

# Places to Live Study Circle Dialogue Report Out

*Joint Listening Session*

**City Council and Planning Board**

**February 22, 2024**





# Agenda

- Agenda
- Welcome
- Places To Live Study Circle Dialogue Statement
- Overview of Process
- Report By Each Study Circle Group
- Wrap up and Next Steps

**portsmouth  
listens...**



# Welcome



- For more than 20 years, a neutral conveyor of dialogue on issues critical to making Portsmouth the best place to live and work for everyone.
- Trained facilitators guide groups of citizens in a safe and respectful environment
- Results are presented to decision makers
- Groups work autonomously with a facilitator and each group forms its own conclusions

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listens...**

# Dialogue Statement



*"The goals of this effort are for Study Circle participants to identify the components of and to understand - from various points of view - the "housing issue" in Portsmouth, and to develop recommendations to the City for expanding choices - by location, by design and by price point - in places to live."*

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listens...**



# Overview



Discussions on Places to Live in Portsmouth

- Places To Live Study Circle Dialogue Process
- Steering Committee members
- 145 participants in 14 groups
- Kickoff / Housing 101, Four Study Circle Sessions, Report out presentation and report
- Appreciation of group facilitators
- Thanks to participants

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listens...**



# Group A

*Places to Live* Study Circle Dialogue  
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# Group Overview



- Six (4 M, 2 F)
- Diverse range of ages (millennials to baby boomers)
- Non-profit staff; government/military; real estate; building supply
- Homeowners/renter view points

# Problem Statement

- Diverse housing challenges
- Surging costs
- Lack of affordable options
- Challenging zoning and land use regulations
- Negative effects on the workforce
- Balancing affordability with regulatory concerns.



# Top Needs



- Improve availability and conditions for workforce housing
- Incentives for developers to increase affordable housing
- Clear goals and a willingness to consider creative and innovative options.



# Considerations for the City

## Goals for Housing Choices



- Improve the affordable housing development environment, by removing barriers
- Increase amount of affordable housing for individuals below median income levels
- Participate in innovative housing initiatives

# Summary

**Most struck by / impressed by /surprised about as it went thru the study circle dialogue process.**

- Portsmouth's Housing Market Study projections for 2020-2030 indicates a need to increase owner units by 227 and renter units by 2897.
- Lack of (Need for) routine evaluation of progress towards the city's housing goals



