, Downtown, Christian Shores, Sagamore Creek area, and the Pheasant Lane development.

B. SUMMARY OF GROUPS DISCUSSIONS

OVERALL

Our group discussions generally started off each session trying to understand what questions we were tasked to address. The further along we were in our discussions the complexity of the housing situation in Portsmouth became more apparent and the list of questions seemed to grow accordingly. We spent a good deal of time discussing the lack of affordable housing, the various causes that contributed to this issue, and what some of the possible solutions might be. As we continued along this discussion path it also became increasingly clear that the problem of lack of affordable housing is in many ways really the symptom of a host of contributing factors. These include the basic economic law of supply and demand, changing demographics, Portsmouth's dependence on tourism as its primary industry and the economic forces that control it such as its reliance on low cost labor, the increasing demands on the city's infrastructure, the lack of abundant and reliable public transportation, the increasing costs of ownership such as rising property taxes, utilities (particularly water and sewer), and maintenance, the limitations of current zoning requirements, a general community resistance to accepting the need to allow more neighborhood density, and the prevailing importance of preserving what ultimately makes Portsmouth special.

SESSION ONE

The first half of session one was spent introducing ourselves to each other and describing our individual living situations. Our assigned group was originally made up of nine participants, but only five of us attended the first and subsequent sessions. Our demographic makeup is very similar. We are all retired professionals, college educated, with ages ranging from 71 to 79 years old. One of us rents an apartment and the rest own either condos or single family homes. We have been residents of Portsmouth ranging from 4 years to over 35 years, which gave the group a wide range of historical context to our discussions. Overall we are fairly homogeneous group.

We also described the various features our living situations offered each us. Several of us appreciate the convenience of living within easy walking distance to downtown, shopping and other activities; others were more dependent on their cars and brought up the difficulty of finding parking downtown. This brought us to discussing the general lack of convenient public transportation, and the dilemma faced by many people who work in Portsmouth, often in the low paying service industry jobs but are unable to afford to live here and have to commute which adds an additional economic burden to their budget. The remaining discussion of our first session was focused on trying to understand the concept of affordable housing, who is entitled to benefit from it and how it is really a regional issue, not just limited to Portsmouth. It became apparent that we all needed to gather more information to better understand the many factors that make the "housing issue" such a challenging topic.

SESSION TWO

We began our second meeting trying to clarify what questions we are trying to address in our study group. The study guide we were given states "The goals of this effort are for Study Circle participants to identify the components of and to understand — from various points of view — " the housing issue" in Portsmouth and to develop recommendations to the city for expanding choice (by location, by design and by price point) in places to live." This is a broad mandate that can include quite a range of discussion areas so we spent a good deal of time trying to define the term "housing issue." It became clear that this is about more than simply trying to come up with solutions to creating more affordable housing in the city, but rather trying to understand the many underlying causes that have contributed to the situation Portsmouth now confronts.

Portsmouth is a desirable place to live. It was once an affordable to live and work in. It included a diverse mix of income groups, employment opportunities, a vibrant resident arts community, a variety of affordable entertainment venues and restaurants, convenient downtown shopping including a grocery store, hardware store, pharmacies, shoe repair, and much more. It was very much a community where one could feel connected, part of a special place, both historical and cosmopolitan, easy to get around. Things change.

Today Portsmouth has become increasingly gentrified. Over the last decade or more the city has become more well known, often included on national lists of best places to live. Its historical charm, abundance of attractions, restaurants, hotels and easy walkability has brought large numbers of tourists who support many of the hospitality businesses that drive the city's economy. Many of these visitors ultimately are so charmed by Portsmouth they decide to move here, often establishing second homes for themselves. In addition, a number of large corporate employers have located at Pease and offer well paying jobs, increasing the regional population and the demand for local housing. The prevailing demographic for these newer residents tend to be well educated higher income groups. As a result most of the recent development has concentrated on building high cost housing. This increased demand coupled with the limited supply of existing housing units has driven the average cost of housing, both rental and owner occupied, to record levels.

As a result many residents, particularly those with lower incomes, are unable to afford the cost of living here and are forced to move out of Portsmouth often to neighboring cities and towns, making the city less diverse. The question we now are trying to grapple with is what can be done to correct this shift and bring the housing situation more into balance. We have discovered that this question has no easy answer and is made up of many different but related components.

Reviewing the 2017 Master Plan it is apparent that it was focused on the desirable qualities of the city and devoted only a small portion to low and moderate income housing needs. There is some suggestion that certain inclusionary mechanisms should be considered, but omits the needs of our increasing aging population as well as no discussion of re-purposing existing properties into housing units. Other topics that receive little or no mention include trying to streamline the permitting process for new development, encouraging the construction of smaller micro housing, ways to encourage homeowners to build ADUs, and effectively banning the conversion of existing housing into short term rental units such as AirBNBs.

The Master Plan did encourage certain neighborhood development projects such as in the West End like the three Frank Jones Brewery apartment buildings near Plaza 800. The improvement of the infrastructure along Islington Street and rebuilding the sidewalks has also been well received. We felt that for the upcoming Master Plan more emphasis needs to be focused on how to increase the availability of more housing without encouraging unchecked sprawl. Making better use of existing buildings is one way, allowing single family houses to be converted to duplexes, allowing some smaller lots to be subdivided, improve the permitting process and making the process of developing ADUs easier and more streamlined.

SESSION THREE

Some of the considerations the city needs to consider moving forward is understanding the changing makeup of many households. According to the Portsmouth FY 2024 budget only 21% of households are families with children. The remaining 79% of households are about evenly divided between singles and couples. These statistics illustrate that there is little need for the construction of large housing units, when fewer people per household require less space than traditional family units. Also it was noted that 52% of housing units are owner occupied; the remaining 48% are renter occupied. Our research has noted that the current rental vacancy rate is less than 1%, an extremely low rate. As a result rents have risen to unprecedented levels. An increase in the available number of affordable rental units is clearly needed for lower and moderate income families, singles and seniors.

We feel that the city needs to partner with the Portsmouth Housing Authority to establish housing development on city owned property. The recent attempt to build housing on the site of the vacant Sherburne School is one example of this happening. That project has been stalled due to local neighborhood opposition, but the city needs to work out a solution and make this opportunity happen.

Other considerations include the implementation of inclusionary zoning requirements for new housing developments, changing zoning rules to encourage the creation of more ADUs, as well as allowing for increased density throughout the city, effectively banning short term rental units and encouraging more development in the various Gateway districts throughout the city.

SESSION FOUR

This session was mostly devoted to discussing the writing of this report and the creation of our PowerPoint presentation.

C. PERCEPTIONS

During our initial meeting we attempted to define what exactly the "housing issue" in Portsmouth is and how to go about finding viable suggestions that might help guide the city towards possible solutions to this problem.

1. At first we considered the problem statement to be "Portsmouth has a lack of affordable housing: what are the causes, who is affected and how can the city create and encourage the development of reasonably priced housing?"
2. After much discussion we decided to change our problem statement to reflect the lack of affordable housing for lower income groups such as service industry workers as well workforce housing for middle income households such as teachers, police and firefighters, public sector employees and healthcare workers.

2.9 Group I

As we began to discuss this it began increasingly apparent that the “housing issue” was in fact extremely complex and is the result of a wide range of conditions and circumstances that combined have brought us where we are today. We realized that our original problem statement was oversimplified and didn’t quite address the real question.

1. Our revised problem statement now reads: *“Who gets to live in Portsmouth: Can market forces, political will and community acceptance converge to make the city a vibrant, diverse and affordable place to live for people at all incomes levels?”*

Aside from affordability other considerations include the need for more expansive public transportation, an emphasis on walkability and proximity to shopping and essential services, the need to create a mix of housing types both for rental and ownership to accommodate families, single occupant households and senior housing needs, and preserving open space and Portsmouth’s unique historical features.

D. CONSIDERATIONS

It is apparent that much of the current housing situation in Portsmouth is the result of zoning. Current zoning has been an invitation to developers to build developments that have dramatically changed the city landscape, particularly downtown and in the North End. These developments have been mostly focused on building an abundance of upscale hotels, high-end condos and market rate apartment complexes. Very few projects have been built with lower and middle income residents in mind. Developers cite the high cost of land and construction as the reason that more affordable units have not been built. It has been up to the city and the Portsmouth Housing Authority to step up and develop affordable and workforce housing. Little progress has been made in this area.

1. Goals:
 - A. Revise city zoning ordinances and regulations to promote affordable housing.
 - B. Encourage existing homeowners to create ADU’s, convert under-occupied single family into duplexes or consider renting out unused rooms.
 - C. Build more walkable developments like the apartments near Plaza 800 and the Portsmouth Greens (McKinnons shopping area) and Yokens Plaza.
 - D. Create or expand city run programs to assist seniors so they can stay in their homes and first time home buyers with down payment assistance.
 - E. Partner with the PHA to build projects on city owned property such as the recently completed Griffin apartments near the fire station and the Sherburne School project.
 - F. Work with surrounding towns to adopt a regional approach to the housing situation which includes the need for more public transportation options.
 - G. Consider offering a housing stipend to public servants such as firefighters, police, and teachers.
2. Actions
 - A. Conduct a comprehensive demographic study to better understand why certain income groups cannot afford to live in Portsmouth.
 - B. Update the Master Plan to focus on housing. Include the implementation of inclusionary zoning as a tool to make affordable housing a standard requirement of new developments. Also, include the needs of expanded public transportation, necessary infrastructure and preservation of open space and recreation areas.
 - C. Streamline the permitting process to build ADU’s as well as for larger development projects. Minimize red tape and approval delays.
 - D. Explore development opportunities in local under-utilized properties such as the Fox Run Mall.
 - E. Develop and publicize programs such as the Portsmouth Housing Endowment program to assist first time home buyers.
 - F. The current Sherburne School project needs to be restarted in cooperation with the local neighborhood residents.
 - G. Work with surrounding towns to establish a regional commission to study common issues regarding housing, transportation and infrastructure needs.
3. Primary Goal
 - A. The goal with the highest priority is to make inclusionary zoning a requirement for future development projects to reflect the urgent need to encourage the creation of affordable housing options.
 - B. It is well known that the primary reason the study groups have been convened is the lack of affordable and workforce housing available in Portsmouth. Unchecked development and the lack of programs and initiatives by the city has stymied attempts to improve the situation. Interestingly, having read through the 2017 Housing Study Group report and the recommendations of the various study groups, there has been almost no change since its publication six years ago. If anything the housing situation has only gotten worse since those findings were made.
 - C. After reading the various resource documents and much discussion it became clear that the “housing issue” in Portsmouth is extremely complex. This requires a dedicated task force (or committee) to commence a study and offer viable solutions for the City Council to consider and put in place.

