

**Hartford Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee Meeting
Town Plan Housing Chapter Update
Draft Minutes
September 12, 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 Tuesday, September 12, 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
John Heath	Planning Commission, term expires 9/5/25
Dillon Bianchi	Planning Commission, term expires 9/5/25
Toby Dayman	Planning Commission, term expires 6/28/24
Kim Souza	Selectboard
Ally Tufenkjian	Selectboard
John Haffner	Housing Committee
Jen Kravitz	Housing Committee

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 (TRORC)

Others Present:

None

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

Draft Housing Chapter (Narrative): Lori Hirshfield noted that this is the first draft of the Housing Chapter. It is based on what we've discussed at the Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee (PC/TPSC) meetings and what we heard at the two community meetings. She added that the goals, strategies and actions are included at the end of the chapter. Lori stated that the Vermont Municipal Planning Grant deadline is approaching but completing the draft and the next community meeting are slated to continue after the grant closes out at the end of October. Kyle Katz briefly went over the housing chapter and noted that the narrative includes data on housing characteristics, location, age, type, demographics, affordability and need.

Lori asked if the Steering Committee had comments on the draft housing narrative.

John Reid noted that the draft cites an implementation table. Kyle responded that he put together a draft table that staff and the Planning Commission will need to review and determine the appropriate responsible parties and timeline.

John Reid noted that under affordability, in addition to rising prices and interest rates, the text should include the Federal cap on mortgage interest deductions and property taxes add to the increase in housing costs. All agreed.

Under the section of “Addressing Homelessness” John Reid suggested adding a comment that the lack of affordable housing leads to an increase in homelessness. All agreed.

John Reid suggested including under “Diverse Housing Models” information on Act 47, the new state approved housing initiative. He asked about the issue of duplexes and accessory dwelling units. Kyle noted that he will add more information on Act 47 and some of the provisions do not go into effect until the end of 2024. Lori added that there are questions/ discussions at the state level regarding how to interpret some sections of Act 47. She added that staff are reviewing the Town Zoning Regulations to see what may need to be changed to comply with the Act.

Kim Souza noted some minor edits.

Kim asked what data we are using to determine rental rates. Kyle responded it is difficult to obtain comprehensive rental data and noted that housing data.org is limited. Kyle added that Zillo doesn’t have rental data for Hartford but does have it for Lebanon. He suggested including Lebanon data. Lori noted that historically, the Upper Valley and Hartford have had higher rental rates than other parts of the region and Vermont as a whole. She added that we may need to use “boots on the ground” to gather some specific information.

Hartford Committee on Housing and Homelessness Recommendations: John Haffner noted that the Hartford Committee on Housing and Homelessness (HCHH) reviewed the Housing Goals, Strategies and Actions. There was discussion about establishing a Rental Registry for Hartford. John noted that Hanover is planning to have a Rental Registry. He also stated that the Upper Valley shares many of the same property managers and suggested working with other towns to share information. The HCHH also suggested they be included in the narrative as a newly established SB appointed standing committee and their role in implementing the Housing Chapter working with other Town and non-Town entities. The HHCH also recommends social safety nets to prevent homelessness be incorporated into an action item, and addressing the following points in the narrative :

- So many people are a few steps away from being unhoused. How can the Town support Emergency Housing assistance directly and or through mutual aid?
- Early identification of tenants falling behind on rent can prevent eviction and help avoid the expense of the eviction process and preparing the property for new tenants.
- What form should this take – financial, services?
- Include reference to specific information presented in the 2020 report from the Hartford Ad Hoc Committee on Homelessness, and from the 2022 Hartford Ad Hoc Committee on Emergency Shelters (HADCES).

Ally Tuffenkjian suggested including recommendations #7 & 9 from the 2020 Homelessness report. She also supported the idea that the Town develop a Rental Registry. Jen Kravitz suggested including recommendations #8 from the 2020 Homelessness report as well. Ally volunteered to work on the draft language of these recommendations. The PC/TPSC agreed.

Kim asked about the impact of the Town reappraisal on property taxes. Lori responded that Town Assessor Rick Vincent would be able to answer that question.

Kim asked about the 7/12/2023 discussion where the PC/TPSC recommended against the readoption of impact fees. Lori responded that the PC/TPSC determined it is broader issue than housing requiring a conversation separate from the housing chapter update.

Additions to the Housing Chapter: Matt noted that Town staff reviewed the Steering Committee minutes and minutes of the community meetings to identify items that were noted for inclusion in the housing narrative that may be missing or need more information. The following are these items:

1. Possible zoning changes.
2. Act 47 changes.
3. Continue to examine changes in straight commercial zoning districts to allow mixed-use and residential development.
4. Types of housing include tiny homes, cottage courts, homesharing and rural cluster housing with shared access, septic and wells.
5. Given market changes in the use of commercial space, consider conversion to residential or mixed-use.
6. The need to plan for denser residential development in areas served by Town water and sewer.
7. The need for increased water and sewer capacity to accommodate needed housing.
8. Identify areas most suitable for residential development.
9. Work with local and regional partners to explore housing opportunities.

John Reid asked about creating more multi-family housing outside village centers. Kyle responded that we have to adhere to state planning goals and also avoid sprawl. Matt agreed and stated that Hartford has a large area served by Town water and sewer both within and outside village centers. We should focus multi-family housing in these locations. John suggested highlighting that in the narrative.

Lori noted that we need to have linkage with water and wastewater treatment systems as well as to ensure the delivery system to meet the demands of housing growth.

John Heath suggested that to ensure smart growth we should have a cohesive plan to identify areas suitable for development and ensure water and wastewater capacity.

John Heath asked about zoning changes. Kyle responded that the bylaw modernization project to analyze Hartford's zoning and seek ways to seek housing opportunities will occur following the completion of the Housing Chapter. Matt added that the review will include tweaking the zoning district standards.

It was agreed that these items would be incorporated into the narrative.

John Reid asked about increasing the building height to increase density. Matt responded that Hartford allows buildings to be 40' high and as much as 60' in some zoning districts. Lori added that the CB district has a 50' height allowance. Kyle noted that Act 47 provides a height bonus of 10' for affordable housing projects. It was noted that height would be part of the Bylaws Modernization project now underway by TRORC for the Town.

Next Steps: Lori noted that the PC/TPSC made a lot of progress this evening. The next step is to clean up the draft housing narrative and present it to the public for input. John Reid asked if we need to complete the implementation table for the community meeting. Lori stated she did not think it is needed at this stage and could be completed prior to initiating the formal Town Plan adoption process. All agreed to move forward with the community meeting. John Heath asked about the community meeting format. Lori responded that Town staff will work on this with TRORC staff, this, and anticipates the community meeting will take place sometime in October.

Homelessness Book Review: Matt reported that Bruce Riddle read the book *Homelessness is a Housing Problem: How Structural Factors Explain U.S. Patterns*, by Greg Colburn and Clayton Page (University of California Press, 2022). The book presents a systematic review of homelessness in the U.S. Matt agreed to forward Bruce's review to the Steering Committee.

Minutes of the July 12th Planning Commission/Town Plan Steering Committee Meeting: John Reid asked if there are any changes to the draft minutes of the July 12th. It was decided to postpone review of the minutes until the next meeting.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:11 p.m.