



# portsmouth listens...

HOUSING DIALOGUE

DECEMBER 2017

## INSIDE

**Executive Summary** pg. 2

**Phase One Report** pg. 4

### Phase Two Group Reports

Monday night pg. 8

Tuesday night pg. 10

Wednesday night pg. 11

Wednesday morning pg. 11

Thursday night pg. 12

# HOUSING DIALOGUE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Final Report, November 20, 2017

### BACKGROUND

Over the summer 2017, Portsmouth Listens engaged with the city to create a community dialogue for input on Portsmouth's proposed housing ordinance. That ordinance tackles the difficult issue of creating more affordable housing in a city where home prices and rents are skyrocketing and inventory is scarce. The goal of the dialogue was to use the brainpower and thoughtfulness of city residents in a series of study circles to provide city decision makers values and fresh ideas that bear on the ordinance and provide new ways to tackle the problem.

### PHASE I

In Phase I, Portsmouth Listens volunteers sought out various interest groups to get their thoughts. These included diverse-income families, local artists/creatives, food pantry clients/staff, property developers, small business and seniors. The housing issue affected each differently. The resulting input was shared with Phase 2 study circles in their deliberations. Some of the key points...

**FAMILIES** – a gathering made possible through the Portsmouth Housing Authority

- We experience discrimination when we live in public housing. Public housing should strive to integrate, be an overall nice neighborhood (example: Osprey Landing)
- Developers need incentives for affordable housing, specifically with rents on a sliding scale based on income.
- Rules for qualifying are complicated and the application process should be simplified

**THE CREATIVE COMMUNITY** –

- Artists are at risk of being priced out of the city, and this would be an overall economic loss
- The city should revive the Artspeak efforts led by Chris Dwyer in the past to create more live/work space

**CLIENTS AND STAFF OF GATHER, A FOOD PANTRY** –

- Safety in public housing is often an issue

- The primary housing need is for more affordable housing for those over 55.
- The city should consider creating more rent-controlled housing
- Repurpose retail and warehouse space
- Copy a MA program that gives property tax breaks/public housing rent breaks to those who volunteer for the city

**DEVELOPERS** –

- Demand is very strong, land is limited and the market is snatching up affordable housing like boarding houses and turning them into higher cost rentals or condos
- Costs to build are soaring due to labor shortage and permitting costs

Suggestions from developers include:

- "Diverse" housing requires 60-80 units in a building, which requires greater height and density than current zoning
- Incentives don't do the job; zoning must – make it possible to meet the need without variances
- Streamline permitting and inspections
- Identify land for affordable housing and work with developers to make it happen
- The city can work with developers on tax incentives and financing options
- Defer senior citizen taxes until their home is sold. Both city and elder resident win in the long run.
- Portsmouth Housing Authority has land available – put this to use in public/private partnerships
- Philanthropic solutions: Is diverse housing as important as the preservation done by land trusts? Could a diverse housing 501c3 be developed?
- Legislative mandate: neighboring states require 10% of housing to be affordable. This is not "the New Hampshire way" but the recent accessory dwelling ordinance shows what is possible.
- Political will: diverse housing won't happen without the community going to bat for it, and overcoming abutter objections to projects that increase supply
- Create a task force to identify financing levers, appropriate parcels of land, and put all these together using an RFP process for fast-track approvals similar to McIntyre process.

**SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS** – input from a small business association president

- The city's success as a destination is creating a "monoculture" dominated by tourists and wealthy part-time residents. The community would be better served with diversity in who lives here, and with a large proportion of those living here also working here.
- The restaurants and small businesses that make Portsmouth "unique and amazing" may not be sustainable as home prices go up faster than wages.
- Commuting to Portsmouth combined with long work shifts is not sustainable – housing is a need for the local economy
- Is it possible for seniors who need assistance and service workers who need a place to live to help each other?

**SENIORS** – a meeting at the Community Campus senior center

- We want to stay in our homes
- We need assistance taking care of our homes and getting around
- Ideal living situation would be one-floor cottages with common space
- Could the high school give credit for community service, and kids help with lawn maintenance, etc.

Many more ideas are in the full reports attached. The Phase I reports are also at [www.portsmouthlistens.org](http://www.portsmouthlistens.org) under Housing Dialogue.

### PHASE 2

In September, Portsmouth Listens used email, newspaper and online advertising and flyers to recruit study circle participants. Forty seven participants signed up and deliberated in five groups. The groups met four times – three for deliberation and one to meet with councilors and candidates to discuss the issue. We are grateful to city councilors, citizens who volunteered, our facilitators and Assistant City Manager Nancy Colbert Puff and Councilor Rebecca Perkins for their many hours of help on the project.

published by:



**SMG**  
SEACOAST MEDIA GROUP

111 New Hampshire Ave., Portsmouth, NH 03801



## FINDINGS

Participants followed a study guide for the three deliberations. Key questions were:

1. What are the characteristics of a good place to live? How does where you live now meet those?
2. What are the housing needs of everyone who lives, works or plays in Portsmouth (review of key demographics)? What are the most important needs to meet? What will it take to meet those?
3. What are your group's priorities for housing and what action must we take (and who is we)?

The groups had these common characteristics of a good place to live:

- Green space/public space (5 of 5)
- Convenient transportation, with an emphasis on walkable where possible, and other modes (5 of 5)
- Diverse age and income – and affordability to maintain that (4 of 5 groups)
- Safety (3 of 5)
- A feeling of community – neighborhood connectedness (3 of 5)

Other themes were a sense of history; variety of scale of buildings/human scale; access to the arts, music, restaurants; the benefit of being walkable; a built environment that fosters social interaction.

In identifying Portsmouth's housing needs, a majority of the groups spoke of the ability of seniors being able to stay here (economically and be able to physically "age in place"); our need to keep our "family creators" and creative young singles, as well as housing for low income and disabled residents.

In terms of solutions there was universal support for the new housing ordinance. The groups embraced the ordinance as a low-friction way to add housing stock.

### OTHER SOLUTIONS:

- Create new neighborhoods: a majority of the groups wanted to see more of the concept in the housing ordinance of new neighborhoods. They wanted thoughtful planning to capture the characteristics of our best neighborhoods now – green



Ioanna Raptis photo

space, safety, convenience and design that fosters interaction.

- Improve transportation: a majority of groups wanted more convenient transportation to facilitate not just the new neighborhoods, but make life in Portsmouth more connected and affordable. A majority of groups saw less auto dependence opening up more opportunities for affordable housing. One group urged strategies to reduce parking requirements in neighborhoods to enable greater density.
- A regional approach: several groups stressed the need to engage Kittery, Eliot, Rye, Greenland and other neighboring communities in efforts to build collective policy solutions for affordable housing.
- Housing at Pease: two groups put forward the idea of returning housing to Pease.
- Greater density, smaller homes, accessory dwellings. One group's top priority was 1,500 sf starter homes, another pointed to Atlantic Heights as a model of neighborhood feel with density, others wanted to expand the size allowed for accessory dwellings, and another to relax zoning to allow greater density. Several groups encouraged innovative multi-family uses (see below). One group opposed greater neighborhood density.
- A surprising three of five of the groups wanted Portsmouth to step into a future with "co-housing" or shared living arrangements. This may require zoning changes. The discussions included allowing seniors to live with their offspring, empty nesters living together communally, and co-operatively owned housing.