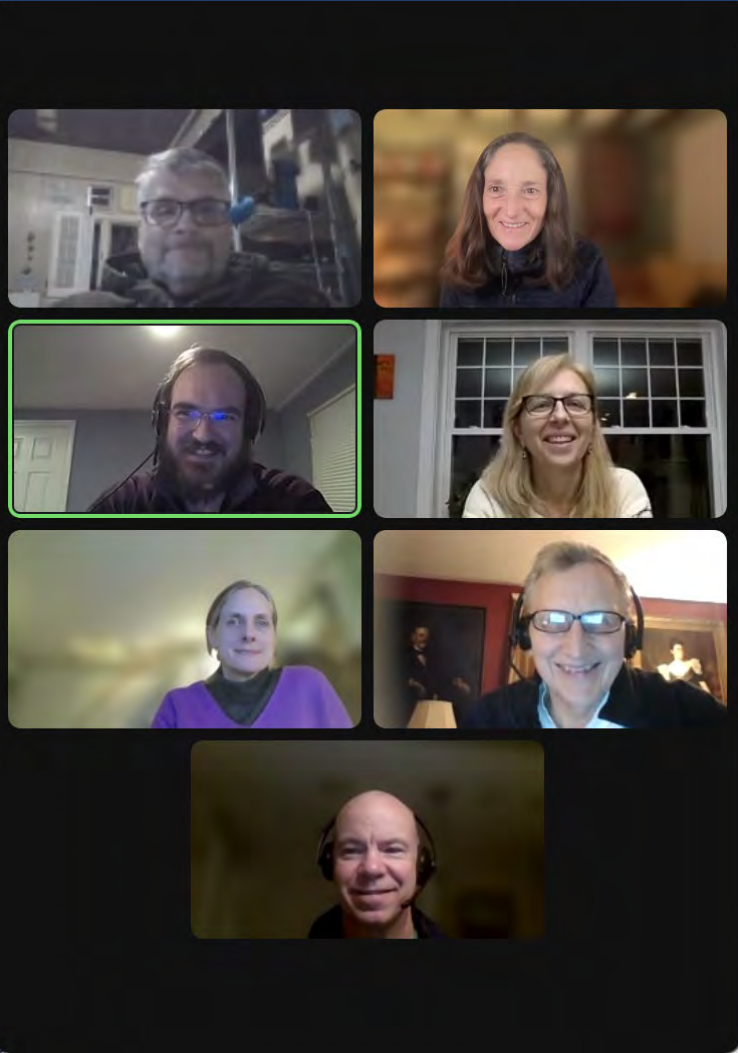


# Group B

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# Group Overview



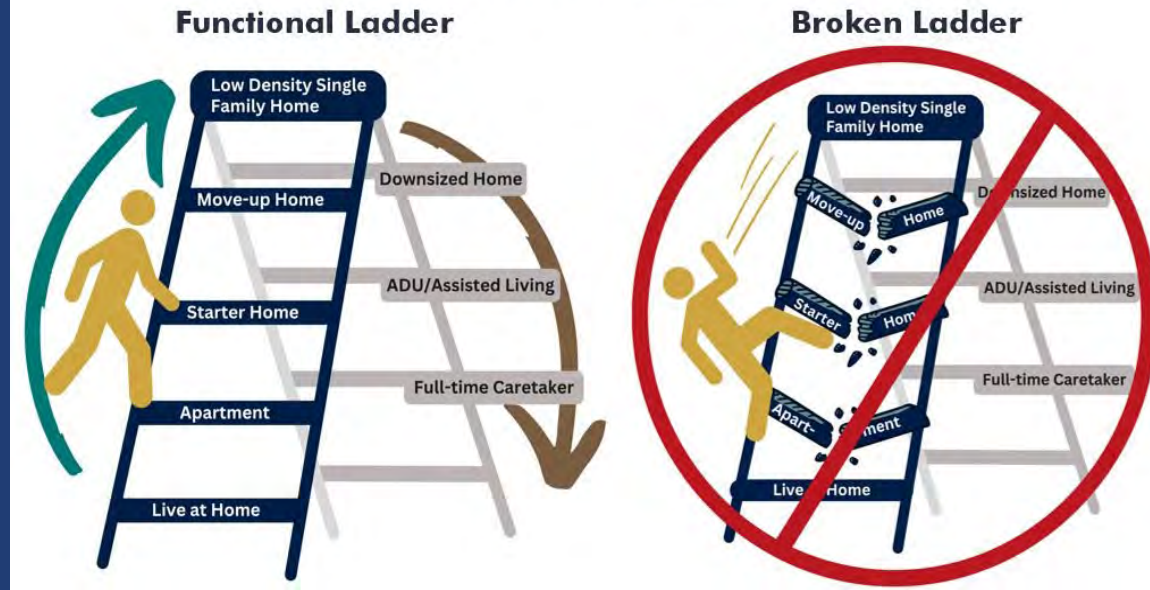
- Larger size (10 people)
- Respectful of differences
  - Civil communicators
  - “Agree to disagree”
- Met virtually
- All owners of single-family houses



# Problem Statement

How do we grow Portsmouth in a way that maintains “quality of life” while increasing affordability?

## The Housing Ladder





# Top Needs



- Sustainability of community
  - Environmental, economic, and quality of life
- Transportation Improvements
- Broad demographic representation

Image credit: <https://cityoftheopendoor.com/>, accessed 2/19/2024

# Considerations for the City

## Goals for Housing Choices



- Building integrated communities
- Maximizing use of space
- Keeping Portsmouth “Portsmouth”
  - Respecting heritage and balancing tourist and residential needs

Jill Mead/The Guardian, 2/13/ 2024,

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2024/feb/13/people-always-gossiped-about-our-sleeping-arrangements-how-100-people-share-a-happy-home-in-the-netherlands>

# Considerations for the City

## Actions for Housing Choices

- Zoning Modifications
- Improve Public Transportation and Enhance Alternative Transportation Options
- Inclusive Housing Development
  - Creating and incentivizing social housing



Image Credit: <https://www.seacoastonline.com/story/news/local/2024/02/14/portsmouth-apartments-christmas-tree-shops-durgin-lane/72554817007/>, accessed 2/19/2024



# Considerations for the City

## Additional Thoughts on Housing



- Is it possible to develop alternative “centers” to downtown?
- Quality of life is difficult to define, but an important concern
- In what ways can the tax structure be levied to support housing goals?

# Considerations for the City

## Areas of Disagreement



- Additional Subsidized Housing
- ADUs
- Boarding Houses
- Limits to Development in Portsmouth

<https://www.seacoastonline.com/story/news/local/2021/02/16/portsmouth-nh-duplexes-behind-1892-home-middle-street/4488328001/>, accessed 2/19/24



# Summary

Group B was struck by how much similar ground had already been covered by the previous housing study

Group B was surprised by how much our group had in common

We were also impressed that new housing development appeared to be influenced by the previous housing study (but much work remains)



Image credits: Top: [www.redfin.com](http://www.redfin.com), accessed 2/19/2024; Bottom: Provided by Tracy Kozak, 2/19/2024