GROUP J

Reporting

A. GROUP DESCRIPTION

Format: In person

Size: 11

Demographics: range of ages from 30's to 70+'s, multiple neighborhoods represented, all were residents, professionals (including retired), mostly home owners, one current renter.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS:

The group generally followed the Discussion Guide and had engaging, respectful, thoughtful, and informed conversations across the 8 hours of dialogue. There was general consensus on most matters and convergence around the final findings and goals/actions of the group. Attendance was very good, with only a couple of absences due to illness or family commitments.

Individual session notes are attached to this report.

B. PERCEPTIONS, ASSUMPTIONS, PROBLEM STATEMENT

1. When the group first started the dialogue process, how was the housing choice “problem” perceived?

When the dialogue process first kicked off, participant views around the housing choice problem appeared to be in agreement on the wide range of perceptions, causes and symptoms related to Portsmouth's housing challenges.

Listening session participants recognized that each member of the group brought, a diverse background and perspective to the housing conversation and at the same time, shared similar assumptions, and goals. Group J's initial conversations focused on the current state of the housing situation and recorded observations included:

- A. The main limiting factor is Portsmouth is built out – less than 1% of buildable land remains across the city;
- B. The immediate need to engage and partner with our neighboring communities to pursue a mutually beneficial regional and local transit system;
- C. At present there are few starter homes and ‘fixer upper’ homes remaining in the city;
- D. Limited options to ‘age in place’ for the city's senior population;
- E. The City should continue to develop regulations to foster diverse populations with different types of housing and density of housing, such as ADU's, conversion of vacant commercial zones into multi purpose residential zones;
- F. The city's housing problem is not limited to one segment of the population, it's impacting many different members of the city's diverse population/potential population.
- G. Housing challenges in Portsmouth should not be viewed through a single silo'd/isolated lens, but rather through an expanded lens – affordable housing is a “regional challenge” involving other neighboring communities.

2. What was the group's first “problem statement?”

Portsmouth, NH is a highly desirable place to visit and live with only 1% of developable land remaining which would be considered available and attainable for additional housing.

What factors should be taken into consideration to maximize both public and private development or redevelopment.

To ensure that individuals and families earning less than/equal to 120% of AMI (Average Median Income) as well as seniors looking to downsize and age in place have that opportunity in Portsmouth.

3. Was that first problem statement revised?

No, Not really, it quickly became apparent during our initial discussions, that more available data was needed to ensure the group was all working from the knowledge base. As members began to review the various reports, the Group came full circle back to the same conclusions list below, there should be a multi-faceted approach focused on the 3 A's listed below, Portsmouth's housing challenges require a call to action and commitment to:

- A. Accessibility - Improving accessibility to quality transportation, critical amenities (e.g. grocery stores, medical facilities, various services, and regional neighboring communities
- B. Availability – With only 1% of the land in Portsmouth available to ensure sufficient housing stock for rent or purchase, including opportunities for downsizing, while still maintaining the balance of public demands for various sports activities, recreation opportunities, parks and greenspace, and safety facilities (Police and Fire) can be complicated.

- C. Attainability - Prioritizing attainability – Portsmouth is a highly desirable place live, but with only 1% of developable land remaining that would be considered available and attainable for additional housing, the focus should be fulfilling the needs of the taxpayers that are currently paying for it, keeping in mind that any “municipal property” belongs to current taxpayers!

4. Did that predominate view change by the end of the fourth session?

The predominant view did not change as much as expand and build from the first to fourth session. Throughout the 4 dialogue sessions the group considered a range of factors contributing to Portsmouth's housing challenges, solutions required to address the challenges, and actions/commitments to be considered, etc. The group's discussions evolved from the conceptual to actionable outcome driven recommendations and even expanded scope for City Council to consider the housing challenges our city is facing is not just a “Portsmouth Problem”. Next, to think outside of the box when it comes to solution identification. An example that gained quick consensus in the group is that housing solutions require a regional collaborative, partnership based approach with support from across the Seacoast.

Several examples of where the group ended up by the 4th session are cited below:

- A. What's Needed to Fully Commit to Sustainable Housing Solutions:
- i. The need to set measurable, quantified, targeted goals, by price range, for any new or rehab construction, including rentals;
 - ii. There is accountability to the Listening Session input, with evidence of follow-through and transparency;
 - iii. Agreement within the City Council that the needs of current residents, then (those who would like to be residents) take precedence over the needs of developers;
 - iv. All actions taken are in compliance with NH laws and regulations, (RSA's);
 - v. City Council needs to be accountable for staff enforcing existing NH State regulations, along with City ordinances.
- B. Recommendations to consider:
- i. Set specific targets (numbers) and timelines to foster real change;
 - ii. Focus on regional plus city-wide solutions, not at the neighborhood level;
 - iii. Solutions should take into account impact on city taxpayers;
 - iv. Encourage employer-assisted housing for larger employers (e.g. Borthwick Ave. area).

5. How does the group describe the Portsmouth “housing situation” now?

The group believes the housing situation in Portsmouth requires a systematic approach to housing solutions, carefully considering availability of transportation, access to amenities, impact on our water and sewer infrastructure and climate impact. This requires a regional, plus city commitment to move ideas and concepts to tangible results driven actions. The group reflected a lot on those values and priorities they see as essential for the city to consider in thinking broadly about the housing situation in Portsmouth. Examples include:

- A. Increased diversity of housing options are desirable, while still maintaining the history and culture of Portsmouth;
- B. Housing options should reflect diverse family structures (single, nuclear, extended/multi-generational, with and without children, etc.).
- C. As the group explored different housing needs beyond affordability what did the group find?

The group discussed a variety of housing needs beyond affordability and identified the following additional considerations when discussing the housing situation in Portsmouth:

- A. Housing is a national, state and regional problem and it's critical that the City Council engage and partner with our neighboring communities to pursue a mutually beneficial regional and local transit system. Understanding that housing is a regional issue; transportation can close the gap;
- B. To implement a systemic approach to housing solutions, carefully considering availability of transportation, access to amenities, impact on our water and sewer infrastructure and climate impact;
- C. The concern expressed during the process from most of the group is this exercise will follow the same path as the 2017 study and serve no purpose with no identified goals, objectives, actions, outcomes. The group is looking for transparency and consistent communication over time from the City Council to visibly demonstrate a commitment to realistic housing solutions; not just identify the desired end result then work backwards to justify that action.
- D. Need to follow and enforce State of NH statute (RSA's) that define AMI guidelines to in both public and private housing to develop programs and solutions to assure that housing is attainable to those making 120% AMI or less or residents that want to age in place.
- E. Most participants seemed unaware of the City's property tax relief programs to address “aging in place” for

the city's growing senior population.

- F. The group agreed that the representation of the unhoused was missing from the dialogue process/group.

C. CONSIDERATIONS

WHAT ARE THE GROUP'S GOALS FOR THE CITY TO CONSIDER AS IT WORKS TO EXPAND HOUSING CHOICES IN PORTSMOUTH? HOW WILL THE CITY MOVE TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS? PRIORITIZE THE GROUP'S GOAL AND ACTIONS FROM WHAT IT CONSIDERS THE MOST IMPORTANT TO WHAT IT CONSIDERS LESS IMPORTANT.

As Portsmouth works to expand housing choices within the city boundaries, Group J hopes that the city moves beyond what it has already done to include ADU guidelines and various zoning enhancements, or conduct another study in hopes that usable land materializes, and instead focus on quantifiable goals for a more diverse socio-economic population to live or work in the city. We want the city to prioritize the lives of people above profits for developers. We recognized that this requires a more regional approach and thinking outside the box.

1. Goals: What does the group hope Portsmouth will accomplish in addressing housing choice?
2. Actions: Provide supporting narrative for each goal to explain how the goal could be implemented.
3. What goal is first and why?
 - A. Encourage more participation in the tax relief programs already in place for the elderly, disabled, and veterans along with first-time-home buyers programs, which are updated monetarily by the City Council every year.
 - B. This is the first goal as it reflects the "people first" value and recognizes that moving away from home may not be economically possible and it removes people from family and other support systems;
 - C. Socio-economic diversity that values people from all walks of life. Enforce regulations we already have requiring multi-dwelling buildings to have units available to those with lower incomes,
 - D. "Housing" as more than just shelter-- a whole system that includes shopping, schools, childcare, health care, and recreation accomplished by more planning and less zoning.;
 - E. Transportation, both bus and rail, that is affordable and functions for both our workforce and employers. This will require changing attitudes about mass transit and a public relation campaign to inspire regional thinking. We envision an incremental plan with each success building upon the last.

WHAT ELSE DOES THE GROUP WANT THE CITY TO KNOW ABOUT HOUSING CHOICES IN THE COMMUNITY?

1. This group did express fears of population density. Current property owners purchased their homes based on the area density at that time, and there are privacy, noise, and parking concerns with filling in every space with any type of housing, especially our precious Historic District.
2. The group is very concerned about the effects increased density will have on our aging infrastructure and increased flooding, due to the increase intensity of storms and the changing climate .
3. Nobody wanted to build in wetlands.
4. Nobody expressed a desire for more million-dollar condos that are only occupied part-time. Whatever the city does, this group wants it to act with transparency.

AS THE GROUP WENT THROUGH THE STUDY CIRCLE DIALOGUE PROCESS, WHAT STRUCK THE GROUP MEMBERS AS A NEW VIEW AND WHAT SURPRISED THEM THE MOST?

Four ideas that seemed fresh were:

1. Building smaller homes for families on smaller lots (i.e. patio homes), rethinking boarding houses as a use for some of the very large homes, and reconsidering manufactured home;.
2. Housing is a national, state and regional problem and it's critical that the City Council engage and partner with our neighboring communities to pursue a mutually beneficial regional and local transit system. Improved mass transportation. Coast, Wildcat, and C&J are all good, but much more could be done with them. Those who have used city buses in larger cities recognized that they can be easy and convenient .