Other ideas: we must plan for a future with self-driving cars and online shopping; the city should audit its own land holdings and determine if any can be put towards affordable housing; create ways neighborhoods and developers can engage in dialogue and find common ground prior to public hearings; encourage co-operatives and resident-owned communities; bottom-up organizing so neighborhoods can strategically plan their future, often including developers in the conversation.

Each of the group's reports that follow have their own values and priorities, but together they speak to a community with the will to solve our housing problem and try new solutions that hold fast to the values of affordability for the most citizens, neighborhood feel and access to services.



# portsmouth listens...

## HOUSING DIALOGUE

### Phase I: The Common Group Reports

Housing has been a critical issue in Portsmouth for ten years or more. It has generated lots of discussion but little action. To explore the possibility of action on housing, Portsmouth Listens is convening this community dialogue on housing in Portsmouth.

For the housing dialogue to be successful, participants need to learn about all aspects of housing from all stakeholders. The information needs to be more than just numbers and statistics. To create more valuable "data" for participants to consider, Phase I of the dialogue asked "common groups" (such as seniors, service workers, theatre/artists, families and developers) to share their stories and beliefs with us. What does housing mean to them? How are they impacted by the current housing situation in Portsmouth? And we asked "developers" how to make it happen?

An important element of any dialogue is adding the "personal experience" of members of the community. Through Phase I we are adding the "personal experiences" of different segments of the community to the "hard data" also being made available to you. We hope it will enhance your deliberation!

Thank you for joining us in making Portsmouth the best place to live, work and play for everyone!

Sincerely,  
Portsmouth Listens

### Families

We want to live in diverse communities, not projects specifically developed for low income families. For example, a college educated single mom with a good job experienced discrimination when she moved to public housing from people who had been perfectly friendly before, her kids being shunned just because of the address. If we need to live in public housing we want it

How can housing, linked to every aspect of our community, make Portsmouth the best place to live, work and play for everyone?

integrated into regular neighborhoods in which people take pride and are good role models for our children. Osprey Landing is an example of where this was done well.

Furthermore, projects specifically designed for low income typically have poor design and shoddy construction, resulting in people living in "the projects" where no one takes pride in the neighborhood.

Portsmouth considers itself to be a tight knit community where everyone knows their neighbor, but in fact caters to people with money, tourists and restaurants, not the local people. For example, the parking garage is the high profile public project whereas housing should be.

Therefore, the City should be more directly involved in housing projects. The City could make a real difference by purchasing available properties and thus be able to have control of what types of housing are put there. Zoning incentives and tax incentives for profit making developers aren't good enough. However, to the extent that public private partnerships, zoning and tax incentives are used they should be structured to make it profitable for developers to make a profit while including income based rents for a portion of the units. That should be real, after tax income rather than gross salary.

Rules and regulations regarding qualification for and receiving of public housing are overly complex and unfair. Without capturing the details, the group all felt that these rules create a situation that makes public housing

difficult to escape. Qualification and application process should be simplified, perhaps modeled on the way scholarships are awarded for colleges and summer camps.

Growing families aspire to home ownership, but in this environment don't see a way that could ever be possible.

Note: This group had 6 participants, but one had to leave early with her child. Of the six, 3 live in Portsmouth but 5 have long time ties to Portsmouth, 2 having lived here previously but now find it impossible to due to costs. Two are college graduates and two have trade school training. Three were in families with both parents, 2 separated, 1 unknown.

Portsmouth has a diverse economy without a major driving corporation. A very large contributor is the creative community, by some accounts adding as much as \$51 million per year. However, 70% of the professionals who run and instruct in the various arts organizations commute to Portsmouth, finding it cheaper to pay for transportation than for housing costs. The concern is that the arts and cultural scene will migrate to where they live, and that would undermine the special nature of Portsmouth, and thus the Portsmouth economy. Newport, RI was cited as an example of what we don't want to happen here.

We are all aware of downtown developments focusing on high end housing. People who have made their money elsewhere are drawn to Portsmouth by our vibrant

arts scene. The risk is that if the arts scene migrates due to affordability issues in the housing market a pillar of the economy is undermined. Housing values could deflate.

On the other hand, high end residences do create a market for artists to sell here even if they live elsewhere. This applies to theater and music venues as well.

Another concern is the availability of studio space. The Button Factory is a case in point. In response to the fire in San Francisco, the owner Mr. Buttrick has begun several building upgrades and has adjusted rents accordingly. These code upgrades challenge the viability of keeping it as studio space. Where will new studio space be found? All the old warehouse properties are fully utilized already.

This group's recommendation is to revive the effort of Artspeak from 10 years ago, when Chris Dwyer was chair, to create live/work space here in Portsmouth. This has been done successfully in Boston. The Portsmouth Housing Authority Development Ltd. is a non profit, 501©3 that owns and manages 11 properties around Portsmouth. This would be the entity to undertake such an endeavor.

### Overview

The Phase 1 discussion group consisted of four (4) people associated with GatherNH in Portsmouth, NH. 2 of whom are retired, one who volunteers at GatherNH, and one who uses their services. The participants all live in Portsmouth, 2 of whom own condos with 2 and 3 bedrooms, and one who lives in a city housing unit. Income levels vary between government assisted levels to \$40,000 - \$60,000 / year.

The most important change for participants that they would like to see about "homes" in Portsmouth were for "housing prices to come down", and a "lack of affordable housing". An important comment on this was "it seems / feels like the last thing



Rich Beauchesne photo

the city is willing to spend time / money on is affordable housing!”

1. VISION: Through the Master Plan process, the City expressed its vision for the City over the next ten years. It includes the following five themes:

- Vibrant: A city that provides a high quality of life with an abundance of opportunities for living, working and playing.
- Authentic: A City that treasures its unique character, natural resources and historic assets.
- Diverse: A City that welcomes residents of all ages and income levels and supports a mix of small to large businesses.
- Connected: A City that provides strong links throughout the community, supports all forms of mobility, & encourages walking, bicycling & transit.
- Resilient: A City that considers and values the long term health of its natural and built environment.

Overall, the group feels generally comfortable with the themes laid out by the City in the Master Plan except for affordability. The group feels the City is at the right levels with vibrancy and authenticity. The group believes the City is not there yet with diversity, but it’s heading in the right direction. They groups sites an important need for better transportation that would include trains and bike trails. A better connection is needed for them. Resilient for the group means that

buildings will be better re-purposed to meet the needs of the citizens.

2. ISSUE #1: FINDING OUT ABOUT PARTICIPANTS’ “HOMES”

The group feels that a home to them means that it is safe, cozy, comfortable, affordable, and aesthetically pleasing. Safety is an important factor for all the group members. Safety includes not just the physical structure of their homes, but also includes safe, walkable surroundings nearby. One participant indicated a significant lack of safety in their city housing dwelling that has caused great trauma, and that is a major concern.