# Group C

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Bartlett Street Reimagined



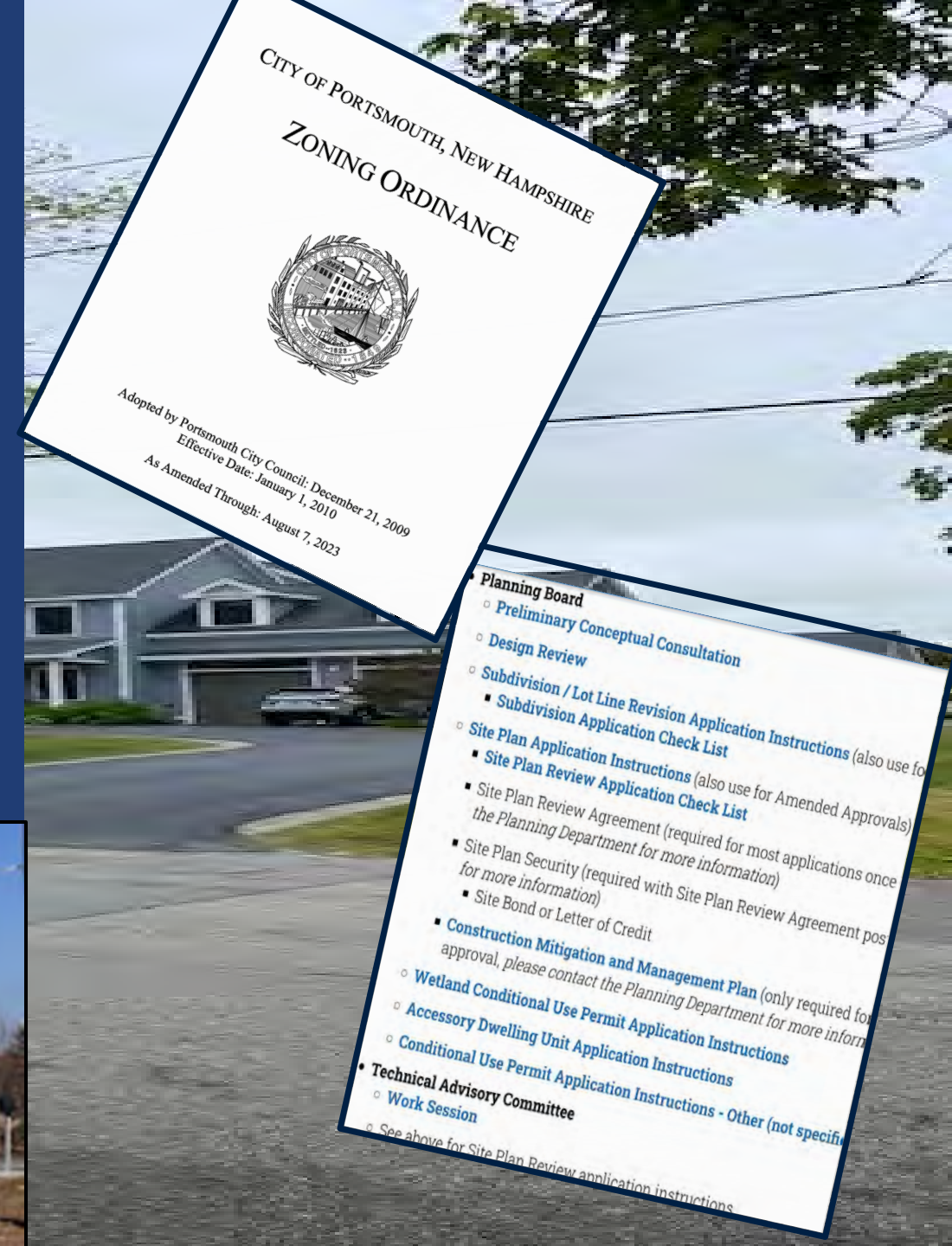
# Group Overview



- Ten Portsmouth residents, some homeowners, some renters.
- Some from other states or countries; some long-time Portsmouth residents.
- Strong background in zoning history, knowledge of current urban planning trends and passion for our community.
- **Accountability As Keyword.**

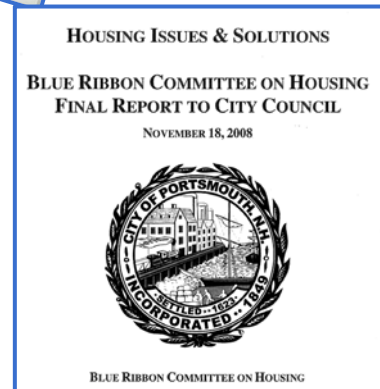
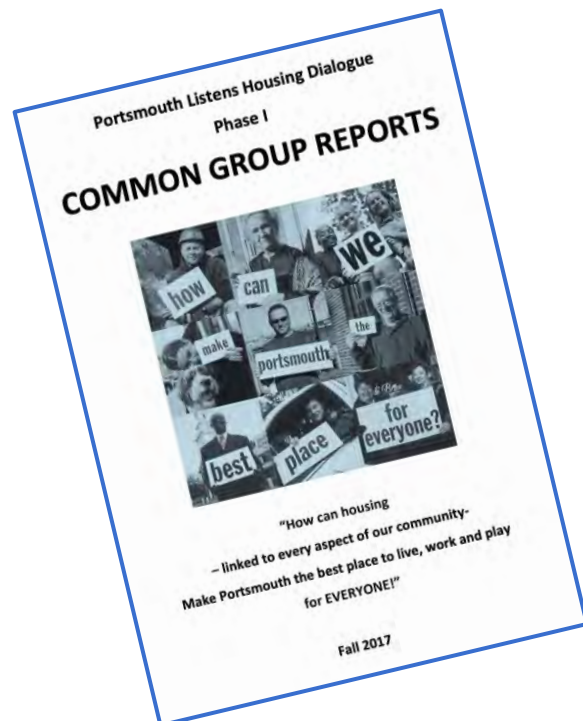
# Problem Statement

Structural barriers in the planning process prevent Portsmouth from implementing widely recognized, proven solutions to the lack of affordable housing.





# Top Needs



- Portsmouth needs to identify the structural barriers: What parts of the planning process have prevented proposed ideas for diverse and affordable housing over the past 20 years?
- Portsmouth needs to actively support a more diverse housing base.
- Portsmouth needs to make our entire city less car-centric and more connected to support a more diverse housing base.



# Considerations for the City

## Goals for Housing Choices



- ❑ **With accountability, remove structural barriers that prevent us from implementing plans to create a more diverse housing base.**
- ❑ **With accountability, create a planning process that facilitates the development of housing that is affordable to all, including an inclusive zoning ordinance, permitting process and an incentive structure that promotes the development of affordable housing.**
- ❑ **With accountability, create a diverse transportation system that supports multiple modes of transport throughout the city.**