PORTSMOUTH LISTENS HOUSING 2024 DIALOGUES - Summary notes

GROUP J NOTES SESSION ONE - JANUARY 17, 2023

What do you hope to get out of these dialogues?

fresh ideas

to present realistic opportunities for housing

to listen and contribute

how actions can affect others—decisions by outsiders are not what small communities want

what is the “real” Portsmouth, not just the South End-- WHAT??

to contribute to community dialogue

to understand and be part of the solution to a global problem

hope to come up with solutions to listen to what people have to say

Sharing your stories

Key ideas/themes

Many of us couldn't afford to buy our current home if we were looking for a house today

There are few starter homes or fixer-uppers on the market

We want people to be able to age in place (e.g., through programs like Youth Villages)

Homes have become work sites; this has consequences for where we live and design of homes

Lack of transportation/mass transit is a huge issue; mass transit could help to close some of the gaps that exist

Portsmouth is built out; less than 1% of buildable land remains

Zoning laws need updating; current rules are not conducive to building more housing

Need to consider the resources/context around housing, not just the buildings themselves

(e.g., access to food, health care, transportation, schools, etc.)

Housing is affected by 3 factors (the triangle of quality, time, and money)

What are we noticing?

What's missing?

The housing situation in Portsmouth

There is not enough affordable housing for people who live in Portsmouth. How can we help people with financing and affordability?

30-year affordable housing time limit is approaching

Round Robin Wrap-up

What stood out tonight?

Everyone came here with an open mind and appreciated the ideas they heard

There was a commonality of perspectives

Housing is not just about “young professionals;” trades people, working class families need consideration, too

Excited about the knowledge base that is here

What can we offer to the city council that would make sense?

We need more information

GROUP J NOTES SESSION TWO - JANUARY 24, 2023

1. What are some assumptions that we carry that may affect our approach to the problem?

Size matters – size can indicate both financial value and social value

Neatness counts – does cleaner, neater mean safer?

Our neighborhoods are losing their distinct characteristics; less diversity across separate neighborhoods (ethnic and SES); decrease in number and role of neighborhood associations

2.10 Group J

Judgments about manufactured homes (from old views on “trailer parks”) need to be re-assessed

Greater diversity makes for a better community; example of Osprey Landing

Things were better 30-40 years ago

Are we only concerned about “young professionals?” What about the trades people we need to service our homes and community?

2. What are you seeing so far in our conversations and the review of reports and data?

Zoning laws may present an opportunity to solve the problem; can past allowance of large lot sizes be reversed?

Findings of the 2017 Housing Study point to the same problems we are discussing now; we’ve had a lot of talk but little action; we seem to do this every 5 years; “spinning our wheels”

Only 1% of Portsmouth land is undeveloped; this creates severe limits on growth; contaminated land also limits opportunities; possible expansion of wetlands due to climate change

Need to focus on what has worked well in the past, such as the Court Street PHA project)

Need greater emphasis on starter/small homes by private developers

A wonder – do we need more planning and less zoning?

Portsmouth’s population will peak in the next 10-15 years, then level off or decline

Redevelopment of existing structures is part of the solution

Experience of neighboring communities may be useful to us

2015 Master Plan linked housing and transportation to create networked communities; housing and transportation are interdependent factors, especially for workforce needs

Process going forward should engage, commit, sustain

Need to assure that developers are held accountable for commitments to affordable/workforce portions of new projects

Recreational areas need to be preserved as part of the solution

Access to amenities (shopping, schools, health care, recreation, transportation) should be prioritized

Environmental impacts of growth need to be considered; sustainability as a key value for the city; climate resiliency especially an issue for the South End

Portsmouth listens, but will the city council and planning board?

How can we be sure there are regional solutions and cooperation?

What is the role of the state?

GROUP J NOTES SESSION THREE - JANUARY 31, 2024

What have you learned about other communities’ experiences?

Mass transit is part of the solution; maybe is the place to start to solve the housing problem; state has not played a role re: transportation

No obvious efforts to address “aging in place”

The need for housing for young families and the aging population has not been addressed

Infrastructure upgrades are crucial

Housing prices are up everywhere

Massachusetts has focused on increased density near commuter rail

Use of public transportation can carry a stigma

Seem like a huge, complex problem that is difficult to solve; some of us are pessimistic that we can get beyond the earlier efforts and reports

What are our priorities and values/principles for guiding future decisions?

Increased density can be good, especially considering the need for wetland mitigation in Portsmouth

Increased diversity of housing options and community population are desirable

Housing options should reflect diverse family structures (single, nuclear, extended / multi-generational, with and without

children, etc.)

Do people really want to move here rather than surrounding towns such as Dover?

We value stewardship of the land, our history, and our culture

What are possible targets of opportunity? What are the barriers? What would success look like?

Public transportation—bus and train

Regional focus, especially for transportation

Enforcement of existing zoning limits; elimination of incentives without follow through needs to change

Convert empty, underused office space into housing

Assure availability of amenities on site or nearby

Value-engineer existing PHA properties to increase efficiency and density

Creative financing such as Pease Development Authority approaches

No public property should go to private developers

“Affordability” needs to be defined

Contamination at Pease limits opportunities there; could be developed after mitigation

Emphasize collaboration with other communities

Politics can be a barrier

Cost of re-purposing office to residential can be a barrier

Physical space limits on land availability – only 1% of public land is developable, and buffer zones must be preserved

Need to extend infrastructure beyond city core

Financing is a barrier

Lack of zoning enforcement is a barrier

Lack of creative thinking is a barrier

Don't pay for any more studies, take action now

Set up a fund for seniors to keep housing affordable

What does success look like? (TBD in session four)

GROUP J NOTES SESSION FOUR - FEB. 7, 2024

What would success look like?

Action that leads to results (including out-of-the-box thinking)

Quantified targets, by price range, for any new or rehab construction, including rentals

Not just a housing solution—a systemic and regional approach

The Council listens, is realistic as to public and private actions

There is accountability to the PL input, with evidence of follow-through and transparency

The need of residents (and would-be residents) take precedence over the needs of developers and city officials

Actions are in compliance with NH laws and regulations

What is our statement of the problem?

We need solutions that focus on:

Accessibility

--to transportation

--to amenities

--with neighboring communities

Availability

--sufficient housing stock for rent or purchase

--within the constraints of available public land

2.10 Group J

Attainable with respect to cost of development and price of housing, including opportunities for downsizing

What are our priority considerations (i.e., what are our goals)?

Regional transportation that recognizes that housing is not just a Portsmouth issue, but a county wide, seacoast issue

Value engineering of existing PHA properties to assure maximum efficiency and density

Ensure sufficient sewer and water capacity

Current workforce housing incentives are non-negotiable; should be enforced and not reversed later in the process

Housing solutions should benefit both current and future residents

Current buildable city-owned land should be ranked by an independent, objective sources for highest and best use (recreation, PHA housing, police station, parks, sports arena, fields, etc.)

What are our core values and principles?

Regulations should foster a diverse population with multiple housing types, sizes, and structures

Actions value the needs of current and future residents over profits for developers

Stewardship of the land, history, and culture of Portsmouth

Systemic community approach to development that includes amenities, environment, and transportation

Transparency and accountability

GROUP K

Reporting

A. GROUP DESCRIPTION

1. Briefly describe your study group (ID by Letter assigned to your group): K
 - B. Format: In person or virtual - Virtual
 - C. Size: How many participants? 5 + facilitator
 - i. Demographics: Portsmouth residents / Homeowners / Male – Female mix
 - ii. Age ranges - 40 to 65+
 - iii. Working and educational background – Employed, Retired, likely all with some degree(s) of some sort.
 - iv. Neighborhoods of where they live in Portsmouth (Downtown, West End, South End, Portsmouth Proper)

B. SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE GROUP'S DISCUSSIONS:

Overall – ADD AT END

SESSION ONE

A variety of issues were discussed:

1. Difficulty for current residents to buy up; scale down, add ADUs.
2. Lack of workforce and affordable housing. City workers / fire/ police
3. Lack of senior living opportunities.
4. Portsmouth offers a high quality of life for residents based on city, environment, amenities.
5. Barriers to development
 - A. Zoning – too complex, many boards involved. Need to streamline the process.
 - B. Wetlands – climate change is part of the issue. We need to address that as we add housing.
 - C. Developer motivation (lack of)
 - i. Lack of labor
6. Out of state purchasers.
 - A. AirBNB
 - B. Second homes
 - C. Investors purchasing rental properties.
7. Education – needed to get residents on Board with adding workforce and affordable housing.

SESSION TWO

1. Favorite Aspects of the City:
 - A. Historic elements that help drive the city's economy. ie: Strawbery Banke Museum, Historic buildings and venues.
 - B. Parks and playgrounds, Walkable city. Safe.

2. Q1: Review of 2015 Master Plan:

What struck you?

- A. Impressive that many of the things in the 2015 MP have occurred or are occurring.
- B. Some of the ideas and plans active today were active in 2015 as well.
 - i. West End, Pevery Hill Rd., Lafayette Gateway apartments and homes.
 - ii. More affordable housing – not necessarily workforce housing.
 - iii. Housing is still expensive but there are more, more affordable options.
 - iv. Walkability and cycling paths – commuting options.
 - v. Additional municipal parking – Foundry Place.
 - vi. Park initiatives – Skate Park
 - vii. Sidewalks – Islington Ave (example)
 - viii. Connecting neighborhoods through public transportation / walking and cycling paths.
 - ix. Value of neighborhoods as the basis for housing development/planning

What values do you see?

- A. Retaining the spirit and integrity of the city. (Historical)
- B. Expanding housing opportunities.
- C. Community Building – Skate park, cycling paths and new trail. Portsmouth 400 events.
- D. Councilors are more often than not well intentioned. However, their processes should be more transparent

and creative.

What is left out?