3. ISSUE #2: QUALITY OF CURRENT HOUSING:

3 of the group members feel that their current housing meets all their needs. One member is not satisfied with their current housing primarily due to a lack of safety.

4. ISSUE #3: WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE OF HOUSING FOR YOU:

The primary need for the group is more housing for the “over 55” community in Portsmouth. They need more assisted living and senior facilities in Portsmouth. Cited examples of successful models include Kittery, Exeter, Durham (coming soon), and the senior housing that is over the Portsmouth police station.

Again, their basic need and expectation is to have homes that are safe and affordable.

They identified the need for a better, realistic definition of affordability. “Affordable for whom? Everyone?” Any future housing needs to be “community-oriented.”

5. ISSUE #4: OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS:

The main obstacles identified to meeting the group’s “needs and expectations” going forward with are money, pay scale, and affordability.

Suggested solutions the group identified are:

- City rent control.
  - Re-purpose old buildings for city housing. Examples include malls and old warehouses.
  - Volunteer work for the City in exchange for property tax relief and/or rent reduction.
- As an example, the group cited a successful program run by the State of Massachusetts call the “Senior Tax Program.” They feel this type of program will benefit everyone through building community and friendships. They believe that people want to feel valued.

The Development Group

The “Development Group” was composed of two real estate developers, a real estate broker, an attorney, a housing authority administrator and a nonprofit housing administrator. While limited in number, the Group represented virtually all aspects of housing development. Their input which is set out below is not intended to be an authoritative analysis of the housing situation, nor does it necessarily constitute a unanimous viewpoint. Rather, it is a summary of information generated as part of a two-hour discussion for the purpose of providing some insight from people directly involved in “housing”

development in Portsmouth.

There was a consensus in the Group, consistent with recent Master Plans, that, for Portsmouth to remain a vibrant and sustainable community, it must become a more diverse community in all aspects. There must be age and socio-economic diversity as well as economically diversity with small and large businesses. The City population, not unlike the entire state is aging, and is attracting an increasing number of part-time or seasonal residents. Housing costs are soaring and businesses are having a difficult time finding and retaining employees.

THE PORTSMOUTH HOUSING MARKET

Housing is critical to Portsmouth’s future and is becoming less diverse every year. The cost of housing, whether to rent or purchase has soared. Two bedrooms, non-luxury apartments, if you can find one, rent for over \$1500 per month and are rapidly moving to \$2000 per month. It is impossible to find a small residence for under \$300,000 and mobile/manufactured housing values doubled in the recent re-valuation, consistent with recent sales. The income needed to pay the high cost of housing in Portsmouth limits who can afford to live here.

A real estate website, Realtor.com, lists the current median listing price for homes in Portsmouth at \$607,000 and the median sales price at \$477,000. Realtor.com lists rents available for two bedroom apartments starting at \$1035+ per month at Sagamore Apartments; at \$1850 per month at the new Veridian development adjacent to South Plaza on Constitution Avenue; at \$2000+ per month at Spinnaker Way; and above \$2000 or more closer to Downtown.

As a very general proposition, housing costs should equal about 30% of gross income. For renters, that translates into:

Rent (not including utilities)	Needed Gross Income	Single Income Family (40 hrs./wk. job)	Two Income Family (40hrs/wk. jobs)
\$1500/mo.	\$5000/mo. \$60,000/yr.	\$28.84/hr.	\$14.42/hr.
\$2000/mo.	\$6667/mo. \$80,000/yr.	\$38.46/hr.	\$19.23/hr.

To support a young family on a single income and live in a two bedrooms apartment in Portsmouth, the breadwinner needs to find a 40 hour per week job that pays \$29-38/hr. Probably requires a college degree to get in that pay range which may complicate the situation with student loans. For a service worker in Portsmouth earning upwards of \$15/hr. renting in Portsmouth is not likely.

For potential homeowners, that translates into:

Cost of Home/Condo	Down Payment	Monthly Mortgage Payment at 4.5%	R. E. Tax (\$16/thousand)	Needed Gross Inc.	Hourly Gross Income
\$300,000	5% - \$15,000	\$1444/mo.	\$400/mo.	\$74,000/yr.	\$35.57/hr.
	10% - \$30,000	\$1361/mo.		\$70,400/yr.	\$33.85/hr.
\$400,000	5% - \$20,000	\$1916/mo.	\$530/mo.	\$98,000/yr.	\$47.11/hr.
	10% - \$40,000	\$1815/mo.		\$93,800/yr.	\$45.00/hr.
\$500,000	5% - \$25,000	\$2407/mo.	\$667/mo.	\$123,000	\$59/hr.
	10% - \$50,000	\$2280/mo.		\$118,000	\$56.75/hr.

Houses selling at under \$400,000 in Portsmouth is becoming a rarity. Two bedrooms condos within a mile of downtown are selling for over \$600,000. A single person or two income family probably needs an income in excess of \$125,000 to have any hope of owning a single family home in Portsmouth.

The City of Portsmouth reports annual median household income at \$77,337 and annual per capita income at \$47,291 in 2015. (<https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/economic/economic-data#employment>). A "median" Portsmouth household can afford a home in the \$300,000 to \$400,000 range, if they can find it and have \$20,000 to \$40,000 down payment. Or, a "median" Portsmouth household can rent a non-luxury apartment in the \$1500 to \$2000 range. But how many Portsmouth seniors, hospitality workers, artists, retail clerks or others are "median" households?"

One of the reasons the cost of housing is soaring is the demand for housing in Portsmouth. Homes are selling for more than the initial asking price. Portsmouth has become attractive to retirees who are looking for the history, arts, theatre, culture and overall quality of life Portsmouth offers. Retirees can sell their suburban home they purchased near Boston 25-30 years ago and pay cash for a condo in Portsmouth, as well as a winter residence in a warmer climate. Ironically, for many Portsmouth seniors who have lived in Portsmouth for most, if not their whole life, and are now on a fixed income, rising living costs and real estate

taxes are making it difficult for them keep their homes. Some very wealthy newcomers are paying seven figures for "part-time" homes in Portsmouth. There has also been an enormous demand from tourists wanting to visit and enjoy the "quality of life" Portsmouth offers. It has been economic boom for the City with a corresponding demand for and significant increase in hotels. Home rentals on VRBO or Airbnb are also cropping up. The overall result is an increasingly aging and part-time population in Portsmouth, a much less diverse community.

Over the past twenty or more years, the supply of housing in Portsmouth has shifted to meet this changing demand. Rental housing is leveled or remodeled into condominiums. A boarding house is rebuilt as not inexpensive condominiums. Old homes are bought and leveled or gutted to make way for much higher end and expensive residences. Supply meets demand in a free enterprise market system, and that is what is happening in Portsmouth.

