

## CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION WITH PORTSMOUTH LISTENS HOUSING DIALOGUE FINAL REPORT

MUNICIPAL COMPLEX – CONFERENCE ROOM A  
DATE: MONDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2017

PORTSMOUTH, NH  
TIME: 6:30PM

Present: Mayor Blalock, Assistant Mayor Splaine, Councilors Perkins, Dwyer, Pearson, Cyr and Denton

Absent: Councilors Lown and Spear

Mayor Blalock called the Work Session to order at 6:30 p.m.

John Tabor representing Portsmouth Listens with Robin LeBlanc said various individuals from the group would be presenting the final report to the City Council.

Jason Walls said he will provide a list of points for “being whole in Portsmouth”.

### 1. Thoughtfulness in place of design

Combining concepts like green space, lighting, noise mitigation, building scale, and variation of size and layout of the overall community.

### 2. 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.

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

That the community is open and engaged while still having a place to call one’s own.

### 4. Demographic needs

The specific need 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.

### 5. Cultural changes

Reducing the stigma of using public transportation reducing “car culture”, etc.

He spoke to an overall picture of what is required for a mix of different solutions for housing 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

He said it is important to develop 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. He stated such development meets the needs of finding a sense of belonging and connecting with neighbors. He gave the Atlantic Heights neighborhood as an example of how this was done well.

He spoke to another issue brought forward frequently was whether or not the space exists to build more housing. He said without an open conversation with existing neighborhoods about 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. He stated 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.

He spoke to the four things they would like to see moving forward to meet its goals:

- **Final say on Pease properties** – 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 Portsmouth Housing Authority 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. Plans can the focus on connecting these neighborhoods to reduce traffic, etc.

- **Hold developers accountable to requirements** – this was identified specially 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 vice versa. Having an open dialogue at the beginning may get more buy in from residents and also make sure that the specific impacts 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.

Larry Lariviere, spoke to characteristics that were reviewed are as follows:

- 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

He addressed 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

He spoke to Priorities:

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

He outline 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

John Shea said his group focused on affordable, workforce housing for Portsmouth. He said that every home should be safe and have access to various modes of transportation. He stated in order to be affordable, the size of the unit could be smaller than the zoning laws currently allows. Amenities such as green space or access to shopping were additional goals to incorporate into any new housing plan.

He stated 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. He said four areas of affordable housing that received the most support 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.

He said to increase and improve affordable housing for micro-units, relaxation of some zoning regulations to allow communal living, 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).

He informed the Council the group would 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).

Three Core Recommendations as follows:

### **Regional Cooperation**

Mr. Shea said the New Hampshire communities of Rye, Greenland, and Newington are particularly critical. He stated they would like to see New Castle involved, too and a bi-state collaboration with the Maine communities of Eliot and Kittery. He stated affordable housing is a regional matter and demands regional collaboration. He also indicated a diverse array of interest and skill sets needed to be 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 interest, environmentalists, etc.

### **Planning Based on Critical Future Trends**

- 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 they are built, how they are heated, cooled, and electrified, fossil fuels and transportation, rising sea levels and implications for wetlands and coast lines, etc.

### **We Fully Support the “Town Center, Multi-Use Gateway” Projects Direction**

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. Including affordable housing within these areas (mixed income by design, smaller overall units/homes with no/smaller private yards, etc.). There must be creative ways to work with and around the wetlands, possible ways to create a buffer (like a rails-to-trails greenway). The free market is not our first priority; the future character of Portsmouth is our first priority.

Jonathan Steinberg said his group wants a City that is safe and diverse and welcoming. He said we need to keep young and creative residents. He spoke to the issue of costs and how we are driving away our work force and need to lower prices. He stated there needs to be better ways that target towards people we want to attract. He said we don't want to increase density and become tumbling grounds for people that can't afford downtown. Mr. Steinberg said we need to open space and be part of a community. He indicated that parking requirements are a concern for developments in the downtown. He said it is important to think about our transportation needs. He addressed the Portsmouth Housing Authority creating housing that is affordable in the downtown area.

Chris of the final group, said there is no one solution to make everyone happy. He said there are limits to everything here. He said his group recommends a one year moratorium on building. He said as we are moving forward we could create a dedicated resource through the City staff to follow developers through their projects. He said the McIntyre building is an important consideration and impacts the infrastructure.

Councilor Perkins said that these are great reports and would like to reconvene the Housing Committee to look at some of the new ideas.

Councilor Dwyer said she supports that idea. She said she reviewed the 2008 Housing Report and it explored many of the items brought forward this evening. She said we need to keep working on the background of information and what we learned from the issues.

Mayor Blalock said he feels we need to continue to work on this valuable issue. He said he supports continuing the Housing Committee into the future.

At 7:00 p.m., Mayor Blalock closed the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by:

Kelli L. Barnaby, MMC, CMC, CNHMC  
City Clerk