

**Hartford Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee Meeting**  
**Town Plan Housing Chapter Update**  
**Approved Minutes**  
**June 29, 2023**

Planning Commission chair John Reid called the meeting to order at 6:30 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 Thursday, June 29, 2023. The meeting was also available remotely and several people participated that way.

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

John Reid	Planning Commission, term expires 1/11/24
Bruce Riddle	Planning Commission, term expires 2/7/25
Dillon Bianchi	Planning Commission, term expires 9/5/25
Dylan Kreis	Planning Commission, term expires 6/27/26
Toby Dayman	Planning Commission, term expires 6/28/24
Colin Butler	Planning Commission, term expires 7/12/24
Jesse Pollard	Energy Commission
John Haffner	Vital Communities
Andrew Winter	Twin Pines Housing Trust

**Staff:**

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

**Others Present:**

Esme Cole, State Representative

**Minutes of the May 31st Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee Meeting:** John Reid asked if there are any changes to the draft minutes of the May 31<sup>st</sup>. Being none, John made a motion to approve the minutes of 5/31/23. The motion was seconded by Bruce Riddle and unanimously approved.

**Public Comments:** John Reid asked if there are any public comments. There were none.

**Overview of the Project:** Planner Kyle Katz of the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) began with an overview of the project. TRORC was hired by the Town of Hartford to update the housing chapter of the Hartford Town Plan. He noted that Town Plans are required to be updated every eight years. The draft goals, strategies and actions will become part of the housing chapter. Kyle noted that at the same time as the housing chapter update, Hartford is working with TRORC as part of a bylaw modernization grant to examine the Hartford Zoning Regulations to make recommendations to change the Zoning Regulations to create more opportunities for housing. Kyle also noted that the State Legislature recently made changes to state statutes related to housing in an attempt to help alleviate the housing crisis. The legislation establishes specific zoning standards that municipalities will have to adhere to.

Lori Hirshfield added that the Housing chapter will have a narrative section that will address the existing conditions/data which give the context for the Goals, Strategies and Actions. She also highlighted the Town Plan introduction section which provides broad guiding principles for the Plan which also can be reflected in the Housing Chapter narrative section.

**Goals, Strategies & Actions:** Planning Commission Chair John Reid suggested going through the goals, strategies and actions in chronological order. Bruce Riddle stated that he has some general comments that he would like to discuss. John agreed to let Bruce proceed. Bruce stated that he thinks we need a more detailed vision for Hartford's housing future. He also expressed concern that the state legislation could have a negative effect on Hartford's neighborhoods.

Bruce suggested that the Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee develop a list of five recommendations that the Town should do to enable the development of the housing that the Town needs. Bruce suggested working with the Department of Public Works to provide information on the capacity of town water and wastewater systems and their ability to accommodate needed housing growth. Lori noted that the current Town Plan initiative is generally to map out what needs to be accomplished and not necessarily to undertake studies at this time. She pointed out the time constraints of the municipal planning grant to complete a first draft of the housing chapter in September and present it to the public. Lori added that she will inquire with DPW if they can provide general information on town water and wastewater capacity.

Colin Butler agrees with Bruce that we need more specifics and that we need to address the housing crisis with more concrete information. He expressed concern that Hartford doesn't have the water and wastewater capacity to accommodate the housing that we need to build. Lori noted the difference between the capacity of water and wastewater plants and the capacity of water distribution lines. Dillon Bianchi agreed and noted that staffing of the water and wastewater plants also is an issue.

Andrew Winter noted that Vital Communities is focusing on the specific need of workforce housing.

Jesse Pollard expressed concern that setback and parking requirements may be limiting the development of housing. He suggested revisiting the standards. Lori responded that this can be part of the bylaw modernization grant review of Hartford's Zoning Regulations by TRORC currently underway.

Jesse advocated for a housing authority. Lori noted that there is a state housing authority. Andrew added that the Windham/Windsor County Housing Trust also functions in a similar manner.

Bruce expressed concern that the State's legislative change to provide a height bonus for affordable housing could be incompatible with existing neighborhoods.

Colin suggested a tax stabilization or another mechanism to provide tax relief for new housing.

John Haffner cautioned that figuring out incentives for developers to provide more housing is complicated.

Lori suggested the PC/Committee members use the current meeting to go through the draft goals, strategies and actions for additions, deletions, and changes, which he Committee proceeded to do.

*Goal 1: Diverse, quality, equitable, and affordable housing is available for all.*

John Reid commented that the goal was too much “pie in the sky”.

There was discussion about impact fees and agreement that residential impact fees would create an additional hurdle for housing. As a result, the Steering Committee agreed to delete the following action. Action 4, under Goal 1, Strategy a. “*Consider reinstating impact fees and waiver for development of permanently affordable housing.*”

Action 2, under Goal 1, Strategy b. *Consider the Town acting as a “bridge owner” of abandoned/tax sale properties to get them in a state suitable to resell for housing redevelopment.* It was agreed that the language should be cleaned up.

Action 3, under Goal 1, Strategy c. *Consider providing Town grants for energy upgrades.* It was agreed to add “to reduce housing costs” to the end of the sentence.

Action 4, under Goal 1, Strategy c. *Explore partnership opportunities with the Bugbee Senior Center, COVER, Capstone and other agencies to support independent living for seniors and home repairs for lower-income households.* It was agreed to remove the reference to specific agencies.

Lori suggested creating a matrix for the Town Plan in the appendix to identify the level of priority, timeframe and responsible party. Others agreed that this would be helpful.

**Next Planning Commission/Steering Committee Meeting:** The group agreed to meet on Wednesday, July 12<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m. Matt reported that he received a request from a developer to talk to the Planning Commission about discussing options for the Brookside Nursing Home building in Wilder. It was agreed that this would be a separate meeting, and Matt would send possible dates. Lori asked the Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee to email Matt comments on the goals, strategies and actions. Matt agreed to email the Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee a word copy of the goals, strategies and actions.

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:38 p.m.