- A. Portions of the city are feeling left out, such as outlying and the gateway areas. Like they don't belong to Portsmouth.
 - B. Housing density issues relative to the city's resiliency, such as ground water and rising tides.
 - C. Community Safety – Housing for people who provide critical services. Fire / Police / Nursing
 - D. Parking
 - E. Additional Dwelling Units
3. Q2: What are some ideas you have about what the city should take into consideration as they plan to expand housing options?
- A. Create a vision plan for housing for the city and articulate that there is a spectrum of housing opportunities, ranging from small scale, incremental, such as ADU or different neighborhood housing types that would fit into neighborhoods, and then new neighborhoods that follow traditional design principles as opposed to our suburban subdivision standards.
 - B. Address NIMBYism through education and positive visioning. Investigate avenues minimize costly and time-consuming appeals.
 - C. Identify options for workforce housing within city limits or close to city limits.
 - D. Examine and adjust rules and regulations at the City and State level in order to allow for easier permitting processes, moderate planning board policies that exercise a softer hand within reason. Zoning and HDC rules and regulations could be adjusted.
4. Q3: What values/priorities need to be considered in this plan?
- A. Education of city population about Housing and the needs for various types of housing. This would include economic and safety impacts.
 - B. City staffing priorities in order to get things done. City Staff should be part of this process. Participation and the ability and depth to be able to support initiatives whatever they may be.
 - C. Use of commercial properties that are not being used.
 - D. Prioritize housing and neighborhood development with sustainable and resilient principles
 - E. Examine and evaluate what other comparable cities are doing.
 - F. Parameters for builders who want to work in Portsmouth. A certain percentage of what they build should qualify as Affordable and Workforce housing. Investigate State and City laws and see if there are some opportunities.
 - G. Examine regional housing opportunities for Affordable Housing and Workforce Housing in Rye and Greenland / Eliot, York.
 - H. Downtown parking considerations. Foundry / South Mill Parking Lot / City Hall Lower Parking Lot.
 - I. Evaluate shuttles from outlying areas to downtown from new outlying housing areas.
 - J. Examine Portsmouth downtown being a pedestrian / cycle area only.
 - K. Study public transportation (Coast) options to broaden service geographically and provide a more regular timetable.
 - L. Revisit the list of city-owned undeveloped properties and package all of the parcels up to a developer RFP for workforce housing for city employees such as police fire, etc.
 - M. Do a study of the route one Corridor basically from Woodbury overpass to the bridge and rezone that area for mixed use redevelopment with housing. Combine that with a redesign of route one to be a handsome two-lane Boulevard. Integrate sustainable design principles. Would be a federal, state, city and private sector partnership project.
 - N. Create an opportunity for liner buildings to be placed around or above downtown parking lots on State Street, Court Street, Bridge Street and other locations.

SESSION THREE

1. Q1: What did you find out about how other communities are addressing housing?
- A. Some cities: require developers to provide a percentage of affordable / workforce housing based on how many more expensive units they develop.
 - B. Provide initiatives for developers to develop affordable housing.
 - C. Have adjusted their zoning laws to better accommodate growth lessening the barriers.
 - D. Have been creative and have worked with developers to build on top of strip malls. (Dover).
 - E. Commercial buildings to housing.
 - F. Have worked with the State, neighboring towns or counties to broaden land availability for development.
 - G. Tiny homes / 3D houses / ADUs

2.11 Group K

- H. Allow for more development.
- I. Made accommodations for their city employees (Firemen, police, city workers, etc.)
- J. Parking lots with build over units.
- K. Have developers build to the maximum potential using incentives.
- L. Reduce the amount of parking spots required / unit.

2. Q2: What does the City need to consider when planning for more places to live?

Can there be priority consideration (for certain populations, certain types of housing, certain neighborhoods, other)?

- A. Develop a Vision Plan (City based / Regional / both?)
- B. Provide diverse housing options through this vision. (Senior, Workforce, More affordable family)
- C. Look at land use options -ie: parking lots, Route 1 Bypass, etc. See what could be done to maximize diverse housing opportunities.
- D. Use of City owned property for building sites.
- E. Consider opening conversations with neighboring communities to partner in some solutions.

What values are important to include in planning?

- A. Access – make Portsmouth more accessible to more people.
- B. Inclusivity – for housing through housing options.
 - i. Tiny homes
 - ii. Multi-family
 - iii. Manufactured homes
 - iv. High-rises
- C. Transparency & Accountability
 - i. Build trust with the folks that pay the taxes.
 - ii. Planning & implementation process.
- D. Housing Diversity
 - i. Consistency – Rule consistently on requests for development or house changes.
 - ii. Leadership, Courage and Accountability (gain trust)
 - iii. Education
 - iv. Climate resiliency

3. Q3: What struck you/came up for you in today's session?

- A. Make things a little easier by removing some of the barriers and regulations that inhibit the necessary development.
- B. Lack of affordability.
- C. City should have solid leadership that reflects the vision provided by Portsmouth Listens.
- D. City should consider allowing for more creative options in design and architecture.

SESSION FOUR GROUP K HOUSING DISCUSSION NOTES

Two members- Bill Blum and Jay Lieberman (?- believe that was his last name) have left group due to other commitments and limited ability to engage

1. Presentation of Groups

- A. Thursday February 22nd, 2024 6-7:30 pm (doors open at 5:00pm)

2. Connection Before Content (Ideas & Understanding That has Changed since Starting This Discussion)

- A. Housing problem is more complex than originally thought
 - i. Less confident in the “easy, low hanging fruit solutions”
- B. Lack of priority on housing issue by city
 - i. These discussions have occurred in the past with solutions identified multiple times, yet no-minimal progress
 - ii. Unclear on barriers that are preventing forward progress
 - Funding?
 - City will?
 - Public will?
- C. Side Note: Possible Recommendation: To create position within municipal government with sole focus on housing issue.
 - i. With further discussion: Is this Howard's role?
 - ii. His is a 2 year position. Is there funding to make the position potentially longer term?

- D. Reviewed and Edited Report Collectively
- E. Initiated Work on Power Point Presentation

C. PERCEPTIONS

1. When the group first started the dialogue process, how was the housing choice “problem” perceived?

It is difficult for anyone to get into Portsmouth as the City is small and very developed. It is even more difficult for people with lower wages as there are so few options available.

- A. What was the group’s first “problem statement?”

Lack of affordable housing

Lack of understanding by residents (education required to bring residents up to date.)

Lack of leadership and vision allowing for more creative options in terms of design.

Climate change is impacting some of our current neighborhoods

- B. Was that first problem statement revised?

No

2. Did that predominate view change by the end of the fourth session?

No.

3. How does the group describe the Portsmouth “housing situation” now?

- A. The housing situation is improving slowly, however, it is locked in many areas.
 - i. More recent developments have not been affordable or workforce alternatives.
- B. There is a need for more affordable housing as well as workforce housing options.

4. As the group explored different housing needs beyond affordability what did the group find?

That if someone wants to move to Portsmouth, change homes in Portsmouth, develop or modify, there are many barriers to entry from permitting, to finding labor to finding inventory.

D. CONSIDERATIONS

WHAT ARE THE GROUP’S GOALS FOR THE CITY TO CONSIDER AS IT WORKS TO EXPAND HOUSING CHOICES IN PORTSMOUTH?

1. Work with developers. Encourage them to build in Portsmouth.
 - i. Review the permitting and inspection process. (Simplify)
 - ii. Perhaps offer incentives for certain types of construction.
2. Help educate the community to broaden areas for workforce and affordable housing.
3. Identify land within the city as well as neighboring towns where some density could take place. (Begin a dialog with Greenland, Rye, Eliot, etc.)
4. Broaden public transportation options. More regular schedule and broader reach.
5. Involve City Staff from the start.
6. Examine options around unused commercial properties.
7. Keep engaging residents.
8. Consider the impact of climate change when developing the city

HOW WILL THE CITY MOVE TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS? PRIORITIZE THE GROUP’S GOAL AND ACTIONS FROM WHAT IT CONSIDERS THE MOST IMPORTANT TO WHAT IT CONSIDERS LESS IMPORTANT.

1. Goals: What does the group hope Portsmouth will accomplish in addressing housing choice?
 - A. The city would have to take a multi-faceted approach to broaden workforce and affordable housing availability.
 - B. Educate the residents to avoid or diminish backlash.
 - C. Identify developers that are able to work with the City toward these goals ensuring participation on a broader scale.

2.11 Group K

- D. Review zoning and permitting processes to streamline and simplify.
 - E. Identify land that can be used to provide density opportunities.
 - F. Identify funding to support this work
2. Actions: Provide supporting narrative for each goal to explain how the goal could be implemented.
- A. What goal is first and why?
 - i. Education would be first in order to obtain consensus and understanding as well as developing trust with residents and potential developers.
 - ii. Leadership and commitment is also a top priority. City leaders need to create a climate where affordable housing is more viable and supported by policy, process, staffing and regulations.
3. What else does the group want the city to know about housing choices in the community?
- A. Senior housing options should be studied given our aging population.
4. As the group went through the study circle dialogue process, what struck the group members as a new view and what surprised them the most?
- A. Housing problem is more complex than originally thought
 - i. Less confident in the “easy, low hanging fruit solutions”
 - ii. Lack of priority on housing issue by city
 - iii. These discussions have occurred in the past with solutions identified multiple times, yet minimal progress
 - iv. Unclear on barriers that are preventing forward progress
 - Funding?
 - City will?
 - Public will?
 - State or Federal laws?

GROUP L

Reporting

A. GROUP DESCRIPTION

Briefly describe your study group.

1. Format: In Person
2. Size: How many participants? 10
3. Demographics: Retirees and working professionals, none with infants, toddlers or school-age children. 50/50 m/f. All white.
4. Age ranges: 28-77. Clustered in the 65-77 and 28-42 ranges.
5. Working and educational background. All with high school diplomas, most with college degrees (bachelor and higher). Retired or working professionals spanning a variety of industries from education/social work to tech, IP to engineering, the arts to small business ownership.
6. Neighborhoods of where they live in Portsmouth: North End: Atlantic Heights; Boarding House; Osprey Landing; Maplewood Downtown: Islington Street, West End: Morning Street, South End: Little Harbor

B. SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE GROUP'S DISCUSSIONS:

OVERALL

Overall there was a great deal of consensus amongst members of Group L. While participants brought their own sets of personal concerns, there was a shared empathy for all those in our community struggling to find or maintain adequate housing that only deepened as the sessions continued. Many members had participated in past Portsmouth Housing dialogues or witnessed first hand, both here and elsewhere, the trend towards exclusivity in the market. All were alarmed by this trend's impact on our community and our inability to steer development towards more equitable, attainable outcomes. The group acknowledged that some progress has been made and should be championed and promoted. Group priorities were developed. Priorities such as: addressing and adapting zoning, permitting and state impediments; a more thorough exploration of effective incentives (e.g., past attempts have been focused on developers, but how can we incentivize individuals to contribute affordable housing solutions); more resources directed to and more collaboration with Portsmouth Housing Authority. There was also an urgent desire to see the city of Portsmouth invest in "marketing" the crisis by creating easy-to-read materials and tools that diagnose and highlight the impact of rising costs on our community members.

