

CITY OF PORTSMOUTH



Adopted July 31, 2008

MINUTES OF MEETING

MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

Portsmouth City Hall – City Manager's Conference Room
7:30 a.m. – July 10, 2008

Present: Councilor Christine Dwyer, Chairperson; Councilor Laura Pantelakos; Joe Couture; William Gladhill; Dick Ingram; Kay Maneen; and Cliff Sinnott. Ex-Officios: John Bohenko, City Manager; and David Moore, Asst. Community Development Director

Also present were David Holden, Planning Director and Rick Taintor, zoning re-write Consultant

Absent: Councilor Ken Smith; Jane James; and Cindy Hayden, Deputy City Manager

1. Call to Order

Chairperson Christine Dwyer called the meeting to order at approximately 7:30 a.m.

2. Consideration of Minutes from June 19, 2008 Meeting

Ms. Pantelakos made a motion to accept the Minutes as presented, which was seconded by Mr. Ingram and passed by unanimous voice vote.

4. Follow-Up Thoughts on Accessory Apartments.

Mr. Moore reported on a discussion with, Perry Blass, a representative from Living Innovations in Greenland as a follow-up on the homesharing discussion which was also a topic at the previous meeting. Living Innovations is a regional service provider and runs a homesharing program for the developmentally-disabled. The organization is looking to expand this program and work more with seniors. The representative reiterated his interest and offered to be involved as needed. Chairperson Dwyer mentioned United Way as one of the potential partners as it also has a regional focus.

Ms. Maneen passed out copies of a North Hampton ordinance on Accessory Apartments, which she felt was a good example of an ordinance in this area.

Chairperson Dwyer noted that, on page 3 of the June 19th meeting minutes, a number of the criteria to be covered in any proposed Accessory Apartment ordinance were listed. Chairperson Dwyer also briefly revisited the discussion relative to the expansion of the density ordinance to other zones from the previous meeting and noted that this action may not result in a large number of additional affordable developments.

5. Mixed Use Options In Key Locations Along Transit Corridors

Mr. Taintor distributed a handout, which included examples and photographs, on choices faced by communities who develop zoning with Mixed-Use Developments. One example was Mashpee Commons in Massachusetts, which had been redesigned to have the feel of a downtown, with a mix of uses. This was an interesting example of a way to look at commercial strip areas, such as along Route One. In response to questions from the Committee, he indicated the shopping center was about 20 years old with residential on some of the floors and, in conjunction with the project, a condominium development, a library and a post office in the center. He briefly referenced other developments which were multi-storied and more urban types of developments, as opposed to Mashpee Commons, which is set back off of a major roadway.

Another photograph showed a brand new mixed use development in Wakefield, RI (near Naragansett) which had a horizontal mix of uses and was built with special zoning. The uses included a movie theatre, a big box store, a three story building with a health care practice, a restaurant, a variety of retail, and a day care center. To the north was senior housing and, to the back, luxury condominiums.

Mr. Taintor noted that residential and commercial uses had not been mixed in the same building. When Mr. Moore asked if it had been a policy decision in Wakefield to not mix residential and business, he stated it was not so much a policy decision, but that firms who specialized in one type of development were used for different components. This was sometimes easier for a single developer than handling the entire mixed use.

In response to a question from Mr. Couture, Mr. Taintor stated that, while Narragansett, R.I. was the closest to Portsmouth in scale, they had very different issues. Mr. Couture noted that there still might be similarities in the process. Mr. Taintor concurred with Chairperson Dwyer's statement that the examples he provided did not include examples of affordable housing, which was partly a response to financing. As communities go through the process, they need to consider the kinds of areas and kinds of development they wanted, and then think about what they need to offer to get what they want. For example, one municipality had allowed more density as an incentive and tradeoff for affordable housing. Some of the questions to be answered in the zoning included whether there would be a minimum required site area, what uses would be permitted in mixed use districts, and whether the structures would be stand-alone or multi-family, or a blend of two types within the same community.

Mr. Taintor stated they needed to keep the potential areas in mind when creating zones. Other options they needed to consider were whether they would want to employ single use phases which ultimately would result in an overall mixed use development. Councilor Pantelakos asked if, with the lack of land in the city, they should be concentrating more on retail with housing on top, for example with the former Shaws site. Mr. Taintor stated that it could happen with higher density and the right package of incentives. The developments needed to be site specific. For instance, they could take a single site with a parking lot, add small streets and change the character of the site, going from big box to the right mix of residential and non residential so they could get higher rents. When Councilor Pantelakos stated they want lower rents, Mr. Taintor replied, for residential, yes, but not for commercial. In today's market the residential supports the retail. In a lot of places the real demand is for residential and the retail is pulled along. If they can create a destination environment, they can require more of retail. Mr. Holden noted that retail had to be protected in the downtown.

Chairperson Dwyer stated that there were a lot of big empty spaces which had been on the market for some time, and not just in Portsmouth, which may be an opportunity to think regionally and develop something through the criteria. A discussion about the regional impact of mixed-use developments ensued. Mr. Sinnott discussed the ongoing U.S. Route 1 corridor planning in New Hampshire and how access to these sites was important, especially with regard to public transportation.

Continuing with his packet, Mr. Taintor outlined how communities can approach various questions and options, such as how to proceed if affordable housing is a permitted use, what percentage of median income would define affordable, what type of density, what types of developer incentives, what would be the requirements for height, open space and parking. He concluded with the options and questions under design standards. There was additional discussion regarding parking and whether the emphasis would be building to the street with parking behind, or garages. Those choices need to be considered when land is a premium and if some space in a development be preserved for future needs.