Another supply factor is the lack of available land to build on. Portsmouth is a relatively small geographic area that people have been building on for almost four hundred years. There is not much vacant area left so that old must be leveled or remodeled to make way for the new.

The land crunch has been further exacerbated by the Pease Development Authority's absolute refusal to consider housing at Pease. The increase in jobs at Pease has been an economic boon for the region. But

its failure to make land available for the resulting demand for housing has been a substantial factor in the dramatic increase in housing costs.

To further complicate matters, the cost of building housing has soared in recent years. Fewer young people are entering the construction trades. Tradesmen and laborers alike are more difficult to come by so the associated costs increase. The demand has also increased the cost of materials. Some estimate that the cost of building rental housing is as high as \$200,000 per unit which ends up reflected in higher rents. Many also complain the time and expense in obtaining permits and approvals. Major projects can take a year or more of approval processes incurring major expenses.

In a free enterprise economic system, supply will respond to demand. Investors and developers will meet demand as the smartest and best way to make a profit. It cannot be expected that the "free" housing market will meet Portsmouth's diverse housing needs. It is starting to feel like one needs to be wealthy or qualify for some sort of public housing/ subsidy to find a home in Portsmouth.

HOW CAN PORTSMOUTH ACHIEVE DIVERSE HOUSING THAT IS NEEDED FOR IT TO REMAIN A VIBRANT AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY?

Creating Diverse Homes in Portsmouth

Over the past thirty years not a single unit of "affordable" housing has been built in

Portsmouth. Zoning incentives in Portsmouth over the past decade have not worked as they have not accounted for even a single unit of affordable housing. Developers have tried but the density required to make the cost of a housing unit affordable has not been acceptable. Neighbors frequently complain about abutting projects sincerely concerned about their "quality of life". Many believe that housing is the Portsmouth's most difficult and critical issue moving forward.

The "free market" has not created diverse housing in Portsmouth; nor can it or should it be expected to on its own. Accomplishing the appropriate number and quality of diverse homes in Portsmouth will only happen if the community works together to make it happen. Here are some suggestions from the "Development Group:"

DENSITY: With limited land available, an increase in the number of units permitted on a given parcel of land is essential. Some estimate that diverse housing developments need to include 60 to 80 units. This means changes such as an increase in structure height, some smaller units and more units per parcel. This is necessary not only for rental units but also "ownership" units through condominiums or manufactured housing. Changes will reduce costs resulting in lower rents or sales prices.

UTILITIES: Access to utilities such as water, sewer and natural gas is critical to keeping costs down.

ZONING: The City must "zone" for diverse housing. Incentives have not worked. Diverse housing must be the purpose of the zoning so that it will not be necessary to seek variances, special exceptions or conditional use permits. This includes not only for rental but "owned" units as well.

PERMITTING/INSPECTIONS: Permitting processes can be lengthy and costly. Streamline all processes to keep costs down to make housing more diverse.

IDENTIFY PURPOSE AND AVAILABLE LAND: Identify diverse housing as a legitimate purpose of the zoning ordinance, and identify specify parcels of land available to meet that purpose. Spot zoning can be an issue that will need to be addressed. Also, repurpose older municipal buildings and properties to create diverse housing.



**TAX CREDITS AND FINANCING:** There are variety of tax incentives and financing available that will help create diverse housing by reducing costs. Investors, developers and the City should work together to identify and utilize these opportunities and incentives.

**SENIOR TAX DEFERRAL:** There are seniors who have lived in Portsmouth for most or all of their life. Their homes have increased in value by hundreds of thousands of dollars. They are on fixed incomes and savings are limited. To allow qualified seniors to remain in their homes, the City could create a formula to determine what they can afford to pay and defer any amount in excess of that until the house is sold. Initially it might create a revenue deficit, but over time, there would be sufficient turnover to offset the deferral deficit.

**PORTSMOUTH HOUSING AUTHORITY:** The PHA has a unique set of tools and opportunities it is exploring to move beyond the more traditional role of managing and providing public housing or subsidies for low income, the disabled or seniors. It has available land and the ability to develop it. It should explore the possibilities of public/private partnerships with the City and private parties which could expand its capabilities in creating diverse housing.

**REGIONAL HOUSING:** With limited land available in Portsmouth, neighboring communities are impacted. While the ideal might be to have everyone housed in Portsmouth, that is not possible. How neighboring communities respond is critical to meeting the demand for rental and owned housing. Transportation becomes a key issue for regional housing.

**PHILANTHROPIC COMMITMENT:** Costs can obviously be reduced and kept down through private donations. "Land Trusts" have successfully raised substantial funds to preserve open lands by private donations (and government initiatives such as the LCHIP assessment as part of the real estate transfer tax). Is diverse housing as important to the long term viability and sustainability of our community? Donated funds could be used to purchase land or fund building costs with the property subject perpetual restrictions to remain diverse. It could include ownership as well as rental properties. Joe Sawtelle developed a Housing Foundation

in Rochester to fund ownership opportunities for low income citizens. Is Portsmouth a community with the capital, social capital and intellect to create and maintain such unique programs?

**LEGISLATIVE MANDATE:** Some states have passed laws mandating "affordable housing". Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40B creates a standard 10% of a community's housing must be affordable; provides incentives for developments with 20 to 25% affordable units; and a streamlined process for approval of such projects. While that seems like a stretch for New Hampshire, the New Hampshire Legislature did pass the "in-law" apartment last year reflecting some sense of housing needs.

**POLITICAL WILL:** Decisions by administrative bodies are impacted by those who show up and what they have to say. Oftentimes, hearings are dominated by abutters looking out for the quality of life in their neighborhood. But is there also a community "quality of life" interest that is relevant? Are Portsmouth citizens willing to represent "diverse" housing as a community value on relevant housing projects? Do they have the political will to make necessary changes in Portsmouth ordinances? "Diverse" housing will not happen in Portsmouth without the "political will" of the community.

**TASK FORCE:** Portsmouth has frequently and successfully used "Mayor Blue Ribbon Committees" to address a variety of critical issues in Portsmouth. The recent Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Housing is a good example. However, achieving "diverse housing" in Portsmouth may require more. How about a "Diverse Housing Task Force" made up of City officials, citizens and developer/investors? The purpose of the Task Force would be to identify available land, developers, tax credits, financing, and support for specific "diverse housing" opportunities and projects. Example: Identify large parcel of land appropriate for the development of "diverse housing". Fund the acquisition of the property through donations, tax credits and housing finance authority financing. Pre-approve the parcel for "diverse housing". Issue an RFP to developers or private public partnerships (PHA and private developer/investors) to build and/or acquire the project. Far-fetched? It is somewhat like what the City is doing with the McIntyre Building.

## Small Business and Their Employees

The Group was intended to meet with members of a small business association in Portsmouth. After the initial meeting with the association, input was obtained through one of its officers.

There appears to be a consensus among small businesses and their employees that Portsmouth needs to be a diverse community to remain vibrant and sustainable. Diversity is necessary to avoid a "mono-culture" dominated by tourists, retired persons, wealthy and part-time residents. There is no animosity towards any of these people. Rather, diversity in age and wealth is critical to sustaining Portsmouth's success.