SESSION ONE

Group L members introduced ourselves and shared our Portsmouth histories; all expressed concerns about Portsmouth's future. Commonalities were: a desire to maintain and grow the sense of belonging within our community; a fear of being priced out or aged out and therefore displaced; the lack of affordable/available housing, particularly for the workforce, those of lesser means, and even the middle class. The housing situation was summarized as exclusive, expensive and dire. Group L expressed a desire for more data driven material on the subject, presented in easily digestible, layman's terms. The urgency of the growing housing crisis was acknowledged as was the need for a comprehensive, long-thinking, solution oriented approach.

SESSION TWO

Group L shared observations from the week between Session 1 and 2. Things noticed: luxury condos, corporatization, and new development that felt "off"; the density of downtown's cherished historical architecture; the walkability and safety of the city; lights off at dwellings that are vacant but furnished (if no one's home, is it a home?). The observations led to reflections. Some remembered growing up here and the diversity of the city's former residents. Others, communal living scenarios, past and present, and the eclectic types of neighbors and roommates now gone, diminished or endangered due to rising costs. Some wondered how we chose to define what is historical? Examples were given of buildings that may have once been divisive, but are now improved upon, accepted or even appealing parts of the overall Portsmouth aesthetic. All expressed a connection to this place, an appreciation for what it was, what it is, and a plangent desire to keep that spirit alive and thriving. Discussion shifted to the 2015 Master Plan and 2017's Portsmouth Listens sessions. A number of group members had participated in the latter. It was noted that while many of the stated priorities have seen tangible progress (green spaces, accessibility, character districts etc.) housing successes are much fewer in number and slower in pace. There was discouraging redundancy in what was expressed then regarding access to affordable housing and what we are facing now. The conversation touched on the financial bind felt by any resident in the middle class or lower. We asked what constitutes affordability. Do we have the necessary political will to get things done? Where are the City's legislative "teeth" in regards to enforceable development requirements, and how effective are incentives? We then brainstormed ambitious solutions. Ideas like a vacancy tax, Community Housing Land Trusts (in the same vein as Conservation Land Trusts), viable or atypical locations to push development and zoning changes (think: unused office/retail space), and ways to couple adapting to Portsmouth's climate future to supplying Portsmouth's housing need.

SESSION THREE

How has Group L's thinking evolved since night one? Our perspective has broadened to consider the pervasive and nuanced ways this issue affects all demographics, not just our own. It's not only a matter of affordability but the types of housing matter too (i.e., aging in place differs from workforce needs). While the lack of workforce/starter-family housing often gets top billing, are we also representing underserved populations like the unhoused? Zoning complexity and state restrictions continued to be a point of dismay. We acknowledged that successes would create other points of need. More housing will require a more robust public transportation system. There was optimism around an increase in supply. We were asked to highlight examples of successful or provocative initiatives from other communities. Some highlights include: Seattle's two-for-one requirements within city limits (ADU or Duplex); stealth density; the tiny home community in Dover; BH on Middle Street etc. We also discussed examples in the negative: big block "warehouses of people"; the unintended consequences of seemingly innocuous zoning requirements (e.g., parking requirements). A robust discussion exploring the idea of "historic" ensued, settling on the ideology of preservation without strangulation. Finally, we collaborated on a list of community values. Many areas of overlap were shared, the most common being, tradition and historical memory, arts & culture, a diverse community of inclusivity, vibrancy, opportunity and sustainability.

SESSION FOUR

Session four was full of summarization and solution based discussion. Group L parsed through our conversations and settled on a set of priorities and recommendations for the city. These will be further articulated below but top priorities include: addressing and adapting zoning, permitting and state impediments; a more thorough exploration of effective incentives (e.g., past attempts have been pitched to developers, but how can we incentivize individuals to contribute affordable housing solutions); more resources directed to and more collaboration with Portsmouth Housing Authority. Certain priorities straddle recommendations, such as our push to engage more frequently with PHA. But other recommendations include: an emphasis on marketing through the creation of digestible diagnostic measures of the "problem," as well as narrative accounts of the types of residents struggling to remain residents (similar to the series by The Portsmouth Herald a few years ago that profiled members of the homeless population, putting faces to the problem).

C. PERCEPTIONS

1. When the group first started the dialogue process, how was the housing choice "problem" perceived? What was the group's first "problem statement?"

The character and economic health of the city is increasingly jeopardized by rising housing and living costs that are squeezing out or excluding all but the most fortunate. Current and past efforts to steer development towards more equitable outcomes have been woefully inadequate.

2. Was that first problem statement revised?

The problem statement was honed but not revised.

3. Did that predominate view change by the end of the fourth session? How does the group describe the Portsmouth "housing situation" now?

Night one, Group L described the situation as expensive, exclusive and dire. As the limitations of what is possible became clear, the understanding of the situation evolved, but the description did not change.

4. As the group explored different housing needs beyond affordability what did the group find?
 - A. A lack of representation for undeserved populations (e.g., the unhoused and homeless)
 - B. Interconnected issues such as the need for more robust transportation services and collaboration between neighboring communities
 - C. A way to rethink co-housing and/or invigorate less traditional forms of housing.
 - D. A need to prepare for Portsmouth's climate future.

D. CONSIDERATIONS

WHAT ARE THE GROUP'S GOALS FOR THE CITY TO CONSIDER AS IT WORKS TO EXPAND HOUSING CHOICES IN PORTSMOUTH? HOW WILL THE CITY MOVE TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS? PRIORITIZE THE GROUP'S GOAL AND ACTIONS FROM WHAT IT CONSIDERS THE MOST IMPORTANT TO WHAT IT CONSIDERS LESS IMPORTANT.

1. Goals: What does the group hope Portsmouth will accomplish in addressing housing choice?
 - A. Preservation without strangulation. Address and adapt zoning, permitting and state restrictions that impede the development of affordable housing

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- B. Effective marketing materials to educate the general public on the nuances of the housing crises as well as better tools to diagnose the evolving nature of the problem.
 - C. Expand resources directed to and collaboration with Portsmouth Housing Authority and neighboring communities
 - D. Incentivize individuals to help resolve issues of supply and affordability.
2. Actions: Provide supporting narrative for each goal to explain how the goal could be implemented.
 - A. Create pre-approved “blueprints” for affordable housing developments that have historical precedent (e.g., Atlantic Heights; stealth density), and can be fast tracked through the permitting process; rezone to utilize vacant commercial spaces; ease restrictions on ADUs or aging in place accommodations.
 - B. The general public is largely ignorant about the issues at hand. For instance, the 2017 Portsmouth Listens summary revealed that NH law prohibits municipalities from enforcing any workforce housing requirements. This was news to Group L, as was much of the data presented in the 2015 Master Plan. Accessible diagnostics tools would also help illustrate the severity of the housing crisis. How much of the city’s staff, service workers, teachers etc. are residents vs. commuters? What’s the current market rent and housing/rental inventory? Clear and concise marketing of the problem will help generate the political will necessary to make change and accomplish goals stated both in the 2017 sessions and again here in this document.
 - C. PHA can boast of one of few success stories since the last series of housing discussions (Ruth Griffin House). The city should use every mechanism possible to support PHA and more demonstration projects should be approved and promoted (think Tiny Home Community in Dover). These projects not only provide much needed inventory but also destigmatize misguided notions about “affordable housing.”
 - D. Much focus has been put on developers, but how can we incentivize individuals with tax incentives or zoning allowances? Using a land trust model, could Portsmouth develop a Community Housing Trust, whereby larger homes are donated to be used as future sites of affordable housing. Can we use punitive measures, like a vacancy tax, to deter individuals who buy houses as investments and not homes?
 3. What goal is first and why?
 - A. The first goal would be to interrogate, amend and adapt the current zoning, permitting, and state impediments. Many are outdated and prohibitive in ways that benefit only those with deep pockets. Simply put they present the greatest obstacle between what is needed and what’s allowed.
 4. What else does the group want the city to know about housing choices in the community?
 - A. If you have money, you're good. If not, you're priced out. How does this fit with the 2015 Master Plan to support a vibrant city/community?
 5. As the group went through the study circle dialogue process, what struck the group members as a new view and what surprised them the most?
 - A. Group L was impressed by the fact that there was far more consensus than opposition amongst our members.
 - B. Data provided on the rate homelessness amongst NH residents was shocking, as that population is growing faster in NH than any state in the country.

GROUP M

Reporting

A. GROUP DESCRIPTION

Group M was a vibrant collection of 10 individuals who engaged in meaningful discussions about the housing situation in Portsmouth. This group, diverse in age, occupation, and residential status, met in-person four times over the course of four weeks, enhancing their dialogue through frequent email exchanges and shared documents. Their discussions covered a broad spectrum of housing issues, reflecting a deep concern for affordability, accessibility, and community engagement.

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Format: In-person

Size: 10 participants

Age Ranges: Wide range, from young working professionals range from late 20s to 70s.

Working and Educational Background: Varied, including professionals across various industries, retirees.

Neighborhoods: Representing a cross-section of Portsmouth; Frank Jones, West End, Downtown, Elwyn Park, Lafayette, including homeowners and renters.

B. SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE GROUP'S DISCUSSIONS:

OVERALL:

Group M identified a critical shortage of affordable housing in Portsmouth, emphasizing the importance of immediate action to construct more housing units. The group highlighted systemic barriers to housing development, including zoning restrictions and a lack of civic engagement from a diverse cross-section of the community.

SESSION ONE:

Initial discussions centered around personal housing experiences, revealing a shared concern for the lack of affordable and accessible housing options. Participants expressed a desire for a more adaptable housing system that could meet the diverse needs of Portsmouth's residents.

SESSION TWO:

The group delved into specific challenges, such as zoning laws and the impact of short-term rentals on housing availability. Ideas for re-zoning and creating more vibrant, walkable communities outside the downtown area were explored.

SESSION THREE:

Focus shifted to potential solutions, including the construction of affordable housing units, incentives for private housing development, and enhancing civic engagement to ensure a wider range of voices in housing discussions.

C. PERCEPTIONS:

Our first problem statement was:

Portsmouth lacks a housing system design that can adapt to meet the needs of its residents, with more people than available housing and a lack of tools to address this issue.