# Considerations for the City

## Actions for Housing Choices

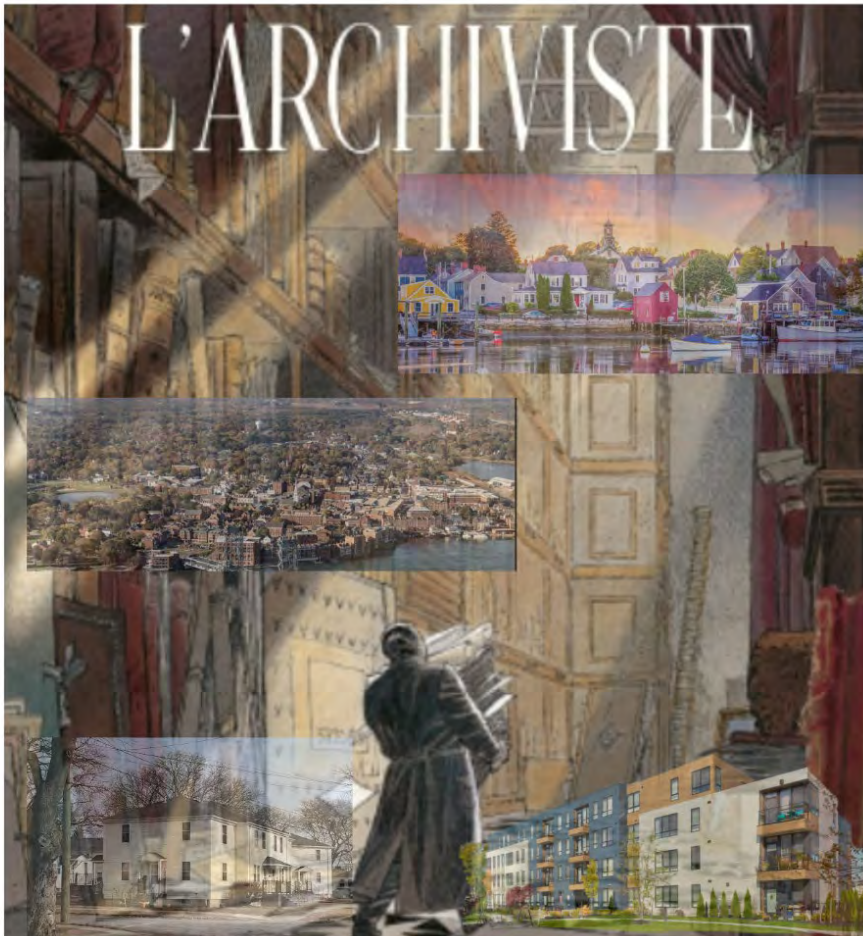


- 1) Identify structural barriers (Use the new City Council Housing Committee to define the structural challenges).
- 2) Change zoning rules to favor housing affordable to all by streamlining the approval process, allowing a diversity of housing types more widely throughout the city, and by increasing incentives.
- 3) Complete and implement a comprehensive bike-pedestrian plan that includes public transit.



# Considerations for the City

## Additional Thoughts on Housing



- **ACCOUNTABILITY:** an agenda item at each City Council meeting to review what we have done toward our goals.
- **NO MORE ROTS**  
(Reports on the Shelves)
- **USE US!** We can keep convening to help with accountability.





# Summary

So many reports  
So many good ideas  
Such an innovative city  
So little implementation  
**WHY?**

**LET'S CHANGE THIS TOGETHER!**



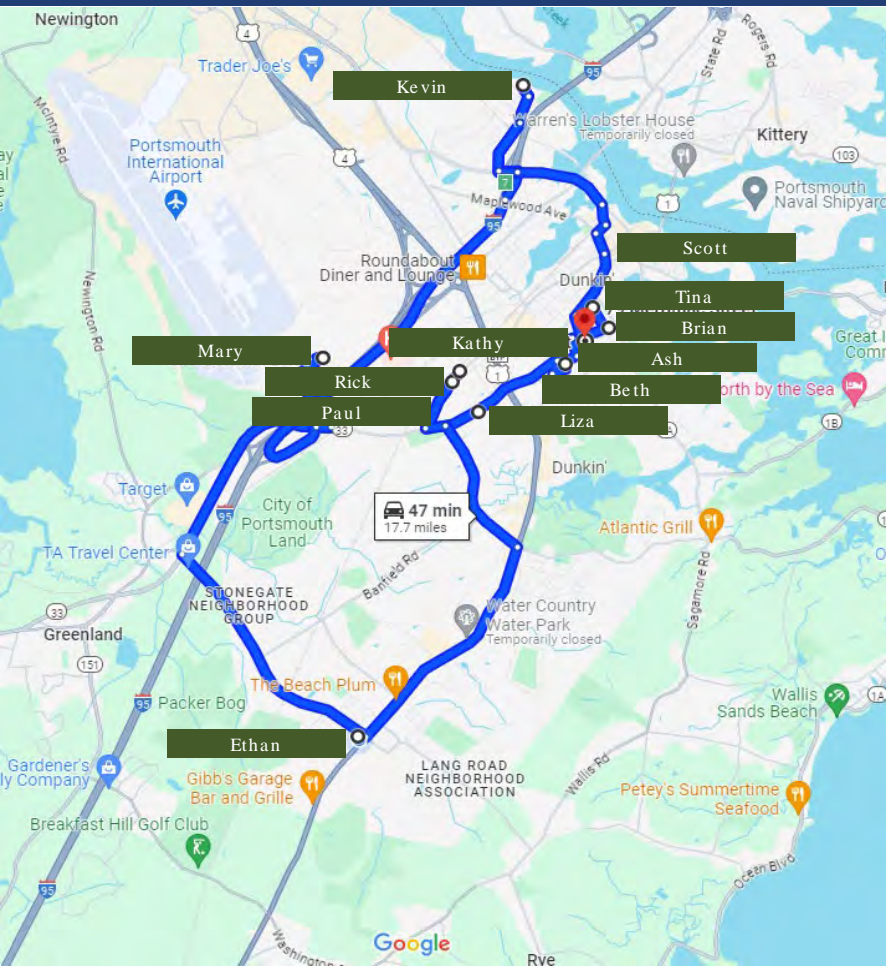
# Group D

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# Group Overview



**We are 12 residents who can help tell the story of Portsmouth and where it's going.**

- **We are generationally diverse**, representing the Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials.
- **We offer varied, informed perspectives on housing.** Among us are homeowners, renters, builders, property managers, an architect, an appraiser, an engineer, and more.
- **We are both experienced and fresh-faced.** Some of us are Portsmouth lifers. Some are more recent transplants.



# Vision Statement

**The state of housing in Portsmouth is full of challenges and opportunities.**

Today, a lack of housing inventory and diversity of units prevents our city from retaining and welcoming more residents. **In the short-term, we must respond with urgency and close these gaps.**

Longer-term, on top of advocating for more housing stock and access to more affordable units, we encourage our community to **seize this opportunity to consider: what should housing – what should life – look like in Portsmouth in 10, 25, 100 years?**

To keep pace with the rate of change experienced by our economically diverse families and ensure that our community continues to live its **values of radical welcoming, environmental sustainability, financial stewardship, and leadership by example**, we hope to help each other understand the challenges Portsmouth is facing, hold each other and our elected officials accountable, discover more housing opportunities, and **make our city an even better place to live.**



# Top Needs




- **Increase housing stock throughout the city.**
  - 50% of Portsmouth residents rent their home.
  - 55% of residents cannot afford to buy a home in town.
- **Empower the public with more knowledge of land use and zoning regulations.**
  - With just 1% of land available to build on, we must make the most of what we have.
- **Embrace a regional approach.**
  - “In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.” – Charles Darwin

# Considerations for the City

## Goals for Housing Choices

Defined as no more than 30% of income on rent, mortgage, and/or utilities

- 
- A close-up photograph of a red dart with a gold-colored ferrule and a silver-colored shaft, hitting the center bullseye of a target. The target has a green bullseye and is surrounded by various colored segments. The background is a bright blue sky.
- **Increase the number of affordable housing units**, especially for veterans, aging residents, young families, and those residents with disabilities.
  - **Utilize underutilized property**, retaining more tax-paying residents and enabling better decisions.
  - **Start more dialogue and enrich our sense of camaraderie with neighboring communities** in Rockingham and Strafford Counties in New Hampshire, as well as York County in Maine.