Mr. Holden noted examples of large lot commercial developments included the former Woolworth Plaza, K-Mart Plazas, and Southgate Plaza, and how they would integrate with the COAST Bus route system for transit options. He displayed a map indicating the COAST Bus route system, which showed the bus routes along each major corridor in the City and region. He noted that Cliff Sinnott served on the COAST Board and could attest to the interest other communities have in opening other routes. The City was a supporter of COAST and through them can make connections to other communities, which will only strengthen the system.

Mr. Holden also displayed a zoning map, on which he indicated various zones, including the Business District and Central Business Districts which allow residential. There were few available lots in the residential districts, but there were more vacant lots available for redevelopment in an area formerly referred to as the laffola pit. This was zoned Office Research, but primarily used for general business as the General Business District abuts it. As an example of potential for reuse, he distributed aerial photographs of a development which had always had two major chains as anchors. He outlined a discussion with a developer held prior to the recent decline in the credit market, in which the Master Plan was highlighted and bringing the development out to the road and incorporating public transportation were discussed.

A general discussion ensued about the need to insure residential development and how to incentivize affordable residential opportunities. The demographics of the Portsmouth area were also discussed. Mr. Sinnott commented that there may need to be a subsidy of some fraction of the units and they need to look at the targets in terms of the tiers of income. Mr. Ingram indicated that attention should be paid to current and future demographic trends in determining what the affordable housing needs are.

Chairperson Dwyer stated, to summarize, that the Committee should discuss further the types of things that they think should be taken up by the Planning Board and the City Council. She felt this could really be treated as a transit oriented business change, with residential use encouraged along with the transit oriented component. What Mr. Sinnott raised about the tiers of income was also important. Mr. Ingram stated that this was an opportunity to do mixed income in a slightly different context and send a message that mixed applications share multiple benefits. Mashpee might not be the best model for them, but they could perhaps incorporate a neighborhood convenience store or restaurant. Ms. Maneen stated that they had to have a mix of income levels including luxury levels, as well as a certain density, to make the projects feasible for developers. With a phased development, certain components could be eligible for grants.

Regarding the zoning process, Chairperson Dwyer stated that they do see this as something that becomes an allowable use in a table of uses or as zoning some parcels for General Business. City Manager Bohenko asked if there was a way to use that transit corridor and say to the City Council that, along that corridor within the blue section on the map, there would be a certain type of mixed use. Then, it would be linked to something which was not a specific site or specific use. Mr. Sinnott mentioned the possibility of an overlay and Mr. Taintor stated, as an alternative, they could just review all zoning districts along a specified corridor. City Manager John Bohenko noted that, in looking at the map, there was already a sort of corridor and Chairperson Dwyer agreed.

Mr. Taintor stated that some of these GA/MH areas were not built out. They could almost look at the site they had discussed earlier and pull it through the area he indicated on the zoning map, maybe as an outgrowth of the Route One study. Chairperson Dwyer stated she liked that idea, as it would

incorporate the regional connection, transit and sustainability. Mr. Taintor concluded that they could do this as an allowed use by right, or make it a conditional use requiring a conditional use permit. There was further discussion including whether they would be creating a new zone and identifying some uses by right and some by conditions, use an overlay, or create a PUD.

6. Topics for next meeting on July 31st

Chairperson Dwyer stated that, at the next meeting, she would like to have the committee begin to shape their recommendations. Additionally, they would discuss the following:

- **Exploration of Pease as site for affordable developments.**

Chairperson Dwyer stated she would like some background information about Pease as a possible site for affordable developments. City Manager Bohenko stated it would be useful to have someone like Dave Mullen Acting Pease Development Authority Executive Director to speak on that. City Manager Bohenko said he would contact Mr. Mullen at the PDA to see if he could attend the July 31st meeting.

- **City-developed/City-partnered site, including location on City owned land.**

Noting that City Manger Bohenko could not attend the next meeting, Chairperson Dwyer indicated that this proposed meeting topic would be pushed back to a later meeting. Chairperson Dwyer asked Mr. Sinnott if there were some aspects of the Route One Corridor Study which would be useful in the light of this meeting's discussion. She felt that some of the planning issues would be related to the mixed-use development discussion held today. Mr. Sinnott indicated that he or David Walker, also of the Regional Planning Commission, could attend a future meeting to discuss these issues. He would check on Mr. Walker's availability for the next meeting.

Mr. Ingram suggested for the future that the Committee convene a meeting with representatives from surrounding communities on affordable housing issues and perhaps invite Ben Frost from NH Housing to speak. Mr. Holden noted that one of the best regional forums was the Rockingham Planning Commission and he asked Mr. Sinnott how the last meeting had gone. Mr. Sinnott commented that the focus at that point was how each individual town would cope with the law and there was not a lot of interest in looking at it from a regional basis. Mr. Sinnott suggested that the Committee might wish to organize a meeting with the Regional Housing Needs Assessment to be conducted by the Rockingham Planning Commission as a backdrop. Chairperson Dwyer and other members of the committee commented how this idea should be further explored as the Committee's discussions continue. Ways to make the meeting a larger draw for officials from regional towns were discussed, including holding a breakfast meeting and inviting a high profile speaker.

Chairperson Dwyer stated that, as the Committee starts to formulate its recommendations, it may wish to hold a public event where the recommendations are discussed in an open forum.

7. Adjournment.

Chairperson Dwyer thanked everyone for coming and concluded the meeting at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Mary E. Koepenick
Acting Recording Secretary