Our final problem statement is:

There is not enough affordable housing to support our economically diverse community. There is a systemic inability to take action on this issue.

Initially, the housing choice problem was perceived as a lack of affordable options for a diverse community. Through discussions, this view evolved into a broader understanding of the systemic issues at play, including zoning challenges and the need for more inclusive civic engagement.

D. CONSIDERATIONS:

Group M proposed a multi-faceted approach to address Portsmouth's housing crisis:

GOALS:

1. Build Now: Construct at least 200 new affordable housing units within the next five years to include workforce

and accessible senior housing.

2. Zoning Strategy: Implement zoning changes to encourage the development of affordable housing across the city and near public transportation.
3. Civic Engagement: Enhance representation and engagement of economically diverse residents and those from underrepresented neighborhoods.

ACTIONS:

1. Approve the Sherburne project and prioritize the development of similar projects.
2. Eliminate single-family zoning to allow duplex and triplex housing in all residential neighborhoods and allow for mixed uses in residential areas to increase density. Remove parking minimum requirements for all residential development and up-zone corridors that are served by transit.
3. Implement staggered City Council terms to ensure continuity and a broader representation of community interests.
4. Launch a periodic city housing newsletter to keep residents informed of housing initiatives and encourage community participation.

New Views and Surprises:

Participants were surprised by the complexity of the housing issue and the variety of potential solutions. The idea of expanding community engagement and rethinking zoning laws to facilitate more housing development emerged as key insights.

E. CONCLUSION:

Group M's discussions culminated in a consensus that immediate action, coupled with long-term strategic planning, is essential to address Portsmouth's affordable housing crisis. The group emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach that includes building new housing, revising zoning laws, and fostering a more inclusive civic dialogue.

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GROUP N

Reporting

A. GROUP DESCRIPTION

Group N consisted of five Portsmouth residents, aged from 40 to over 70, and both retired and employed, either full- or part-time. Participants live in the South End, Richards Avenue, and Aldrich Road neighborhoods. Most are long-time residents of Portsmouth (one having grown up here, worked and lived elsewhere for many years and then moved back later in life) while at least one moved here within the past 15 years. At least one has raised their children in Portsmouth. All have attended or graduated from college or post-college graduate/professional schooling, and pursued careers in law, engineering, education and nonprofit administration.

All are active locally in civic, non-profit, local governance or other public service endeavors. We conducted all of our meetings via ZOOM. Meetings were expertly facilitated by Devon Skerritt.

We met four times. Each meeting generally adhered to the provided program outline.

B. COMPREHENSIVE SUMMARY

The group members love Portsmouth and want to live out their lives here, but worry about the ability to do so. We see the housing that we inhabit as increasingly out of reach to those at earlier stages of life. Most of us would be hard pressed to afford the houses we inhabit now if we had to purchase them in the current market. There needs to be more affordable housing, especially for families and those in the local workforce, lest Portsmouth lose its diversity and special character. The biggest impediments to the creation of more such housing appear to be the difficulty of getting through zoning and other legal requirements (e.g., HDC) and NIMBYism.

SESSION ONE

In the first session we were prompted first to take a look at how we (and our families) live now, consider our current housing needs, and think about how those needs might shift over time. We each live within walking distance of downtown, and we all value this highly. Proximity to the delights and amenities of downtown Portsmouth is a significant positive attribute of where we each live now. We all live in detached, single-family homes, and all expressed the desire to be able to age in place, while noting that most of us currently enjoy more housing capacity than might be strictly required as single or two-person households.

Members talked about changing future needs, such as the need for assistance in maintaining homes, potential renovations that might be needed for aging-in-place (moving to one floor, adapting stairs, creating/updating bathrooms, etc.). We shared the experiences of living in an older home, the financial challenges of maintaining it, and noted (with dismay) how the shifting demography and housing demands/prices for homes in our neighborhoods makes them less available to newer residents, families with children, and middle-class residents generally. Some of us observed that we might not currently be able to afford - at current prices - the homes in which we now reside.

We all expressed some anxiety about being able to age-in-place in our current homes as rising values impact property taxes. We next shared our general impressions of the current housing situation in Portsmouth. All members expressed concern about the lack of affordable housing options for the unhoused and the housing insecure, as well as for the many workforce employees who staff our local restaurants, shops, businesses and public services. Increased housing costs pose threats to population diversity, and call into question Portsmouth's ability to stand by its slogan as "the city of the open door." We shared personal anecdotes about current and future affordability of our own homes, and one member reported on the increasing housing insecurity within the elderly community, especially those with fixed incomes.

As a group, we sensed generally that our conceptions of what is considered 'right' when it comes to housing may need to shift if these concerns are to be addressed.

SESSION TWO

In session two, we shared what we had noticed from our observations and journaling over the past week. We commented on the surge in new market-rate housing (e.g. West End Yards), all of which seems to be fully occupied as soon as it was completed. We shared concerns about how dropping such large developments into existing communities affects those communities, and shared concerns about new resident engagement with the community.

We also shared observations about some of the many resources and reports that had been provided on the shared drive. Some of the information that jumped out from those resources included:

1. How Portsmouth has experienced recent population gains after a prior decline, leading to increased demand for housing. A significant percentage of those who rent in Portsmouth spend more of their income on housing than the "normal" standard.
2. The challenges of affordability persist, evidenced by the rise in home values and the difficulty in accommodating

different housing types within existing zoning constraints.

We talked about the need for more diverse housing options, including considerations for senior housing, subsidized housing, and affordable housing in new developments. There were questions about who is living in the newer, market-rate developments: are they commuters from outside? folks working from home? are they employed in the community?

We talked about the possibility of vertical expansion and increased building heights to increase capacity, especially along the Rt. 1 corridor.

We talked about perceived impediments to housing, including zoning and NIMBYism.

We noted how many of the issues we are discussing today were highlighted in the 2017 Portsmouth Listens study, and expressed concern and dismay about the lack of progress since then. We shared observations from developers who identified zoning as a significant impediment to the creation of more diverse, affordable housing stock. We noted the challenges faced by local businesses in attracting and keeping a workforce that often does not earn enough to live locally.

Participants acknowledged the City's efforts in providing housing opportunities at various income levels but noted that these efforts do not seem to have borne fruit. We discussed multigenerational housing as a way to generate additional income within one house and allow families to own larger homes by combining different incomes. We noted that current zoning regarding ADUs does not seem to have resulted in any significant increase in such units.

The Group expressed common values including:

1. Portsmouth should provide housing for people from diverse backgrounds and income levels to live and work in the community.
2. A community loses its essence if people are forced to leave due to affordability issues.
3. Services and commercial activities are harmed if a significant portion of the population can't afford to live in Portsmouth.
4. All residents have the right to livable housing- whether in subsidized housing, senior living, or other accommodations.
5. It is important to educate the public about workforce and affordable housing to remove misunderstandings and fears.

SESSION THREE

The team discussed how their thinking has progressed on the topic of housing since starting this process. We shared observations on some of the resources we have each read, concluding in general that the wealth of resources provided seem to reinforce the initial impressions that further changes in zoning and other applicable laws, greater dialogue, and education to combat “Nimbyism” are needed to enable the creation of more affordable housing, including PHA housing. The “housing problem” was extensively studied in the 2017 housing dialogue program, identifying all of the same issues as our current study. Since then conditions have not improved. However, the larger incomes of those relocating to Portsmouth continue to drive housing (purchase and rental) prices up at all price points, despite continued additions of new units. The growth is also increasing the average age.

SESSION FOUR

Our group reiterated many of the talking points from prior meetings, noting that in the 2017 study the community identified the challenges related to affordable housing and those same challenges remain today. Despite some changes (e.g., in the law to permit accessory dwelling units) they are seemingly not sufficient to effect any meaningful, measurable impact to date. More work is clearly needed. We then spent some time discussing the process, agreeing to focus on the public presentation PowerPoint first, to be followed by a more detailed written report. The group spent the remainder of the session starting to draft the problem statement that would frame our presentation and written report conclusion.

C. PERCEPTIONS

When the group first started the dialogue process, we noted a lot of common thinking about the housing “problem”, and this common thinking was validated without much change during the process. The wealth of materials provided seemed to validate and even deepen our thinking.

By the final session, our thinking regarding “the problem” had not so much evolved as become a bit more succinct. Portsmouth is a very desirable place to live, and attracts those with high incomes, both still working and retired. This drives up the cost of housing for all, and properties once considered within reach for working- and middle class individuals and families are now far less so. Affordable housing for those working in hourly service positions is effectively non-existent.

2.14 Group N

These deficiencies are already changing the character of Portsmouth, reducing diversity, and threatening the sustainability of what makes it such a wonderful and attractive place to live.

OUR FINAL STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM IS:

There is a deficiency of housing throughout the income spectrum, from the high-end to those making 30-50% of AMI, both for rentals and for purchase. This especially impacts young adults (> 18 yrs), older millennials (35-64 yrs) with families, and those over 65 years. A significant percentage of residents are cost-burdened by housing resulting in a less economically, racially and ethnically diverse community. How can a wide spectrum of housing options help Portsmouth fulfill its mission of being 'The City of the Open Door'?

D. CONSIDERATIONS

GOALS AND ACTIONS

Group N identified the following goals and actions the City to consider as it works to expand housing choices in Portsmouth:

1. Work to ensure a variety of affordable housing types and styles at all income levels and throughout the various neighborhoods and geographic regions of the City. The City Council can use its bully pulpit to educate and promote changes in laws at the state level (such as Dillon's Law) that would allow Portsmouth to mandate affordable/subsidized housing as a percentage of future residential developments, or otherwise promote affordable housing development.
2. The City and its citizens have talked about the housing choice problem for many years. We need to resolve to move from conversation to more effective action to better address these deficiencies.
3. The City Council needs to strike while the iron is hot. Affordable housing is a "hot" issue where more common ground seems to exist now than in prior years.
4. Increase public support for the Portsmouth Housing Authority (PHA) projects. The City should promote early and frequent dialogue with project abutters to address concerns and generate support. The City Council - individually and as a body - should engage with the abutters individually or in groups as needed to educate, listen, and build support for PHA projects.
5. The City should continue to explore and develop additional housing options such as tiny houses and accessory dwellings. The City should define what about the current ADU zoning process has worked, and what has not worked?
6. Since the City Council is uniformly committed to addressing the housing problem, it should eliminate unreasonable impediments to new housing options hidden (intentionally or unintentionally) in the zoning and other codes. Higher density projects should be promoted, especially in areas on the outer perimeter of the city and along Route 1.

