

**Hartford Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee Meeting**  
**Town Plan Housing Chapter Update**  
**Approved Minutes**  
**February 13, 2023**

Planning Commission chair John Reid called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. He followed by reading the hybrid meeting script and conducting a roll call.

**Attendance:** The following individuals attended the meeting which was held at the Hartford Town Hall in Room 2 at 171 Bridge Street in White River Junction on Monday, February 13, 2023. The meeting was also available remotely and several people participated that way.

**Planning Commission & Town Plan Steering Committee Members:**

John Reid	Planning Commission
Bruce Riddle	Planning Commission
Toby Dayman	Planning Commission
John Heath	Planning Commission
Colin Butler	Planning Commission
Kim Souza	Selectboard Liaison to the Planning Commission
Ally Tufenkjian	Selectboard Liaison to the Housing & Homelessness Committee
Jesse Pollard	Energy Commission
John Haffner	Vital Communities
Andrew Winter	Twin Pines Housing Trust
PJ Skehan	Hartford Area Chamber of Commerce

**Staff:**

Lori Hirshfield	Director, Department of Planning and Development
Zach Doiron	Planning Intern, Department of Planning and Development
Matt Osborn	Town Planner, Department of Planning and Development
Kevin Geiger	Director of Planning, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission
Kyle Katz	Planner, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission

**Others Present:**

Janelle Sahutski

**Minutes of the November 21<sup>st</sup> Town Plan Steering Committee Meeting:** John asked if there are any changes to the draft minutes of the November 21<sup>st</sup> meeting. Being none, John asked for a motion to approve the minutes of 11/21/22. Kim Souza made a motion to approve the minutes of 11/21/22 as written. The motion was seconded by Bruce Riddle and approved.

**Schedule:** Matt Osborn presented the schedule for the project and noted that it is not set in stone. It is more of a general guide. Matt noted that the Vermont Municipal Planning Grant (VMPPG) has deadline for project completion and expenditure of funds by 9/30/23 and final report and products submitted by 10/31/23. He pointed out that the VMPPG only requires a draft of the Housing Chapter submitted by the deadline. After the draft chapter is submitted to the state, the Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee may elect to revise the draft or hold additional community meetings or initiate the formal Town Plan adoption process. Colin Butler suggested adding a Planning Commission/Steering Committee meeting to the schedule to make that decision.

**Partnering with Junction Arts & Media (JAM):** Lori Hirshfield noted that we plan on creating numerous opportunities for public input for this project. She reached out to Samantha Davidson Green, Executive Director of Junction Arts & Media about what JAM can do to assist in getting the word out about the project. Samantha agreed to have JAM design a multimedia booth for public participation in a Designing the Future of Hartford Housing (or title TBD) to go live by March First Friday. It will remain in place for approximately 2-3 months and then could move to other locations. John Reid noted that he likes the idea of moving the multimedia booth to other locations since many seniors don't always embrace use technology. Kim suggested bringing the booth to a Listen Dinner.

John Reid asked if staff plans on using a questionnaire to obtain more data. Lori responded that it wasn't included in the scope of work and would be difficult to develop at this point. Colin noted that he is concerned about young people having difficulty finding housing and older people living in a home that needs work. He suggested replicating the multimedia booth on the Town website. Colin also wants to hear from non-residents who would like to live in Hartford. John Haffner suggested a triangulation of different methods to reach different audiences. Kim suggested that when the booths move to other locations that they be staffed.

Lori reported that the Planning and Development Department will be collecting information about multi-unit housing in Hartford including number of bedrooms, size, utilities, and cost. Colin asked if the research could include single-unit housing as well. Lori responded that it is much harder to get information on single-unit housing.

Lori mentioned that staff is working on an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) trade show at the Hartford Area Career and Technology Center that will take place on Saturday, May 6<sup>th</sup>. as a way of promoting ADU's.

**Project Logo/Identity:** Lori reported that staff is working with a Center for Cartoon Studies graduate student to develop a logo/identity for the housing chapter update. There was discussion about the tag line to go along with the logo. Colin suggested using the term "home" in place of "housing". Janelle Sahutski agreed noting that "home" is more personable. The Steering Committee agreed. A few tag lines were mentioned and there was agreement that "Homes in Hartford" was the best. Staff will continue to work on a logo and tag line and hopes to have a final product by the end of the month.

**Community Meeting Format:** Lori stated that the first community meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 28<sup>th</sup>. She noted that hybrid community meetings are challenging. She also noted that there have been increases in Covid cases recently. As a result, she decided that the first community meeting should be remote. P.J. Skehan stated that he is hearing that people are tired of remote meetings and prefer in-person events. Lori responded that only the first community meeting will be remote. The remaining three community meetings will be in-person.

For the community meeting, Kyle Katz noted that after introductions, Kyle will give a brief presentation (10 minutes) on housing data that will be followed by an internal exercise to personalize housing needs and choices. This will be followed by three different breakout groups that participants can choose: housing availability, type and affordability.

Following the breakout groups, the larger group will reconvene and there will be brief reports from each facilitator. The meeting will conclude with final remarks and the plan for the next community meeting.

**Community Meeting Questions:** Kyle asked the Steering Committee for their input regarding the small group questions. John Reid commented that we should seek input from the builder and realtor communities. Lori suggested holding a stakeholder meeting. P.J. commented that we would learn a lot from talking to builders.

Kyle went over the three breakout groups:

1. Housing availability
2. Housing type
3. Housing affordability.

Bruce reported that he has been working on a review of the Hartford Grand List to collect information on housing. He also commented on the housing issues facing the town. He stated that all types of housing are badly needed. There is a need for affordable housing. Much of Hartford's housing stock is old and in poor shape. Bruce believes we need to increase density where we have Town water and sewer. He expressed concern that there is frequently a "not in my backyard" (NIMBY) response to development proposals. He also noted that there are many opportunities for infill development. He stated that the challenge is how to increase density, where to increase density and how the community will tolerate higher density. Lastly, Bruce stated that we need to incentivize good design. Jesse Pollard agreed that the key is where to focus density.

Ally Tufenkjian noted that the three topics are interconnected. She suggested discussing how the three topics overlap. Kevin Geiger responded that they (Kevin and Kyle) will provide the big picture regarding housing data. The community meeting is meant to make the housing story their story. The other community meetings will address policies. Kim asked if we can show how 2020 census data compares to 2010 housing data. Kyle noted that the Census Bureau stopped collecting certain data as part of the decennial census but some of that data is captured by the American Community Survey (ACS). The downside of ACS is that it's based on samples and tends to be less accurate than census data. John Haffner suggested providing an overview of Hartford's housing make-up at the meeting.

Colin suggested that the Town appropriate funding for housing. Lori responded that it was included in the proposed budget but the Selectboard didn't commit to it.

John Heath noted that building accessory dwelling units isn't economical.

Jesse expressed concern that the Hartford Housing Authority was phased out about ten years ago. He suggested looking into forming a housing authority again.

Lori noted that these are all good comments but the Steering Committee will be addressing solutions later.

Bruce noted that House Bill 68 proposes restrictions on local zoning to mandate an increase in density in areas with municipal water and sewer. Lori noted that the Vermont League of Cities and Towns has a good summary on the legislation.

**Next Steering Committee Meeting:** Lori Hirshfield stated that staff will send out an email about a date for the next meeting.

**Adjournment:** John thanked everyone for attending the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 8:44.  
p.m.