

Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Affordable Housing

Year-End Report



Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Housing Year End Report

MBRH committee was created in March 2024. The committee set its mission in the following statement voted in May 2024:

“Recommend policy changes that would secure permits for at least 500 units of diverse, affordable housing by the private and public sector over the next two years, while promoting market conditions to ensure long-term affordability and accessibility for all income levels.”

Members are:

Dagan Migirditch – Co-Owner, Liar's Bench; John O'Leary – former city councilor; Megan Corsetti –resident; Erik Anderson –resident; Mary Loane –resident; Tracy Kozak – principle of ARCOVE architects; Andrew Samonas – Planning Board member; Jen Stebbins Thomas – managing director, PROCON; Byron Matto – School Board liason; City Councilor Beth Moreau –planning board member; Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley and Councilor John Tabor, co-chairs

The committee met 25 times with additional meetings by sub-groups. Their work encompassed conversions of city property for affordable housing (such as the Sherburne project), innovative new zoning like the Gateway Neighborhood Zoning Overlay, other zoning changes to increase supply, gathering data from RKG associates on incentives for developers to include affordable units, exploring private sector initiatives like a low-interest loan fund for affordable units, and engaging with housing advocates and the public on housing policy,

The committee has made incremental progress with ten recommendations voted on by the City Council. What follows is a summary of impacts.

Impact – Sherburne School project (Nine meetings)

Action and recommendation	Impact
April 2024: recommend the city “move toward the disposition of Sherburne property for permanent affordable housing” after public input and discussion, including concerns of 16 neighbors	Council approves the recommendation. City manager begins an RFQ process that nets six applicants
August 2024: Council requests committee input on Sherburne. Committee deliberates on RFP criteria	City manager uses committee and other input and to start RFP process
November 2024: Committee vets two finalists, POAH and PHA with extensive list of written questions	City staff relay questions to PHA and POAH and open the process to a public Q&A December 5
December 5, 2024: Committee reviews answers, hears from developers and 33+ public comments, votes 4-3 to recommend PHA as developer	Council votes December 9 to move forward with PHA and their plan for 127 units of below-market rate housing

Impact: city properties (two meetings, four site walks)

Action/recommendation	Impact
June 2025: Committee considers additional city properties to dispose of for housing	
July-August 2025: site walks at Granite St., two sites in Atlantic Heights, city hall lower lot. Recommend Granite St. if neighboring condo board would sell incremental land. Recommend city lower lot as politically harder but most sensible as an optimal location close to downtown	Recommendations go to City Council. Staff exploration of land sale does not bear fruit; city hall lower lot tabled until city hall renovation/police station options are clear
April 10: Committee discusses potential expansions of PHA properties (Gosling Meadows, expansion, small parcel near senior center, Atlantic Heights parcel, Wamesit expansion, other)	Part of PHA long range planning

Impact: GNOD (three meetings)

Action/recommendation	Impact
June 2024: Committee creates workgroups for zoning, parking/transportation, and finance. Zoning workgroup discusses Commerce Way as a priority area for mixed use (in addition to discussing initial co-living concepts)	Discussion of Commerce Way merges into lawsuit settlement discussions
Sep 2024: Committee reviews Gateway Neighborhood Zoning Overlay district's three options to help solve housing need in exchange for zoning incentives: inclusion of below market units, in lieu payment to housing trust fund instead, or land donation for city use for housing	Committee and legal staff work on fleshing out in lieu option and Housing Trust Fund
Feb 2025: Committee and RKG develop in-lieu payment workings and recommend to council, as well as Affordable Housing Trust Fund language	Council approves in-lieu payment methodology and value table as well as new Housing Trust Fund language
February 2025: Committee votes to recommend City manager run process for Commerce Way land donation/affordable housing, and consider POAH as a pre-qualified developer	Recommendation reported to City Council

Impact: Zoning changes (four meetings plus working group)

Action/recommendation	Impact
May/June/September 2025: Committee and staff develop a list of zoning changes in response to City Council request	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommend a list of additional industrial areas such as Heritage Way to convert to mixed use 	Referred to Planning Board and approved by planning board to go back to Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put parking approvals for multiunit projects into site review 	Same as above
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extend Section 18.218 which allows for multiple units in the same existing house to more areas of the city 	Council referred to planning board, planning board eyeing this as part of the Master Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt RSA 79E which gives temporary tax relief for converting office buildings to housing, downtown renovations that increase housing supply, and the creation of “Housing Opportunity Zones” that incentivize projects with 30% of units designated as affordable 	Council voted to request a report back from Legal Department. Legal staff seeking more guidance on where the provisions would be applied and which provisions to put to a vote. Council voted to hold a work session.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> October 2025: Committee further explores RSA 79E as well as Transfer of Development Rights that created the Cottages in Dover, with Ryan Pope of New Hampshire Housing 	TBD

Impact: 1% Loan Fund (working group)

Action/recommendation	Impact
Committee members discussed successful Upper Valley Loan Fund, a private initiative offering low-interest financing for affordable housing. It is responsible for 200+ units of affordable housing, funded by local employers and banks. A committee workgroup began exploring	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Met with two local banks who expressed their willingness to participate	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Discovered Lighthouse Credit Union has put together a Seacoast regional working group with the same goal	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Committee has active representation with that working group	Ongoing private sector initiative

How is the city doing vs. 500 unit goal?

Project	Units	Status	Prime mover
Sherburne	127	Approved	Housing Committee
Commerce Way	80	Land transfer in 2026	Multiple
Christ Church	44	Approved	PHA - Church
Co-Living	125	Approved	McNabb- Planning Boar
Service Credit	0	On hold	SCU -Land Use Comm
The Tour	15	Part of CUP	Planning Dept
Cinemagic	19	Part of CUP	Planning Dept
Total	410		