There is a strong belief that the overall quality of the community will be better served if more people live and work in Portsmouth because they will be more vested in their community.

Housing is a very serious problem for small business owners and their employees. The problem is availability and affordability. Small businesses do not have enough revenue to pay substantially higher wages necessary for them or their employees to afford to live here (rent or own). If one cannot live in Portsmouth, then they must spend time and money getting here every day. As a result, there is a high turnover of employees who will take slightly lesser paying jobs if they can live where they work.

Portsmouth is a "unique and amazing" City. It has done an incredible job preserving its history; embracing the arts, theater, culture and crafts people; developing a local economy; and becoming a walking and environmentally friendly community. As a result, Portsmouth is attractive to all walks of life. There has been an influx of wealthier people who have created a very high demand for quality housing that has drastically increased housing costs. Housing costs have become unaffordable for some small business owners and most of their employees.

The irony is that, as Portsmouth becomes more desirable, the demand for restaurants, shops and a variety of other small businesses continues to increase, but because these small businesses cannot afford to pay their employees enough to be able to afford to live here, it has become increasingly difficult to staff the very businesses that are in high demand. What makes the City "unique and amazing" may not be sustainable.

The need to commute to work in Ports-

mouth has many disadvantages. The cost of and time to commute, and then to find parking, add up. Transportation alternatives are limited. Additionally, for some vital services, such as nurses, a 45 minute commute to and from work every day, added onto a 12-hour shift, can impact performance.

If Portsmouth is going to have diverse housing, there:

- Needs to be public support for diverse housing;
- Needs to be an understanding that diverse housing will not decrease the value of homes, but to the contrary, will sustain values over time;
- Needs to be, on the national level, an understanding that a "living wage" for all employees is necessary for sustaining a vital national economy.

The Group offered an example of housing alternatives that need to be explored. Many seniors want to age in place in their homes but need help in maintaining their homes and having some companionship. Service workers cannot afford housing in Portsmouth but could be live-in companions with seniors, thereby reducing their housing costs, giving them a local residence, and helping seniors to age in place.

The Group's overall vision for Portsmouth is best summed up as follows: Portsmouth needs to build housing that will integrate the community from preschoolers to seniors. People who live and work here will be more vested in their community and generate and sustain a better community. Small businesses will be able to maintain their employees and housing values will not go down.

## Seniors

Seven people from the senior center at the Community Campus met with facilitator Robin LeBlanc for an hour. Three live in Hillcrest Estates, two in their own homes for over 20 years, and a couple live in the yellow apartment building next to the old library. Income ran the gamut from under \$20,000 per year to \$80=100K per year. The couple and one other had moved to Portsmouth to retire within the past four years.

1. What does your home mean to you/ what impact does it have on your life?

continued on next page

2.

- like the convenience of walking downtown and availability of public transportation.
- feeling of security and belonging among the neighbors, grateful for that when my husband died. I had only been there a couple of years and had made good friends.
- Peace and quiet of the neighborhoods, and access to public transportation (where applicable) were very important.

3. How is where you live working for you (location, design, price-point)

- It's working okay, there is a ramp, but I cannot use it in my wheelchair
- The interior is too small for a wheelchair – use a walker but if anything were to happen to my husband, who does a lot for me, I would have to move. I cannot mow the lawn or shovel, cannot get up steps by myself.
- I put in a chairlift several years ago and use it often now for myself. However, maintaining the property – mowing, raking, shoveling, cleaning – is a challenge and places that do it charge too much.
- I am stuck in a too-big house but cannot afford to move. It's a lot to take care of by myself.
- Hillcrest prices are getting high.

4. Challenges for finding places to live if we have to move – location, design, price-point?

- All of them!
- The older we get, the less money we have
- Need almost nothing to be able to get into the “projects”, and some are terrible
- So much is so expensive, rents too high (eg, new units out by McKinnon's)

5. If we have to move, looking for:

- A place that is accessible for wheelchairs – ramp, wide doors inside, walk-in shower, etc.
- Would love to see a group of small, one-floor cottages with a community building. Perhaps a condo-type set up, so don't have to worry about maintenance

\* Noted that this would be difficult to create and still be affordable

6. IDEA: why doesn't the city partner with an agency or agencies and expand living options in places where they already have senior housing in town?

7. Multi-generational settings were important to some of the group but not to all (had family visit frequently)

8. What do you want the City to know?

- They all want to stay in their homes – whether where they are now or in the future = and not have to go into a nursing home. They want homes that are affordable and accessible (one floor, wide doors etc.) and have public transportation.
- They also want to have services available to them (home maintenance, rides to doctor appointments or grocery shopping, etc.) that are affordable.
- Could the high school require community service as a pre-requisite of graduation, and then teens could assist seniors with lawn maintenance, etc.
- They want the City to think about how rising taxes is affecting them. Suggestion: “We've paid our dues for education for years. How about if seniors get a break in the education portion of the tax bill?”
- A little off topic, but they also said they would like the city to think about
  - a. More places to sit downtown – more benches
  - b. Giving seniors a break in parking prices
  - c. Encouraging restaurants to serve lighter meals, with discounts to seniors

## HOUSING DIALOGUE

### Monday Evening Group Summary

#### “Being whole as people”

The goal of Portsmouth Listens housing dialogues was to identify what it means to have a “good place to live” that takes into account the needs of those who live, work and play in Portsmouth. Early on in the dialogue, we coalesced this concept into one main idea:

What is it about a place, specifically housing and neighborhoods, that allows us to “be whole as people.”

#### What constitutes being whole?

Changing the conversation to focus on this phrase allowed us to expand our view beyond just housing. We also explored what people need when living in an area as an experience. When viewed in this light, the group identified the following four key necessities to reach this:

#### Thoughtfulness in place design

The overall list of ideas brainstormed by our group was large and thorough. The group was given several votes each, but we were able to consolidate some of the ideas to avoid spreading repeats. “Thoughtfulness in place design” was one of these consolidations – combining concepts like green space, lighting, noise mitigation, building scale, and variation of size and layout of the overall community.

#### Walkability

Critical to the effectiveness of place design was the ability to be in close proximity to services, activities, and social interaction, along with the ability to get to these things either without the need to park, or without the need to have a vehicle in the first place.

#### Knowing Neighbors and “Having a Sense of Belonging”

At the end of the day, all of these factors contribute to the overall sense of “being whole” that we set as our target. Two of the things identified with this and voted on by the group were having a good relation with neighbors and having a sense of belonging – that the community is open and engaged while still having a place to call one's own.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC NEEDS

The group also identified the specific needs of certain demographics that

either already make up the population of Portsmouth or were expected down the line. These demographic groups included those aging in place with a fear that they would be pushed out of their homes or out of Portsmouth altogether, young “family creators” who are raising children, and “20 somethings” attracted to the area for its energy and vibrancy.

