



**Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Housing**  
**7:30 a.m. – May 1, 2008**  
**City Hall/City Manager's Conference Room**

Present: Councilor Christine Dwyer, Chairperson; Dick Ingram, Jane James, Joseph Couture, Karen Maneen, Councilor Laura Pantelakos City Manager John P. Bohenko (Ex-Officio), Cindy Hayden Deputy City Manager (Ex-Officio), David Moore, Asst. Community Development Director (Ex-Officio)

Absent: Councilor Ken Smith Everett Eaton and Cliff Sinnott

- 
- 1. Call to Order** - Chairperson Dwyer called the meeting to order at approximately 7:40 a.m. and welcomed members to the inaugural meeting of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Housing. Chairperson Dwyer indicated Mayor Ferrini was unable to attend the meeting but that he would attend the next meeting.
  - 2. Charge of the Committee** – Chairperson Dwyer reviewed the charge of the Committee established in a February 28, 2008 Memo to City Council members from Mayor Ferrini. The three elements of the Committee's charge included the development of a "white paper" on housing options, programs, and identification of key issues; identification of creative solutions which, preserve the existing affordable housing stock and create additional affordable housing opportunities; and to determine a short list of opportunities for future policies and actions the City and other stakeholders can take.

At this time, Chairperson Dwyer, asked members of the Committee to introduce themselves and each member spoke about their own connection to the housing issue.

- 3. Distribution of a Road Map to Affordable Housing** – Chairperson Dwyer then recognized Cindy Hayden who provided members of the Committee with a binder entitled "A Road Map to Affordable Housing" prepared for the Blue Ribbon Committee on Housing by the Community Development Department. Ms. Hayden reviewed the report highlighted information about Portsmouth's housing supply, the cost of housing, already existing housing programs, existing regulatory approaches to the housing issue, and information on the City's housing partners. Two appendices were included in the report: the housing chapter from the City's 2005 Master Plan and a statewide report on Housing solutions for New Hampshire.

Chairperson Dwyer asked Committee members to review the report prior to the next meeting and thanked the staff for its work in compiling the information for the Committee. Chairperson Dwyer said she hoped the committee would discuss proposed solutions to the housing issue and identify a few action-oriented strategies and move them forward.

A general discussion about housing took place. The City Manager circulated a copy of “Communities and Consequences” by Peter Francese and Lorraine Stuart Merrill. Several members noted they had seen the documentary which is based on the book. Ms. Hayden noted that the City’s First-Time Homebuyer’s Program, HomeTown, is profiled in the book as a possible strategy to address the housing challenge.

Councilor Pantelakos suggested the committee engage selectmen in surrounding areas on this issue.

Mr. Couture indicated that the number of Section 8 vouchers administered by the Portsmouth Housing Authority (PHA) should be added to the roster of subsidized housing found in the report developed by staff. He said the PHA currently manages 406 housing vouchers for units in Portsmouth and surrounding towns.

The City Manager indicated that the City has experienced difficulty in hiring new employees due to housing costs and that many employees live 45 minutes or more away. This travel time is problematic not only for Fire and Police, but for Public Works employees. He noted that the housing challenge facing Portsmouth and the region may require legislation at the State level.

Ms. Hayden indicated that the PHA is working to retain and improve existing units of affordable housing and that the retention of existing units is important as well as the creation of new units.

4. **Discussion** - Chairperson Dwyer presented the Committee with a sheet “Exploration of Creative Solutions” which she prepared. The handout, included the following categories: 1. Expanding the stock of Affordable Housing, 2. Preserving Affordable Housing Stock/Keeping People in Homes, and 3. Other Types of Solutions. Chairperson Dwyer asked the members to review the handout and asked members to indicate which of these topics would be useful to explore over the next couple of meetings.

Councilor Pantelakos would like to see work on an ordinance that would allow people to have in-law apartments or accessory apartments. Ms. Hayden suggested City staff doing more research on this. Councilor Pantelakos referred to elderly people who have lived in Portsmouth for a long time, but who cannot afford their homes anymore.

The City Manager suggested further investigation of the homesharing concept, which included matching senior homeowners with younger individuals looking for housing who could provide rent and/or services to the senior.

Chairperson Dwyer suggested looking more closely into property tax liens for seniors who need help staying in their homes. The members discussed the negative connotation associated with tax liens and that the concept could be introduced in a more positive way.

Ms. James said publicity for housing options is lacking in the area. She said new approaches to this issue will be successful if there is outreach and communication with the public. The committee discussed a non-web-based center of information, such as the Portsmouth Public Library, as a possible solution. Mr. Couture said the PHA conducts informational programs at the Senior Center, which might be a useful outreach tool for such a program.

Mr. Couture indicated that subsidized housing for the mentally-disabled is a large issue facing the Portsmouth Housing Authority (PHA). He said the mentally-disabled population in the PHA’s

housing units has grown and has created some conflict between the younger mentally-disabled population and seniors at Feaster and Margeson Apartments. He indicated that the mentally-disabled population needs supportive housing units.

Chairperson Dwyer indicated that the charge of the Committee was to not only consider subsidized housing for people earning less than 80% of Median Family Income (MFI), but also addressing housing for people earning between 80% and 120% of MFI. She said the Committee should look at ways to preserve existing units of affordable housing as well as ways increase the number of affordable housing units.

Chairperson Dwyer indicated she would like to see the Committee explore Pease as a potential area to build new housing.

After this discussion, the Committee agreed to visit the topics of in-law/accessory apartments as well as co-housing/homesharing at the next meeting. The City Manager suggested David Moore be the Committee's staff contact and if invited any member of the Committee who would like to share information with the Committee to give it to David.

The Chair circulated a sheet of paper for Committee members to write their contact information. The City Manager summarized the Right-To-Know law for committee members who are considering using e-mail to communicate with staff or other Committee members.

5. **Next Steps & Set Meeting Schedule** –After discussion, it was decided that the meetings will be approximately every three weeks on Thursdays beginning at 7:30 a.m.. The next meeting is May 29, 2008 at 7:30 a.m. in the City Manager's Conference Room.

**6. Adjournment –**

Respectfully submitted,  
Elaine E. Boucas, Recording Secretary