

Somersworth Mayor's Housing Task Force - Minutes, 2/22/24

Called to order 5:00PM, 2/22/24

Attendance:

Mayor Matt Gerding	Present
City Councilor Paul Goodwin	Present
City Councilor David Witham	Present
Debbie Evans	Present
Chris Horton	Present
Anthony Jones	Present
Richard Brooks	Present
Elizabeth Nguyen	Present
Nick Taylor	Present
Ken Ferrer	Absent

1. Introductions
2. Nomination without objection of Paul Goodwin as secretary.
3. Mayor Matt Gerding provided the purpose of the committee to focus on housing, affordability. The committee has been assembled to reflect the various boards and interest groups, with the hope that any identified changes can be sent to various boards as needed, and so that representation/input from all stakeholders can be accounted for.
4. Review of how to set SMARTgoals: Specific, Measurable, Attainable (yet challenging), Realistic, and contain a Targeted completion date.
5. Goal Setting Discussion:
 - a. Councilor Witham notes that edits to zoning ordinances may be needed, cited possible ideas, such as looking at ordinances on ADUs
 - b. Councilor Goodwin noted that the state expanded 79E, and if we updated ours, this would provide an incentive.

- c. Mr. Taylor noted similar task forces in other communities and some of the models that have worked. Noted that if there are variances that communities see frequently, it likely means it should get changed in ordinance. Cited Exeter's Master Plan as a good example.
- d. Mr. Horton noted that different housing types need to be considered based on our current inventory and needs. Also wanted to look at the application process and get feedback from applicants.
- e. Councilor Witham notes that along with zoning updates, site plan and regs updates will also be required. Also asked whether we are limited on density based on infrastructure.
- f. Councilor Goodwin noted goals: simply zoning and regs, eliminate single family exclusionary zoning, allow for duplexes in residential areas, legalize multifamily zoning in more areas, allow greater housing diversity, target density, noted form-based approach key for visioning, noted requesting a capacity assessment on water and sewer to aid growth conversation.
- g. Ms. Nguyen noted housing typology is key, what is our vision in terms of form. Worth exploring how neighborhoods could have unique needs.
- h. Mr. Jones notes having the option of comprehensive zoning updates. Multiple others agreed that we should consider a comprehensive zoning and regulation update.
- i. Council Witham, notes who the users/demographics are. Aging population, declining school enrollment, increasing demand on water/sewer/first responders.
- j. Mr. Brooks suggested to do a comprehensive look at what we like and is worth keeping, and what needs to change. An audit of zoning.
- k. Mayor Gerding said that SRPC is currently working on an audit of zoning which will be submitted soon to the Planning Board. He also suggested that he'd like to see downtown be the focus of more housing as well.
- l. Mr. Jones laid out a phased approach for changes. Phase 1: use the audit to tell us where we need changed, and assess capacity. Phase 2: if goal is to increase density, how? What type and structures? Phase 3: make changes to ordinances. Also noted that in doing this, we need to use recent assessments of sewer, water, roads to determine the impacts of new development.
- m. Councilor Goodwin stated that he agrees with a strong focus on the downtown but also applying a neighborhood approach to plan growth and inform form. Also warned of having too much layering in ordinance.
- n. Mayor Gerding noted the potential importance of the committee addressing homelessness and transitional housing. Cited the potential for creating a

Seacoast NH Continuum of Care and partnering with abutting communities to apply for funds as potential funding source.

- o. Mrs. Evans provided an outline of Somersworth Housing Authority's work and stated that SHA is interested in building more units and expanding their mission but have not found the opportunity in Somersworth to do it.
 - p. Councilor Goodwin noted that the SHA is an existing entity that can be useful for filling an otherwise difficult to fill affordability gap. Councilor Goodwin asked if advocacy at the state level would be appropriate.
 - q. Ms. Nguyen noted that there are a few bills currently being discussed in Concord that the committee may support.
 - i. Increasing affordable housing fund with real estate transfer tax
 - ii. Excluding 3-4 unit buildings from needing sprinkler systems
 - iii. Historic revitalization tax credit
 - r. Councilor Witham believed that whatever decisions we make, that we need to be inclusive and involve the community as much as possible
6. Mayor Gerding's first pass at higher level categories to encompass the goals outlined in discussion:
- a. Zoning Ordinances and Regulation Updates
 - b. Affordability, Families, Transition housing
 - c. Economic Development, Capacity Assessments, Parking, Tax Base
 - d. Better Bureaucracy (alignment of zoning and progress), Advocacy to the State
 - e. Character/Engagement - community mapping, historic features, neighborhoods
7. Mayor Gerding also noted that he is interested in exploring whether opioid settlement funds can be used for housing.
8. Mayor Gerding assigns homework: to review the housing chapter and provide notes/comments. Mayor Gerding noted there is more to come including an audit on zoning.
9. Committee agreed to set the next meeting on March 20th in Council Chambers at City Hall 5:30PM. The meeting will be a joint workshop with SRPC. to discuss the draft Housing Chapter.
10. Adjournment