# Considerations for the City

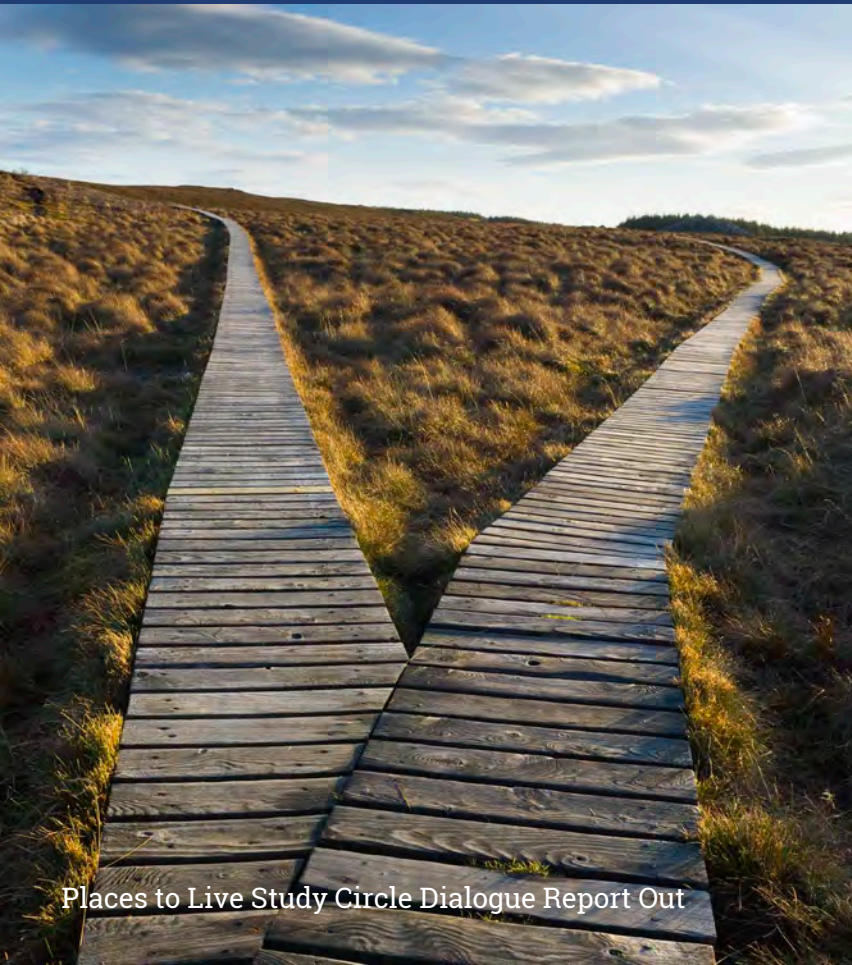
## Actions for Housing Choices



- **Enhance enforcement of short-term rental closures.**
  - Every short-term rental could be a long-term rental, inhabited by a local tax-paying tenant.
- **Execute a “Knowing Your Zoning” series that might include:**
  - Public 90–120-minute trainings on existing ordinances.
  - A booklet on *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About ADUs*.
  - Planning Dept. newsletters explaining:
    - How current ordinances encourage affordable housing.
    - What affordable developments are underway and progressing.
    - What the Dept. recommends to improve housing choice in Portsmouth.
- **Explore areas of collaboration and joint problem-solving around housing, transportation, and environmental resiliency with neighboring communities.**

# Considerations for the City

## Additional Thoughts on Housing



Looking ahead, **we encourage Portsmouth to:**

- **Consider quality.** This is an opportunity to enrich the fabric of a beautiful city with novel ideas. We should push ourselves to move beyond strict costs and numbers of units.
- **Prioritize environmental resilience.** Future generations will thank us for preserving the rich biodiversity around us and “greening” new and existing developments in Portsmouth.
- **Continue to advocate at the state-level.** Several state regulations limit our abilities to solve our housing choice problem. We can play a role in advocating for that freedom.



# Summary

- We all want a **thriving Portsmouth**.
- We are heartened by **how many people got involved in this effort**.
- We all want the City to make **responsible fiscal decisions**. And, 12 different residents will always define “fiscal responsibility” differently.
  - Some of us would prefer to see City Council prioritize solutions that **avoid overall public spending that would lead to higher taxes**.
  - Some of us would be **more amenable to higher taxes for the right public investments**.
- Having participated, we feel **heard, more informed, and more positive, if pragmatic**, in our outlooks on housing and the solutions that Portsmouth might consider.



Freeman, D. (2022, August 17). Best Things to Do in Portsmouth, N.H. Fifty Grande. <https://www.fiftygrande.com/guide/best-things-to-do-in-portsmouth-nh>



Schatz, T. (2023, November 10). The Best Things to Do in Portsmouth, NH in the Winter. Back Road Ramblers. <https://backroadramblers.com/winter-portsmouth-new-hampshire>



