

Hartford Committee on Housing and Homelessness – Draft Minutes
August 31, 2023 6:00 PM
Hartford, VT Town Hall, Room 2

Attendance

In-Person: John Haffner (Chair), Jennifer Kravitz, Dan Nott
Ally Tufenkjian (Selectboard Liaison)
Members of the Public: Michelle Boleski
Staff: Lori Hirshfield

1. Call Meeting to Order

John Haffner called the meeting to order. There were no members of the public or remotely participating members at this time.

2. HCHH Member to do Meeting Minutes

Jennifer Kravitz agreed to do the draft Meeting minutes.

3. Review Order of Agenda

John Haffner asked if any changes to the meeting agenda. There were none.

4. Approve July 31, 2023 Committee Meeting Minutes

There was some discussion about whether the committee could approve the agenda because there was not a quorum of those present at the last meeting. Lori Hirshfield will review the rules for this. It was decided to take a vote. Jennifer Kravitz moved to accept the meeting minutes from July 20, 2023. Ally Tufenkjian seconded. A unanimous vote was recorded.

5. Public Comment

At this time, no members of the public were present for comment.

6. Committee Member Opening – Discussion on Process

John Haffner reported that Patrick Danaher, Vice Chairman of the committee resigned his position. This leaves three current openings for members. Ally Tufenkjian reported that the draft agenda for September 5th Selectboard has consideration of one considered of an application. John Haffner will contact the Town Manager's Office administrative assistant about the new opening and advertising for positions.

There was discussion about the need to appoint a new Vice Chairman. Jennifer Kravitz volunteered to be acting Vice Chair. Dan Brown made a motion to nominate Jennifer Kravitz for the Vice Chairman position. Ally Tufenkjian seconded which was approved by unanimous vote.

At this time, Michelle Boleski, member of the public, joined the meeting remotely.

7. Town Plan Housing Chapter Update – Discussion of Working Draft - Goals, Strategies and Actions

Lori Hirshfield briefly presented the Town Plan Housing Chapter Update. She pointed out that the draft was structured in the form of goals followed by strategies to achieve stated goals and then actions to support them. She noted the importance of the HCHH's input on the draft to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive document. John Haffner noted that this document will guide the Committee's work.

There was discussion of the working draft. Jennifer Kravitz asked for clarification about the phrase "changing demographics of the town" (Goal1, Strategy A). Lori Hirshfield explained that in general it reflects an aging population, smaller households occupying larger housing units, more diverse population and the disconnect between income needed to live in town and the present median income of the population. These factors and the interplay between them create the need for diverse housing options featuring quality and affordability.

Michelle Boleski asked where the data on Town demographics could be found. Lori responded that various sources are available including the on the "Homes for Hartford" page on the Town Website. Lori further explained that the Upper Valley and Hartford have had historically low vacancy rates coupled with a high cost of living causing a big affordability gap. It was noted by John Haffner that Grafton County in NH contributes to the high cost of living in the rest of the Upper Valley.

Ally Tufenkjian addressed the idea of a "rental registry" (Goal 1, Strategy b, Action 5) – "when working with legislators on..." She noted that the state legislature passed legislation to create a state-wide registry but it was vetoed by the governor. She contended that a knowledge of the rental rates would be useful and inquired if the Steering Committee could address this. The committee members agreed that this idea should be pursued. Michelle Boleski asked if another nearby state or other Vermont municipalities have collected this information and it was agreed that researching this would be useful.

Dan Nott asked about the Town as a "bridge owner of properties" (Goal 1, Strategy b, Action 3). He wondered if the Town is aware of abandoned, delinquent, run-down or available properties, how they are identified and contacting the property owners. There was discussion of what it meant for the Town to act as a bridge to direct properties to developers to increase housing supply.

There was discussion of a municipal housing fund (Goal 1, Strategy b, Action 1). Lori Hirshfield explained that in the past, Hartford had a fund to assist with development. This was the non-profit Hartford Housing Authority. Presently there are many funding resources at the state and local level from ARPA to the Upper Valley Loan Fund. She noted that administration of funds may be more

efficient at the regional or state levels. John Haffner suggested that the HCHH might be a resource in pursuing funding at the state level. There was discussion about identifying this in the chapter. Lori Hirshfield noted that the Planning Commission/Steering Committee have been discussing including the partnership and leadership roles for this committee and other Town and related groups can be identified in the narrative section of the Housing Chapter Plan narrative section of the Housing Chapter as well as in a matrix as an appendix to the Plan. She also pointed out the cross referencing of other chapters in the Town Plan that overlap with the Housing Chapter goals, strategies and actions.

Dan Nott pointed out that the scope of the Town Plan Housing Chapter Update is large work program for this committee. Lori Hirshfield responded that this committee would act as facilitators as opportunities to act present themselves. She added that the Town Plan also is an important document for identifying Town-wide goals when the Town or other entities are applying for funding related to housing.

Lori Hirshfield asked the committee if there were goals, strategies or actions that were not reflected in the Plan. There was conversation about general versus specific actions.

Ally Tufenkjian recommended tracking legislation and grant opportunities in the state and then educating and engaging the community with the information.

Discussion turned to Goal 3 and the addition of an action to specify the Town's role in providing a social safety net to prevent housing insecure people from moving into the unhoused population. Ally Tufenkjian asked how the Town could support emergency needs. There was discussion about the Town's role, funds, regulations, fostering connections and a network to meet needs.

Lori Hirshfield noted that the Planning Commission/Housing Steering Committee's next meeting is 9/12 and it would be helpful if the HCHH could submit suggested changes or additions to the draft before that time. Members will submit suggestions ASAP to the HCHH Chair to be finalized be summarized for submittal.

8. News from Committee Members

Ally Tufenkjian reported that she spoke with Sarah Phillips at OEO concerning the DCYF Homelessness Response grant to clarify funding and application parameters. She understands that the process would entail the town presenting an idea and we would then be directed to where funding can be found, no formal presentation is required. Ally noted that the Community Safety Review was suggested as well as using the Haven as a conduit for funding. The town can reach out to Sarah and Ken Hammond, Agency for Human Services Field Director for Hartford if funding is needed. Lori noted that any funding request would be coordinated with the Town Manager's office which is the primary contact with the state on the grant. Ally added that the Selectboard is about to begin interviewing consultants to perform the Safety Review.

Jen Kravitz reported that she interviewed a representative of VNH of Vermont and NH and explained the scope of their services. As they do not refuse services based on ability to pay and because they provide services to all ages with various programs, they would be a good partner in future endeavors

to serve the at-risk and unhoused population. This would be particularly true in partnership with other agencies such as the Haven.

Dan Nott met with the Peterborough, NH Affordable Housing Committee and reported that he has their information. They keep an inventory both of affordable housing and employers' needs in their area.

John Haffner reported that he was contacted by Thetford Housing Committee, Sarah Martel-Chiar, who are proposing a housing committee get-together to share ideas and this would be in the form of a potluck. He will provide further information.

9. Adjourn Meeting

Dan Nott moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:49 PM. Jennifer Kravitz seconded. The committee voted unanimously and the meeting was adjourned.

Committee Membership as of 7-20-2023

John Haffner, Chair (through 12/12/2024)

Dan Not (through 11/28/2024)

Jennifer Kravitz, Vice Chair (through 4/03/2025)

Ally Tufenkjian, Selectboard Liaison

Vacant Position

Vacant Position

Vacant Position

Lori Hirshfield, Staff Liaison