Cross Roads House Round Table Dialogue

Tuesday February 27, 2024 from 4:00pm – 5:00pm at Cross Roads House, 600 Lafayette Road in Portsmouth, NH.

BACKGROUND

In attendance were six Cross Roads House residents and one Cross Roads staff person. The resident group was comprised of two females and six males with ages ranging from mid-twenties to mid-sixties. One participant had a dependent staying with them, and the rest were single.

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

1. How long have been in your current place and where did you live before?

- Three months here. Was previously living in Seabrook before at Rockingham Village renting a lower income unit until the rent increased too much. Have a granddaughter with me.
- Living here since November 1st. From Rochester and lived there until the rent increased. Was there over 16 years until rent increased to \$1,200 a month. Manchester prior to that.
- Here since August of last year. Lived in Somersworth and rented a room. My roommate passed away and the family then increased rent. On a fixed income. Lived in Barrington and Rochester before Somersworth.
- Lived in Dover for more than 20 years. Lived in Portsmouth in the 1980's. Many of the residents are here for a year waiting for subsidized housing.
- Arrived 10 months ago and am waiting for subsidized housing. Lived in Rochester previously in a trailer but had to leave when roommate turned violent.
- From Vermont and lived in Montpelier with mother. Traveled around New Hampshire and Maine living with friends or homeless until arriving here two months ago.
- Been here for two-and-a-half months. Lived in York and Kittery with two kids either with friends or homeless.

2. What do you like and what works well about the place you currently live?

- Feel safe, am grateful for having a room and food. Supportive environment. Help to do want needs to be done to change. First had depression and then reality changes and can work on getting better.
- Feels like a great opportunity. Focus on other things with necessities provided.
- Better than being on a street corner. Senior citizen wanting more privacy. Public dorms.
- Warm and have a roof overhead.

3. Different experience, roof over head. Grateful and working with what is here.

- Previous health issues, feeling better in this situation, life no longer in shambles. Have access to a bus system. Have a roof and warmth. Allows to get your will back and work through health problems.
- Stability of knowing under a roof and have support.

4. What people don't like/would change about where they live.

- Would like time here to be shorter, staff puts so much effort into what will be the next phase of living on own, want to change and no longer living here.
- Things are good here.
- Structure of dorm living – times out and in. Have vertigo issues and can't time it.
- More privacy but it is what is. Motivated to get own place. Use to work a second shift – lucky to have vehicle and get out when needed.
- Rules are the rules – maybe bend the rules a bit per each circumstance.
- Privacy and rules – this is a shelter and to motivate at same time provide structure. Not having congregate living and provide individuals more privacy.
- Flexibility with the rules and structure, have Sunday to be lazy a day.
- Improve facilities such as the laundry to better support living here.

5. How do you get to and from work/ volunteer?

- Do not work on SSDI. Retired and on social security. Work part-time when able.
- Not working.

- Out of all the residents, approximately 25% work full-time or part-time.
- Want to work.
- Just over the income limit but not enough for subsidized housing.

6. What type of housing do you think you will need or want to live in 10 years from now? What type of housing do you think you'll need in the next 10-20 years?

- Condo or even a mobile home - just to be on my own. If had \$1,800 for rent wouldn't be renting. Want to move back to Rochester / Dover area to be near family.
- Own place that is affordable but rental units are way too much. Won't have any choice but to be near local transit.
- Assisted living – HUD limits with income – same thing maybe too much.
- Not worrying about situations, happy and comfortable.
- A good number to pay and very connected to health providers – to live in Portsmouth is important.
- Near transit.
- Out on own feet. Ten years is a long time in the future and now taking one day at a time.

7. If the place where you live went away, what would be the next place you would look for? If your current housing disappeared tomorrow, what would be the next place you'd look for?

- Another place like to live like Cross Roads House. Have family to consider Rochester.
- A lot of fear and would not know what to do. Would have to leave the state for another.
- Unaffordable due to age. Do not know where could go.
- One or two people temporarily stay with – not want to be a burden. Panic thinking about it – move somewhere, another state that would be affordable.
- Don't know of any options.

8. Prior to living at Cross Roads House, what other challenges did you experience in securing a place to live?

- Housing living on the program Community Action that provided rent support. Program did not pay for three months. Evicted from apartment lived in over \$8,000 in back rent. Was locked out.
- Covering expenses and traveling to find a place to live.
- Had to leave with just clothes on back. Needed to bring oxygen and electrical compressor and ended up passing out in parks in Rochester. Lived there and after eight days asked for help. Wound up here.
- It is not like we can call a shelter and book a room.
- Laid off pre-social security and used up savings. Now on a fixed income. Was paying \$625 a month then the house was sold. Rent increases to \$1,200 a month. Mind numbing looking for a place to live with rent similar to what for before.
- Got on it fast when needed something to do – lucky to get safe so quickly after losing housing.
- Lived in campgrounds, rents all up, background check credit check and application fees required. With deposit fees can not afford.

9. What type of public services and facilities are important to you?

- Nurses and doctors that come here on Wednesdays. School important, working with the agencies that are provided to get a GED (Waypoint) – support for adolescent granddaughter.
- Seacoast mental health will come here.
- Doctors on Thursdays, case workers to help with regular stuff like social security and personal records.
- Operation Blessing for food and goods, access to medical doctors.
- Medical, bus routes, availability to Portsmouth, dover, on and around. Shopping. Bus takes time but it is there.

10. How would you characterize the housing challenges in Portsmouth?

- Too much in costs, geared towards the people that have money.
- Getting paid 20 dollars an hour won't pay for housing.

2.15 Round Table Dialogues Meeting Notes

- Rich people moving in, locals pushed out. Went from \$600 to \$2,000 a month in rent.
- Housing options are not there. Anger comes from the frustration of not having the housing.
- On fixed income and wont able to be here. Rochester / Dover the same. Even Farmington.
- Even with a voucher it is too challenging. Appreciate support of donations consisting of gift cards.

11. What are your reasons for living / wanting to live in Portsmouth?

- Family - want to live in Rochester / Somersworth area. Don't want to be living here in Portsmouth due to the cost.
- Things here are run by those with money, city council, prices of businesses have all driven up prices.
- Not reason for being here.
- Only here because of Cross Roads House.
- Live here just for convenience and support services.
- Prices just unattainable.
- Two-bedroom needs – not affordable.

12. Recommendations / Suggestions for the City of Portsmouth

- Make more housing of residential apartments that are affordable.
- Workforce housing!
- Low-income housing – housing for all income levels.
- I am older, need apartments for those who, like we all should, pay 25% of what we earn for housing costs.
- It is unaffordable here – change that.
- More housing for the elderly. It has been unaffordable for a long time – people use to move to Kittery and now it is Rochester and Dover.

PHA Gosling Meadows Round Table Dialogue

14 February 2024 session with 1 – 2 PM in the site's services room.

The participants:

The session was attended by three women: two in their thirties - forties, the other a bit older. There was a half day of school that day and a middle-school son of one of the women joined us after about 20 minutes in.

One woman, a writer and artist, had been there since 2008, coming from another public housing site in Portsmouth she said was horrible.

One woman has been here since 2011, after bouncing around from apartment to apartment in NH and Southern Maine seacoast region. She did not say what she does for work but did say she has a landscape business on the side.

The older woman said her parents were one of the first families to move in in the late fifties, and she has been here ever since. She works five hours a week at the Mobile station on the corner, so can walk.

1. How does living here fit your needs?

- This used to be a rough place. Still are sections, but overall it is the best place I have ever lived.
- I am on a fixed income {all said they were} and would not be able to afford my apartment otherwise.
- Heat and hot water are included in the rent, and there are washer/dryer hookups in the basement of each unit.
- Lawn care is also included, as is plowing (not shoveling)
- The artist/writer has deteriorating mobility issues and so far where she is is okay. The rent structure is really helpful.

2. What do you like about living here?

- It's on the bus line
- Cumby's is right there for basics
- The Community Garden – in spite of vandalism and few people willing to contribute to the upkeep, it produces hundreds of pounds of vegetables each year.
- Community dinners once a month
- Mobile market
- There is a van that is available once a month to go to Operation Blessing for clothes and other needed items.

3. What do you wish were different?

- The bus does not allow people to carry groceries on board, so it's hard to go to the grocery store to get what's needed. One person mentioned using a wagon to pull groceries home.
- Need more parental supervision, especially around bad language and bullying (which seems to be a huge problem).
- Parents themselves sometimes get into fist fights.
- There are surveillance cameras all over the neighborhood, but half don't work and what they do capture does not seem to be used. Many have taken to getting their own cameras for safety.
- Need to vet incoming tenants better re records, drugs
- PHA took away the clotheslines, as they interfered with mowing the lawns. A universal wish to have them back.
- There need to be vents to vent stoves to outside.
- The rise/tread ratio is upside down on cellar stairs. Many falls, some serious.
- There need to be treads of some sort on the hardwood stairs

4. If you had to leave tomorrow, where would you go?

- Six feet under. I could not afford to live anywhere else and I don't plan to go anywhere else.
- The streets
- Could not afford to go elsewhere
- Thinking ten or so years ahead: will where you are now meet your needs?

2.15 Round Table Dialogues Meeting Notes

- Artist/writer will need single-floor living, accessible.
- This includes the laundry appliances will have to come upstairs

5. What does the City need to know?

- The neighborhoods here are pretty low maintenance
- There used to be (City-sponsored) summer camp here – just for our neighborhood. Activities, trips, more for all the kids. It was great.
- Keep in mind:
- The US is aging, including veterans
- We will need more accessible places, including like wide doors
- We need more one-floor living, with elevators to floors above the first
- The COAST bus is good but not for people with anxiety [they did not elaborate]
- They like the Trolley buses
- Buses do not always go where needed – eg, getting to and from locations in Dover.
- Need to look at Eurovan model, including more buses, more routes.
- The infrastructure here is aging and getting really bad
- Need to replace or maintain more
- Drains often get clogged, and then basements flood
- Some people are getting sick
- Need safety treads outside – nice paint jobs on steps, but they are very slippery when wet. There have been dangerous falls.
- In some places, the sun never gets there and mold grows. This is slippery if on steps, and can get into the house.