While the goal is to allow this sense of “being whole” in general, these specific demographics may have particular needs outside the general case. These included:

- The ability to alter properties to allow for families to take care of their older generations on site
- Having more assisted living
- Keeping friends/family from different socioeconomic levels in the area
- Keeping the city affordable so that younger people who leave the city to grow are able to return, and that people can age in place without being priced out of their own homes.

Cultural changes were also discussed – reducing the stigma of using public transportation, reducing “car culture”, etc.

#### What is needed, and what should we address first?

In week two, we discussed what types of housing would meet the goals described above. While it was recognized that the fundamental reality is that the city needs more housing supply to meet demand, it wasn't the only factor, and the types of housing necessary varied greatly depending on the target audience.

This gave us an overall picture that what is required was a mix of different solutions, including:

- Housing in a variety of sizes and configuration and pricing (also, with yards and gardens)
- A desire for well-designed smaller units and co-housing/multi-age housing
- Mixed use development
- Pocket neighborhoods

The latter solution is notable because the discussion centered around meeting the



specific goals identified for “being whole as people” beyond simple housing. Developing more neighborhoods that could be connected by public transportation or non-vehicular (walking, biking) travel reduces costs in ways beyond merely trying to reduce the cost of housing itself. Furthermore, such development meets the needs of finding a sense of belonging and connecting with neighbors. The Atlantic Heights neighborhood was given as example of how this was done well.

The other issue brought forward frequently was whether or not the space exists to build more housing. Without an open conversation with existing neighborhoods about how what changes they would accept down the road and how it will impact them, it is difficult to simply decide that existing areas should be re-zoned or planned in other ways. This issue often brought up discussion around Pease, why housing was removed from there originally, and if the possibility of placing neighborhoods “out there” exists. However, the need to become more dense in other areas was still recognized.

### Recommendations

While there was not much push-back on the existing plan to revise the Gateway District mixed-use zoning plan, there was a desire to have the 2nd or 3rd readings delayed until the recommendations provided by Portsmouth Listens could be completed. Whether those recommendations will affect those existing proposals is only part of the scope of these working groups – the other part being looking forward to newer proposals.

There was also concern that even with the existing plans that have been put forward over the years, real change has not occurred, or, at the very least, advice has fallen by the wayside. The desire for more frequent progress reports was identified.

Beyond these concerns, the group identified the following four things they would like to see moving forward to meet its goals:

- **FINAL SAY ON PEASE PROPERTIES** – there has been so much confusion at many different levels (residents, council, city government) on what the reality is with the PDA’s charter and contracts. What can be



Ioanna Raptis photo

done? What cannot be done? The group wanted a full analysis of the possibilities regarding residential building here in both the near and long term to clarify this and finally have a full set of information on the table. Requesting the City Manager give an overview of the entire Pease charter and agreements over time to the council, or perhaps a commission directly created for this purpose, was a desire.

- **INVESTIGATE STOCK OF CITY PROPERTIES FOR THESE PURPOSES** – engaging with the PHA to develop more housing and examining which properties have this potential. This includes developing RFPs that require certain percentages of workforce housing. The advantage here is that the city owns the property and thus has control over it without stepping on any developer property rights.
- **FOCUS ON THE CREATION OF MORE NEIGHBORHOODS** – as identified above, meeting the sense of belonging while increasing localization and walkability was most clearly met by allowing new neighborhoods to grow, whether through small well designed units or through mixed-use.
- **HOLD DEVELOPERS ACCOUNTABLE TO REQUIREMENTS** – this was identified specifically around creating 30% affordable housing requirements, and change zoning requirements such that the affordable housing developed would not necessarily need to be in the same development as any particular one being proposed. Options such as impact fees and Tax Increment Local Transfers were discussed, but primarily focused on making sure that the impacts of development are well understood and mitigated as part of the process.
- **CREATE AN OPEN DIALOGUE BETWEEN DEVELOPERS AND NEIGHBORHOODS** – other cities have had success in creating a direct forum for residents to engage with developers who have plans to change things on or nearby their existing homes. It was noted that right now that conversation tends to happen indirectly; residents talk to city government/staff, staff talks to developers, and visa versa. Having an open dialogue at the beginning may get more buy in from residents and also make sure that the specific impacts

Plans can the focus on connecting these neighborhoods to reduce traffic, etc.

of changes to each neighborhood is accounted for. It may also reveal many residents who are on-board with having areas at or near them re-zoned to these newer ideas.

This group believes that the goal of solving our housing issues to allow people to “be whole” as stakeholders of Portsmouth is best met by focusing on these five priorities.

### Who can act?

While the bullets above are directed at city government, it should be noted that the above does not rest entirely on the shoulders of the council or staff. Much of this public information is available to anyone with the wherewithal to investigate it and share that investigation with other interested parties. Furthermore, it is entirely possible for bottom-up organization to form proper forums connecting neighborhoods with developers, allowing neighborhoods to strategically plan their own growth, etc. The process of living as whole people in Portsmouth is one that takes active engagement, and it is incumbent on all of us to participate in it.

# HOUSING DIALOGUE

## Tuesday Evening Group Summary

### WHAT MAKES A GREAT COMMUNITY?

The areas that rose to the top include:

#### GREEN COMPONENT:

- Access to Green Spaces
- Healthy environment and ecosystems
- Reduction and mitigation of human impact

#### FINANCIAL COMPONENT:

- Financial viability, including equitable taxation and ability to maintain home\*
- Responsive city services including maintenance

#### PEOPLE/NEIGHBORHOOD COMPONENT:

- Connecting with neighbors, sense of community\*
- Convenience including walk /ride public transportation
- Safety

#### OTHER:

- Lasting memories and shared history
- Healthy maritime economy
- Integrated diversity of all kinds in neighborhoods
- Community resources including arts and culture\*

\*votes considered to be of particular importance to an individual's housing needs

### ASSESSING THE CURRENT STATE OF PORTSMOUTH'S VISION FOR ITSELF – HOW ARE WE DOING IN THESE AREAS?

(40 points=highest possible.

8 points=lowest possible)

- |             |    |
|-------------|----|
| • Vibrant   | 34 |
| • Authentic | 24 |
| • Diverse   | 20 |
| • Connected | 31 |
| • Resilient | 22 |

Recognizing that any discussion on housing encompasses many factors, we tried to tie in the insights and recommendations as outlined in the "Portsmouth Listens Housing Dialogue Phase 1 Common Groups Reports," along with our own perspectives. In addition, it seems clear that, while the city may be interested in hearing these public discus-

sions and obtaining feedback, many private projects are already underway and others have been approved. The city has been looking at repurposing certain commercial parcels, but the viability of pursuing these concepts/potential projects is not known. A particular theme that came out was the notion that the Portsmouth Housing Authority may have "access" to properties, and what that might mean in the mix of providing economically diverse housing. A majority of our members did not wish to see the City of Portsmouth as landlords/in the housing business. However, the city ought to utilize the expertise of the housing authority to translate any recommendations into viable solutions.