# Group E Exceptional 🤗 Energized Engaged

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# Group Overview



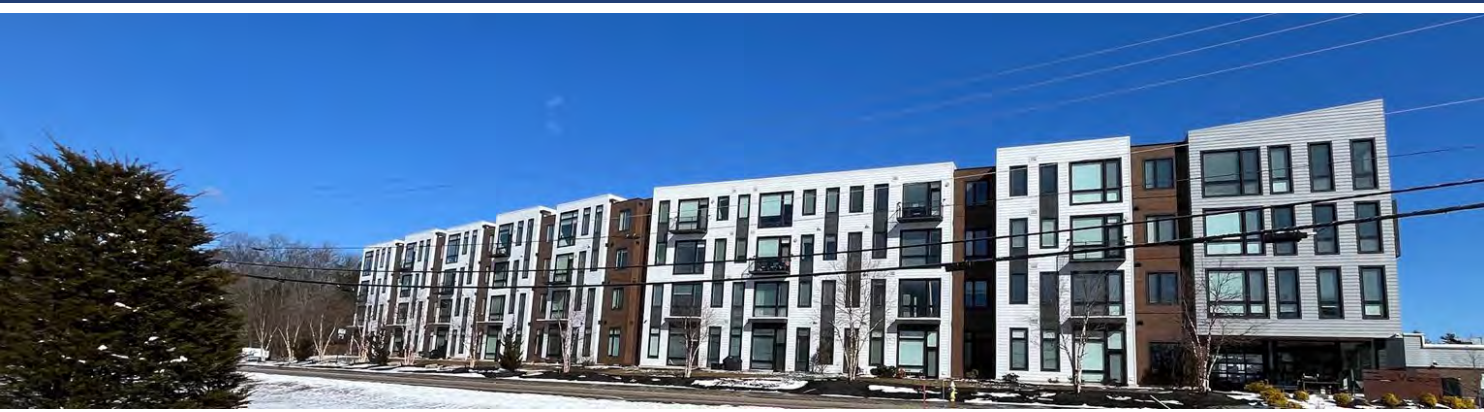
- 9 Portsmouth residents
- 4 homeowners, 5 renters, including one Section 8 recipient
- Age range from 30s to 70s
- Professionals and retirees
- Multiple neighborhoods represented





# Problem Statement

- **Failure** to address housing demands of a socio-economically diverse population
- **Urgent** need for clear pathway and action plan to address housing needs
- **Renters** with mid- to low-incomes most acutely burdened
- **Moral imperative** to enable people who work here to live here (from service workers to professionals)



Townhouse triplex in largely single-family area



Proposed Building Types



Proposed 360-apartment project to repurpose mall



# Top Needs



- Housing solutions for **all income levels and occupations**
- **Diverse stakeholder voices** part of all planning processes and decisions
- Community-wide support for urgent action and changes; it's **bigger than any one neighborhood**

# Considerations for the City

## Actions for Housing Choices



- Document and publicize a **pathway** for a housing action plan with clearly identified steps and timeline
- Monitor progress and track specific unit **targets** by housing type (below-market rentals, micro units, ADUs . . .) with easy public viewing access
- **Prioritize zoning changes** to create solutions, such as enabling multi-family housing in single-family neighborhoods

# Considerations for the City

## Additional Thoughts on Housing



- **Leverage city resources** and available funding and grants (inc. federal revitalization programs)
- **Minimize burden on local taxpayers** (owners and, indirectly, renters)
- Approach housing as a **community ecosystem** connected by shared services, including **transportation**, infrastructure





# Summary: Group E . . .

- Mirrors city's **50/50 rent/own** breakdown.
- Emphasizes **housing is a real crisis** demanding **urgent** action.
- Hopes **civic engagement** of Portsmouth Listens participants doesn't end here.
- **Respects complexity** of housing crisis and need for data-based decision-making.
- Concludes neighbors who know each other discover **more in common than not** and are less likely to fight change.



Below-market workforce units

Need for work/live space for artists



21 new micro-unit apartments

# Group F

*Places to Live* Study Circle Dialogue  
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# Group Overview



- 6-9 average attendance, morning Zoom
- Aged 50+
- Most are single-family homeowners, 1 renting a single-family home from family member
- Little Harbor, Downtown, South End, West End, North End, Greenleaf neighborhoods



# Problem Statement

21<sup>st</sup> century market forces have created an ongoing shortage of affordable, workforce, and mid-level housing.

\*Portsmouth, NH  
Some of the “Best”  
Neighborhoods

- South End
- Downtown
- West End

\*Realtor.com

**77 homes for sale: \$149,900-\$4.9M**

Median list price **\$745,000**

Median sale price is **\$776.000**

**What factors define a great neighborhood?**

1. Trees/greenspace
2. Can move around without a car
3. Can find essentials nearby
4. It's safe
5. Easy access to Medical care

6. Variety of housing types
7. Full range of public services
8. Diversity
9. Walkable “15 minute” neighborhood

<https://www.weetas.com/article/top-qualities-define-good-neighborhood/>

# Top Needs

## IMPROVE HOUSING CAPACITY, DIVERSITY & INTERCONNECTEDNESS



**More and varied types of housing for all levels of household income throughout the city:**

- ADUs (Accessory Dwelling Units)
- Multi-family homes
- Tiny house developments
- Transitional housing
- Co-housing models
- Work/Live spaces
- Conversion of existing commercial and public properties
- Micro-units
- Public transit to connect housing to jobs



# Top Needs

## IMPROVE HOUSING CAPACITY, DIVERSITY & INTERCONNECTEDNESS



- **Marketing & Messaging** : nurture attitudes that value & invest in all forms of community diversity
- **Increase Connectivity**: connect people to people, people to jobs, & people to services for all forms of mobility
- **Connect neighboring communities**: Solutions close at hand (public transit, walk/bike)

# Considerations for the City

## Administrative ATTITUDE OF YES



### *Actions that foster & facilitate diverse housing options:*

- Council: Ordinance and property tax revisions that facilitate diverse housing opportunities
- Staff: proactive public outreach & education re. housing design options & funding opportunities
- Regional approach to housing and public transit



# Considerations for the City

## Administrative ATTITUDE OF YES



Example of a current Co-Housing model in Portsmouth  
on Middle Street study Circle Dialogue Report Out

*Open the Door to actions that foster & facilitate diverse housing options:*

- **Citywide: expand/develop systems and programs that increase access and connectedness for all forms of mobility between neighbors and neighborhoods**
- **Educate residents to understand all varieties of need, fostering empathy & enabling motivation for change**
- **Make Portsmouth a leader in planning regional housing/transportation solutions with partners**

# Summary

- Many topics and identified needs are **not novel**
  - Take advantage of rich **best practices** - neighbors, regionally, nationally
  - **Use existing city ordinances and resources** while changes are developed
  - **Build stronger alliances & relationships in Seacoast region**
  - Avoid assumptions: develop **Attitude of Yes**
  - Start by picking **low-hanging fruit**:
    - Kittery and Dover examples
    - Financial resource facilitation
- **Portsmouth can live up to motto of the “City of the Open Door”**





# Group G

*Places to Live* Study Circle Dialogue  
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# Group Overview



- 7-8 people in each circle- ages between 60-85 years old
- Participants have lived all over the country & world- MA, MI, NH, PA, WI, WV, Europe
- Currently reside in variety of Portsmouth neighborhoods: Woodbury, South End, Spinnaker, Bartlett St. Atlantic Heights, Plains Neighborhood
- Varied professions: real-estate, IT, graphic design, education, hospitality, scientists.