PHA Griffin Place Round Table Dialogue

February 13, 2024

The participants:

Nine people participated in the dialogue. The evening began with each participant introducing themselves, how long they'd lived at Griffin Place, and where they had lived immediately prior.

- One woman, retired, moved with husband from Whitefield, NH
- One woman, previously unhoused, with two children
- One woman, sold house in Plaistow, with two adult children
- One woman with two children, unknown – she arrived late and I didn't have a chance to ask
- Three women and three men, all had apartments within one mile from downtown
- Of the nine, one person walks, takes the bus or asks a friend for a ride to get where they need to go. Two men walk everywhere or get rides from others or from the I Got Bridged van. Several others have cars.

1. What people like about where they live

- Ability to walk to work
- Close to resources. Resources mentioned: library, COAST bus stop, groceries, city hall, hospital, schools, fire and police
- The size of my unit – downsized, it is just what was needed right now
- New building/well insulated – haven't had to turn heat on
- Nice public areas

2. What people don't like/would change about where they live

- It was challenging to keep folks on track thinking about the broader question of what they don't like about where they live vs. things that are very specific to Portsmouth Housing Authority.
- The cost of rent is high.
- Lease is unclear and several stated they're afraid their rent will rise unexpectedly
- Parking – having to pay to park and income not taken into consideration when setting parking rates
- Impossible to save money
- Need more washers and dryers
- Location – Stigma of living in public housing (my words). Proximity to Feaster Apartments results in the public thinking the same population lives in Griffin Place.

3. What type of housing do you think you'll need in the next 10-20 years?

- Still live in Griffin Place
- I would like some type of transition from Griffin Place to owning a small condo or house. A rent-to-own option through PHA/the City would be ideal.
- I'd move in with my adult child

4. If your current housing disappeared tomorrow, what would be the next place you'd look for?

- I'd move in with my adult child
- Four or five people felt they'd be unhoused
- Children could live with father but I'd be unhoused
- Prior to living at Griffin Place, what challenges did you experience in securing housing?
- Meeting eligibility criteria for housing
- Severe rent increases that resulted from Covid
- Long wait lists for a Housing Choice Voucher, and then being unable to find a place with a rent that the Voucher could afford
- Finding a large enough place for me and my children that I could afford

2.15 Round Table Dialogues Meeting Notes

- Knowing where resources are to find housing

5. Recommendations/Suggestions for the City of Portsmouth

- DO something! "I'm a third generation Portsmouth resident, 63 years old, and we've been talking about this my whole life." Other than Griffin Place, the City has not taken action.
- Tiny homes like the ones built in Dover
- What is the plan for future use of Community Campus? Potential for housing there?
- A rent-to-own option through the City
- Zoning adjustments that allow for a more diverse housing stock
- When planning housing the City must do so in consideration access to transportation and necessary services
- Push developers to work with the City to provide affordable housing as a percentage of a development
- Educate the public about what workforce housing is. Hold community meetings at Griffin Place to show people we aren't "those people".
- Work with and learn from other cities and towns to develop more affordable housing. Example: Work with the town of Newington to determine what to do with the Fox Run Mall property.

PHA Margeson Apartments Round Table Dialogue

Thursday from 10:00am – 11:20am at Margeson Apartments, 245 Middle St. in Portsmouth, NH.

BACKGROUND

In attendance were eventually nine PHA residents comprised six from Margeson Apartments, two from Feaster Apartments and one from Pleasant Street. Of the six from Margeson it was a mix of seniors and individuals with disabilities. The meeting started with seven participants.

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

1. How long have been in your current place and where did you live before?

- 7 years – Wilmington, MA.
- 19 years – Group home on Lafayette Road in Portsmouth.
- 6 months – union street at apartment for 12 years – Dover, NH before that.
- 15 years – Various apartments in Portsmouth for another 15 years.
- 2 years at Margeson - Connors Cottage 2.5 years.
- 1 year – state street many years in various apartments.
- 8 years in April – Previously unhoused and dependent on family members - 2 year wait list.

2. What do you like and what works well about the place you currently live?

- Roof over heads, heat at reasonable rate.
- Access to downtown (walkable), transit options, PHA strict with people, safety.
- Rent based on percentage of income with utilities included, safety, without a car so public transit connection to destinations outside of city.
- Collaborative efforts of PHA connection with those needing housing over the decades and their history, wide variety of resources in variety in housing types. Of late improving but have a lack of professionalism, some of public think those with housing here take it for granted, identifiable service needs, some effort is needed to increase support to better serve PHA mission (country wide housing just one piece), support service needs are for the general population and without specific backgrounds in specific resident needs like geriatrics.
- Like support financial, not feeling would have to move provides a sense of security in having a place to live. Helps in life's transition. Family in Pittsburgh had a feel of type of services provided. Challenge in accessing services in other PHA locations that are of interest but not provided here at Margeson.
- Access to services at senior center.
- Known by the public as city's senior housing but there are others here with different backgrounds. Need to improve safety, feel safe in apartment but some odd things have happened in common areas.
- Income able to afford, prior to moving to Portsmouth had section 8 and lower quality living standards. Work still to do. Grateful to live here, pay according to income.
- Monthly meals, road trips are nice. Senior van not accessible.

3. What people don't like/would change about where they live.

- Improvement to transit options, public perception of Margeson and the reputation is not understanding the housing convenience, how it is a good place to live, things are accessible but there is not enough participation by residents. Need more access to other senior oriented activities. Make activities more related to the age group living here.
- Make more specific to age groups to better meet needs of residents. Without mental health services and been told it is not in purview of PHA services.
- Social services – turnover of staff – lack of cohesive vision from above to make it all work.
- As well at Feaster – needs provisions of services but different groups of residents.
- Without access to city bus route that goes to health care center and without adequate schedule linkages. Interaction with staff – access to other activities.
- Diversity of population makes it less safe for me. Some residents with addiction and drinking issues.
- If subsidized housing not properly managed, it becomes problematic for outside greater population to have a positive and appreciative perception of the residents that live here.

4. How do you get to and from work/ volunteer?

- Work here in building.
- Ring bell for salvation army.
- Volunteering - Historical society and cultural center.
- Walking, a lot, to where I volunteer.
- One of the few residents that has a car, probably last one, and I am learning the access and schedule of the transit system.
- COAST specifically for seniors. 3-4 hours to accomplish a single appointment.
- Shopping on coastal van. Activity. Volunteer with Dover public library – bus. Leave at 3:30pm and get home at 9pm for my hour time at the Library.

5. What type of housing do you think you will need or want to live in 10 years from now? What type of housing do you think you'll need in the next 10-20 years?

- Without choice for the next place to live. I have no other choice. Last place I will live.
- Can't afford section 8 – stuck here. Career but once in housing you lose. Forcing people to not work. Can't save for move. Most seniors – cola changed affordability – net loss.
- Doing worse.

6. If the place where you live went away, what would be the next place you would look for? If your current housing disappeared tomorrow, what would be the next place you'd look for?

- Without options. Maybe live with family but lose independence.
- Mission or purpose of PHA and providing affordable. Less willingness to address geriatric population. Can't solve with renaming. Feels tenuous living here.
- Little choice for other, similar support living options and few locations around state.

7. Prior to living at Margeson, what challenges did you experience in securing a place to live?

- Lived in motel in Rye. Worked but pay went to hotel.
- Three jobs to make rent. Florida at the time.
- Went to retire from work. Looking for a place to live – appalled at how much rent had gone up. When had to leave 2 years after retirement from group home on Lafayette Road I was accepted into this place.
- Own home 43 years in Plaistow. Moved out and started a cycle of surviving – chronic physical health issues – and with few steppingstones. Two years trying to get more permanent shelter overhead. Harder to find more permanent housing when you are in the gray area. Transitional.
- Owned home in South Hampton – in Portsmouth most of life.
- If you have a family member already living getting in PHA housing is in faster. – the system feels deliberate. Use to work at crossroads and it favors Portsmouth residents.

8. What type of public services and facilities are important to you?

- Better transit options for seniors.
- Better integration of services and agencies in and outside of PHA – need cohesion and coordination with professional staff.
- Gather food services – inhouse outreach efforts –
- Those with pets use to have veterinary services coming to the PHA building.
- Senior center and Seacoast mental health center, need more drug counseling and direct transit access to near-by health centers.

9. How would you characterize the housing challenges in Portsmouth?

- Affordability!
- The senior population will get bigger and there are not enough people to help those seniors, it is a country wide

issue.

- Care giving groups exist but seniors have more regular doctors visit than the rest of the population - workforce housing needed so those workers can be close by.
- Portsmouth has / is at peak gentrification, will get harder for younger people to live here.
- Critical point for housing for all levels of incomes.
- Seniors feeling the effect of what more people and younger people will start to experience if more housing is not created.
- As soon as you get ahead you cannot advance and get out of the cycle.

10. What are your reasons for living / wanting to live in Portsmouth?

- Originally for family. Came here when younger. It was accessible then to doctors, work, and culture programs.
- Workable situation and allows to adjust to the situation. Makes it easier if you don't have choices.
- From New Jersey, moved for marriage. Time when hen you could afford to rent then move for work. Costs then got / were too high after divorce.
- From Boston – social aspects, especially the theater, cultural attractions.
- Originally visiting pre-gentrification – always with social community events and activities then moved into health services and needs. Needed to maintain continuity and without alternatives.

11. Recommendations / Suggestions for the City of Portsmouth

- Housing affordability – changing rules to / of affordability, they are too hard now.
- Skate Park - used with money that should have built housing. Better fund housing.
- Christmas tree shop is coming down for new housing. Look into converting unused office space and the McIntyre building.
- Rebuild older unused buildings for homes.
- Housing development on city land – what about extra land at Community Campus?
- The city council listens but then does what they want when they want too.
- Community campus for housing.
- Money not being used in the right way.
- More housing for specific age groups.
- Keep everyone inclusive and with a say ion what happens.
- Need a master plan.
- Cultural shift is needed to get rid of affordable stigma. Lack of housing is squeezing out the younger generation we need in the city.
- Make it personal and with informed actions leading to productive results.
- Act on past and current insights and create the needed housing.
- Portsmouth is dangerously gentrified – plan for now and future needs – can't miss the early signs of the negative changes that will occur if more housing is not created.
- New buildings in Portsmouth – bring taxes down.
- McIntyre building reuse. Bring back post office, police and other social destinations downtown. And access to them.

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