Economically diverse housing, reflecting pricing that service workers, young families, middle-income and fixed income senior populations can reasonably afford is a goal. This "middle" group of residents seems to be the hardest hit in terms of the city's ability to retain a diverse community. Initiatives to create new neighborhoods is a good idea, where gateway mixed-use zones could target the missing middle. The majority opinion opposes increasing density in existing neighborhoods. We believe that preserving the character of existing neighborhoods takes priority over increasing housing in these areas.

Zoning ordinances, and potential changes to them, also took up a good portion of discussion, especially where protecting and sustaining green space is concerned. Wetland and woodland protection, and buffer zones throughout the city, is a primary concern to our group, even if it means forgoing housing projects that would solve acknowledged shortages. Understanding that incentives may be part of the solution for private developers to create "affordable" units, one concept put forth was to allow assessments to reflect protection of wetlands by lowering assessed values of that portion of the property that is being preserved.

Stronger regulation could also be considered when it comes to environmental impact. Do not approve the sought-after extension of the zone near the Marine Supply store, which is near wetlands, and behind the Echo Ave. neighborhood.

Adverse impact to the city's water and sewage facilities is of concern as building

and development continues. These may already be overburdened. We do not have unlimited capacity, therefore thoughtful development is a must.

#### ADDITIONAL NOTES FROM OUR MEETINGS:

- Cost is a barrier to entry for the young; continued affordability a problem for most.
- More small, affordable apartments are needed (too many high-end condos).
- Concern about shoe horning too many buildings on small lots through granting variances.
- Avoid urban sprawl with its negative impact on the environment.
- Concern about being financially pushed out of affordable places like Hillcrest by gentrification.
- Walkability to basic needs like shops for retirees is important for new developments.
- Facilitate cooperative living facilities as an alternative to nursing homes (currently discouraged by the zoning ordinance.)

A desire to slow down the pace of development to require developers to be clear about a project and hear community questions and concerns? Suggestion of a 1-year moratorium on development of commercial, industrial, and retail because of concerns about unburdening water and sewage. Then after 1 year reassess. Opposing view: this would be kicking the can down the road, leading to developers dumping property and creating legal problems.

Suggestion: one person from the planning department be assigned to follow a building permit start to finish

#### WORKFORCE HOUSING AT PEASE?

Ability to develop housing at Pease would alleviate pressure on Portsmouth and gateway zones; although, Pease being a superfund site would make housing development there challenging.

Also, the Pease Development Authority is strongly against housing at Pease.

#### MCINTYRE BUILDING – VIEWS:

- Ensure this development includes affordable housing for downtown area.
- Rehabilitation of the building will be too expensive to include affordable housing.

- The property is too valuable to accommodate affordable housing, which would reduce revenue for the city over a 10 - 20 year period.
- Hoping the McIntyre building can regenerate the tax coffers.



# HOUSING DIALOGUE

## Wednesday Evening Group Summary

Our group was comprised of Gregg Spaulding (facilitator), Jessica Gorhan (recorder), Diane Stradling, Barbara DeStefano, John Shea, Robert White and John Maher. We met for three evenings to identify the opportunities and challenges to adding more diverse housing stock to the City's existing inventory.

Because we came from diverse sections of the City, we identified the basic characteristics necessary for a home in Portsmouth. In light of the fact that our charge was to focus on affordable, workforce housing in Portsmouth, our group felt that every home should be safe and have access to various modes of transportation. In order to be affordable, we felt that whether it was a single-family home, condominium or an apartment, the size of the unit could be smaller than the zoning laws currently allow. Amenities such as green space or access to shopping were additional goals to incorporate into any new housing plan.

Many changes could occur if the City continues to modify its zoning requirements to allow for more diverse housing to be built in close proximity to one another. There must be a concerted effort to educate the citizens of Portsmouth that these changes are necessary in order to keep Portsmouth as vibrant as it is today. For years, the City has been stopped at its borders with any plan to create a regional approach to the housing issues or problems. Our group encourages the City to revisit any contacts with the surrounding towns to address the housing needs of the region. Our group prioritized the different categories of housing that were in most demand. The four areas of affordable housing that received the most support in our group were, in order, housing for seniors that work or still need to work, housing for lower income families, housing

for young adults, and housing for middle income families.

Among the suggestions we discussed to increase and improve affordable housing in Portsmouth were the following: more micro-units, relaxation of some zoning regulations to allow communal living (and more calls for mixed uses everywhere), expanding the square footage limitation of accessory units, and expanding the number of elderly housing units (and increasing the support for those residents who are already in elderly housing in Portsmouth).

On a longer-term basis, we'd like to see the City focus on and carefully study the future status of automobiles, parking, and public transportation in the downtown area and throughout Portsmouth – and alternative transportation (bicycles included).

In the end, we discussed quite a few ideas, recommendations, and priorities (both broad/conceptual and quite specific/detailed) – often agreed with one another and sometimes varied in our views. However, for the purposes of this report, we agreed on three core recommendations. As follows:

### (1) REGIONAL COOPERATION

– We believe it is essential that the issue of affordable housing in (and around) Portsmouth be tackled with as much regional collaboration as possible. We need to tackle this issue together, find common ground, and work cooperatively. We believe the New Hampshire communities of Rye, Greenland, and Newington are particularly critical. And we'd love to see New Castle involved, too. We'd also urge bi-state collaboration with the Maine communities of Eliot and Kittery. Affordable housing is a regional matter – and demands regional collaboration. And we believe it is everyone's greater interest – and that leverage points surely

## HOUSING DIALOGUE

### Wednesday Morning Group Summary

#### CHARACTERISTICS

- A diverse population and economic situations
- Interconnected neighborhoods that are walk and bikable
- Recognition of our historic past
- Public parks and open space
- Public transportation
- Sustainable practices as outlined in the Master Plan
- Human Scale development

#### HOUSING NEEDS

- All types of housing for families, singles, and seniors
- Affordability and cost ability
- Services for seniors and adults with disabilities
- Services for seniors to age in place
- Good schools and education opportunities for everyone

#### PRIORITIES

- Find ways for seniors to stay in their homes and age in place
- Give preference to local developers
- Expand public transportation

#### ACTION PLANS

- Set clear goals and objectives
- Determine what our infrastructure can handle
- Engage in regional solutions
- Clarify Gateway Zoning areas
- Educate new city council on Natural Step/4 Conditions
- Create villages outside of downtown
- Find additional revenue

exist to bring everyone to the table. Traffic, roads, bridges, parking, public and alternative transportation, clean rivers and oceans, safe drinking water, air quality, and secondary education (Portsmouth High School) are among the drivers. We need citizens, city/town governments, and businesses from all seven communities (Portsmouth, Rye, Greenland, Newington, Eliot, Kittery, and New Castle) participating. And state government – both NH and ME. And possibly county governments in the region, if and as makes sense, also participating.

And, not only do we need regional cooperation, we also need a diverse array of interests and skill sets at the table – citizens currently living in all forms of housing, citizens in need of affordable housing, architects, developers, realtors and

real estate agents, city planners, transportation interests, environmentalists, etc.