# Problem Statement

Portsmouth is an attractive place to live and housing demand is high. There are not enough diverse housing options (type, price) in the City for people to live and work here. Additionally, the City has very few sources of funding (essentially just property taxes) and no control over prices and rents.



Places to Live Study Circle Dialogue Report Out



# Top Needs



- An increased stock of a VARIETY of housing options (cost/sizes/types)
- A more extensive public TRANSPORTATION system
- REGIONAL mindset and approach to solutions – Portsmouth cannot do this as an island



# Considerations for the City

## Goals for Housing Choices



- REZONING CONSIDERATIONS *so that* workforce, varied stock, more affordable options are possible (i.e. rezoning from single family to multi; commercial to residential, allowing “boarding” house model)
- Consider incentivizing BUSINESS COMMUNITY to engage in solutions to create workforce housing (develop housing solutions specifically for employees, consider Pease, medical, hospitality communities)
- Further develop GATEWAY CORRIDORS (Lafayette Rd, Newington for instance) to create communities w. walkability, transportation, grocery/services connection

# Considerations for the City

## Actions for Housing Choices



- Incentives for developers/corporations- related to density, tax incentives
- Encourage weatherization/energy efficiencies for existing properties
- Increase density on PHA and city properties
- Remove barriers/restrictions to allow for more diversified housing (micro-units, “boarding” houses, manufactured housing, ADUs)
- Incentivize (private owners) use/development of vacant lots



# Considerations for the City

## Additional Thoughts on Housing

Places to Live Study Circle Dialogue Report Out



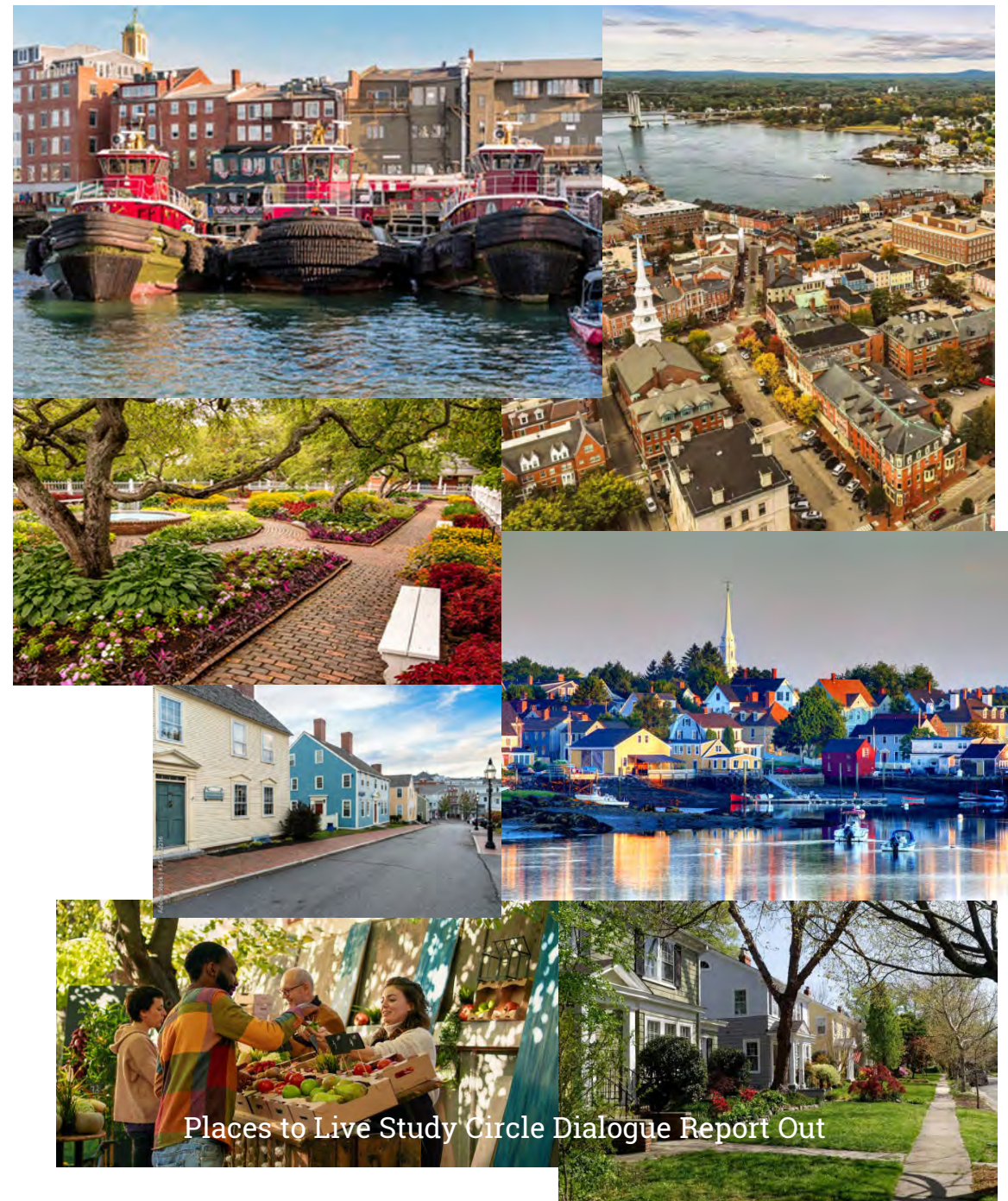
- SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES and CLIMATE need to be front and center and underlying all considerations and actions
- WAGES and NH low minimum wage was significant concern and one that needs to be part of conversations even not directly within our focus of control (beyond ballot box)
- IS THERE A LIMIT TO GROWTH? Need to have an evaluation and conversation about big picture, including, but not limited to infrastructure capacity and needs



# Final Thoughts from Group G

While we appreciate participating in these study circles, **we don't want more conversation**- we want to see decisions and change activated by the council. There have been SO MANY dialogues, studies that render similar outcomes/recommendations; it is **time to move to action**.