### (2) PLANNING BASED ON

**CRITICAL FUTURE TRENDS** – It is hard to predict the future (10, 15, 20, 25, and more years out), but it is critically important that we tackle the affordable housing issue with the best understanding possible of these critical future trends. Four general examples are as follows:

The future of work/employment – where we work, when and how much we work, the nature of full-time employment and independent contracting, etc.

- The future of transportation – cars, sizes of cars, electric cars, driverless/self-driving cars, alternatives to cars, public and alternative transportation, etc.

- The future of shopping – how we shop, where we shop, e-commerce, delivery, drone delivery, Amazon hubs, etc.
- Climate change and its implications – size of houses, how their built, how their heated, cooled, and electrified, fossil fuels and transportation, rising sea levels and implications for wetlands and coast lines, etc.

### (3) WE FULLY SUPPORT THE "TOWN CENTER, MULTI-USE, GATEWAY" PROJECTS DIRECTION

– We are excited about the proposed mixed-use (more densely developed) areas being initiated/planned along Lafayette Road, around I-95 Exit 7 (and the old K-Mart area), and Mirona Road. We like the idea – shopping, entertainment, groceries, restaurants, green space (and playgrounds) all within walking distance. We are particularly excited about including affordable housing within these areas (mixed income by design, smaller overall units/homes with no/smaller private yards, etc.). And we'd like to see more of it – including, for example, on the WBBX property between Islington and Borthwick. There must be creative ways to work with and around the wetlands, possible ways to create a buffer (like a rails-to-trails greenway) between the development and existing homes, and ways to plan traffic patterns that actually alleviate traffic on Islington.

We, like many others, are very concerned that market forces are changing (and will continue to change) the character of Portsmouth in negative ways. We support doing what is necessary to curb, regulate, and/or work around these forces. The free market is not our first priority; the future character of Portsmouth is our first priority.

# HOUSING DIALOGUE

## Thursday Evening Group Summary

How can housing, linked to every aspect of our community, make Portsmouth the best place to live, work and play for everyone?

### CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE

#### OUR PRIORITIES FOR THE CITY:

**SAFETY** – Safety is fundamental. Everything else we've discussed about what we want to see is "bells and whistles:" safety, both real and the perception of safety, comes before all. That relates to knowing your neighbours, street lighting, active properties etc.

**VIBRANT AND DIVERSE NEIGHBORHOODS WITH MULTI-GENERATIONAL CONSTITUENTS** – We do not want segregated neighborhoods. We want a "mix of people, and people mixing." Diversity in all its facets, age, race, economic level etc, is key.

**CONSISTENT AND ACCESSIBLE WALK/CYCLE AMENITIES** – Due to the size of the city walkability/cyclability should not be hindered by lack of pathways, unkempt pathways and/or busy traffic patterns.

#### SECONDARY FACTORS:

- Active and Diverse Creative Industry (theaters, music venues, restaurants, galleries)
- Public Gathering Spaces (both privately and publicly owned cafes, parks, recreational halls)
- Diverse Economy that allows Employment Mobility
- Ability to Age-in-Place (small homes, single-floor living)
- Affordable Public Transportation (extending to existing and new neighbours beyond downtown)
- Traffic Calming Measures (including the creation of pedestrian-only areas)
- Variety of Architecture in Commercial

Buildings, and Dwellings (both built & natural landscape)

- Public Art, and Interactive Creative Spaces
- Community/Neighborhood Gardens

### HOUSING NEEDS OF EVERYONE WHO LIVES, WORKS AND/OR PLAYS IN PORTSMOUTH

This group recognizes that all demographics have similar needs and desires in housing. However we have defined several groups who we feel are under-supported through housing stock.

- Low-income residents
- Individuals with physical, mental, developmental disabilities
- Individuals transitioning from homelessness
- Young professionals (dual-income no/with kids, single-income no/with kids)
- Students, living with or without roommates
- Fixed income mature residents, those who are both employed and retired

#### OUR PRIORITIES FOR THE CITY:

**AFFORDABLE STARTER HOMES** – This group prioritized affordable small (<1500 sq ft) homes for individuals starting or continuing their careers in Portsmouth. This included a variety of developments with a mix of people and with and without commercial space. Pathways to ownership ensure that we have residents at all levels of the property ladder.

**CHANGED ZONING ON CO-HOUSING/HOME-SHARING** – The city needs to address

its ordinances relating to co-housing. Whether we have individuals 55+ who do not want to be segregated from their communities or low-income individuals, Portsmouth has an opportunity to be a innovator in home-sharing policy and development.

**GATEWAY ZONING ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS** – Ultimately, this group supports the proposed amendments, however only with the inclusion of design standards and character-based zoning that reflects the town, creating truly desirable neighborhoods. Conscious development that creates active, fun, and safe neighborhoods will ensure that they offer something unique and desirable, alleviating some of the strain on downtown.

#### SECONDARY FACTORS:

**CREATING PERMANENCY IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING** – This group acknowledged the lack of affordable homes within the free market. The group discussed the idea of land trusts holding the value of the land, but allowing the housing to float with the market.

**SAFE COMMUTING SYSTEM** – The group identified the need for all housing, in current and new neighborhoods, must be connected to accessible walking, cycle, and driving pathways. The group would like to see a pedestrian center in Market Square, and improved bicycle and pedestrian amenities and infrastructure, including bike lanes.

**PARKING REQUIREMENTS** – The city needs to seriously consider the implications of parking requirements. By allowing flexibility and creativity in parking requirements, further developments at various income levels could be supported.

### CONCLUSIONS

#### WHAT DO WE WANT THE CITY TO KNOW?

Conversations on housing, affordability, equality and speed of development, have existed for decades. The city must act now to safeguard the reasons we all choose to live here.

Ultimately, this group wants to see the gateway amendments pass, contingent upon the inclusion of design standards or character-based zoning. The gateway zones must become real, complete neighborhoods with easy access to downtown. The gateway zones should not become places where we build "housing for the sake of housing" and dump lower income residents.

#### WHAT CAN WE DO NEXT?

This group feels that the next step in creating sustainable, and equitable housing in Portsmouth will be forming a meaningful collaborative task force between residents, developers, entrepreneurs, and decision makers.

Now is the time for innovation, and for Portsmouth to step up as a leader in a social/economic challenge that is facing many towns and cities across the country. We believe that exploring the role of Public Private Partnerships can help us find solutions.

Public and nonprofit entities have the ability to attract millions in tax credit equity for new housing developments in the city, and are experts in the kind of compliance and asset management that is required to operate affordable housing properties. We may also need to address the confinement of legislation that defines the character of affordable and workforce housing.

We believe together we can:

- Be creative and harness the power of public and/or non-profit developers (e.g Portsmouth Housing Authority, Housing Partnership)
- Encourage resident empowerment (e.g Co-operatives and Resident Owned Communities)
- Utilize the capital and creativity of the city's commercial businesses (e.g Employer-supported housing, Arts/Culture, Technology or Tourism Industries)