We also need to be informed of what concretely comes out of this round of Portsmouth Listens. We want a report from the City on next steps (in March) & a plan for **continued communication** with the public.



Places to Live Study Circle Dialogue Report Out



# Group H



*Places to Live* Study Circle Dialogue

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# Group Overview



- Four passionate and engaged women
- Golden - 60+ in years; young in spirit
- Mix of working/business owners and retired
- Long-term (40+) and short-term (13+) residents



# Problem Statement

- Lack of affordable housing for middle and low income individuals/families
- Caused by market forces (excess demand/desirability), cumbersome zoning regulations and inconsistent application, and NIMBY
- Impact on populations that make Portsmouth vibrant - essential workers young families



# Top Needs

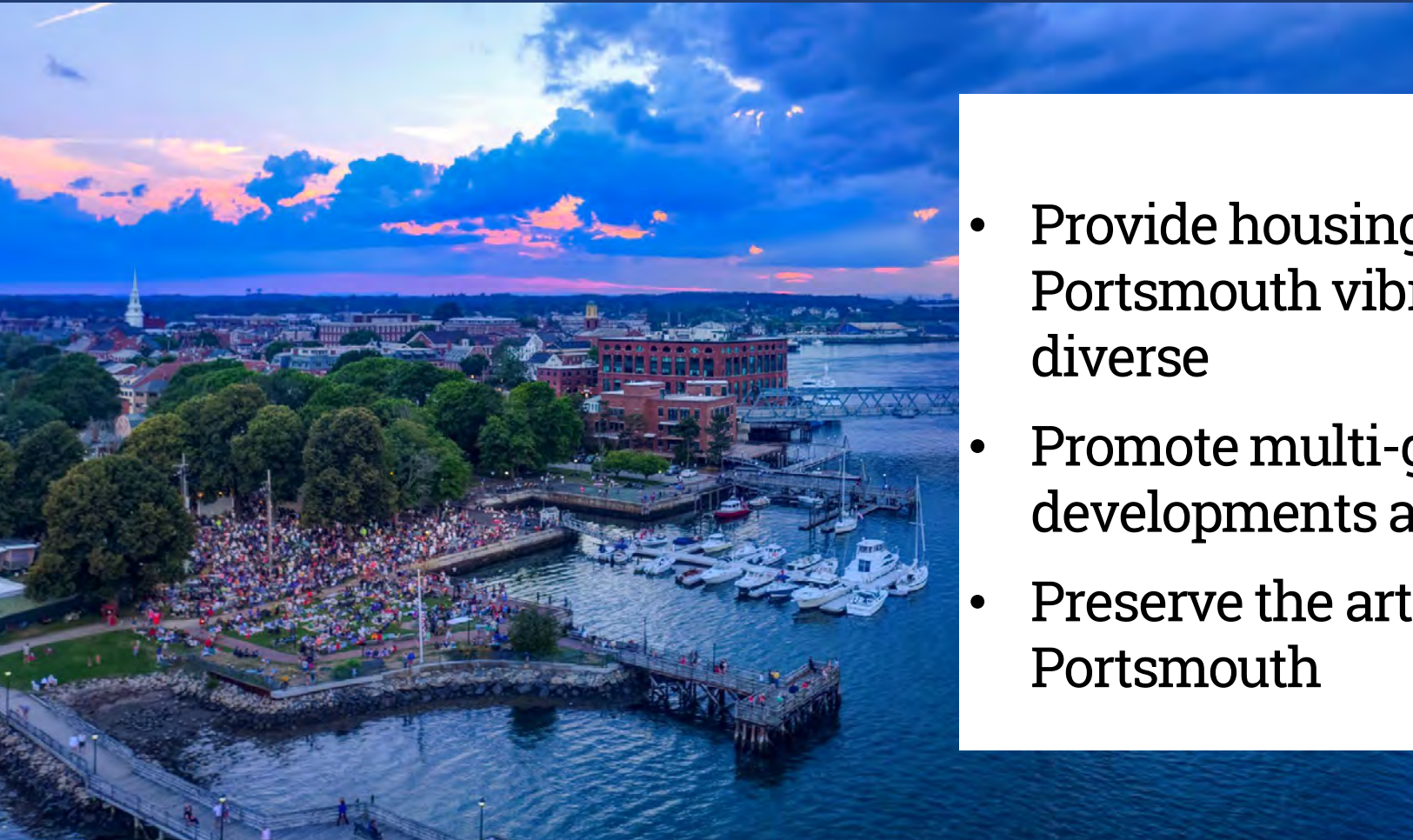


- Middle and low income housing
- Mixed-Use/Income Developments
- Transportation (downtown & regional)
  - Shuttles into downtown from existing parking lots
  - Gondola's/small shuttles within the city



# Considerations for the City

## Goals for Housing Choices



- Provide housing for the people who make Portsmouth vibrant, authentic, safe and diverse
- Promote multi-generational/income/use developments and neighborhoods
- Preserve the arts, culture and history of Portsmouth

# Considerations for the City

## Actions for Housing Choices



DEVELOPERS BUILD TINY HOME NEIGHBORHOOD TO ADDRESS WORKFORCE HOUSING SHORTAGE



- Incentivize **home-sharing**
- Remove **zoning** barriers and streamline approval process for mixed-use/income and multi-family units, and ADU's (including parking requirements)
- Provide incentives for **employer-assisted housing** (e.g. Dover employer housing)
- **Educate** and communicate with the community to reduce NIMBY



# Considerations for the City

## Additional Thoughts on Housing



- OUTCOMES over process
- Collaboration & Communication
- Compassion & Community

# Summary

We've done lots of research

We know WHAT to do...

Now is the time for **ACTION**

*For a collaborative task force of the city,  
developers, and non-profit organizations*

20% is the plan and 80% is implementation





# Group I

*Places to Live* Study Circle Dialogue  
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# Group Overview

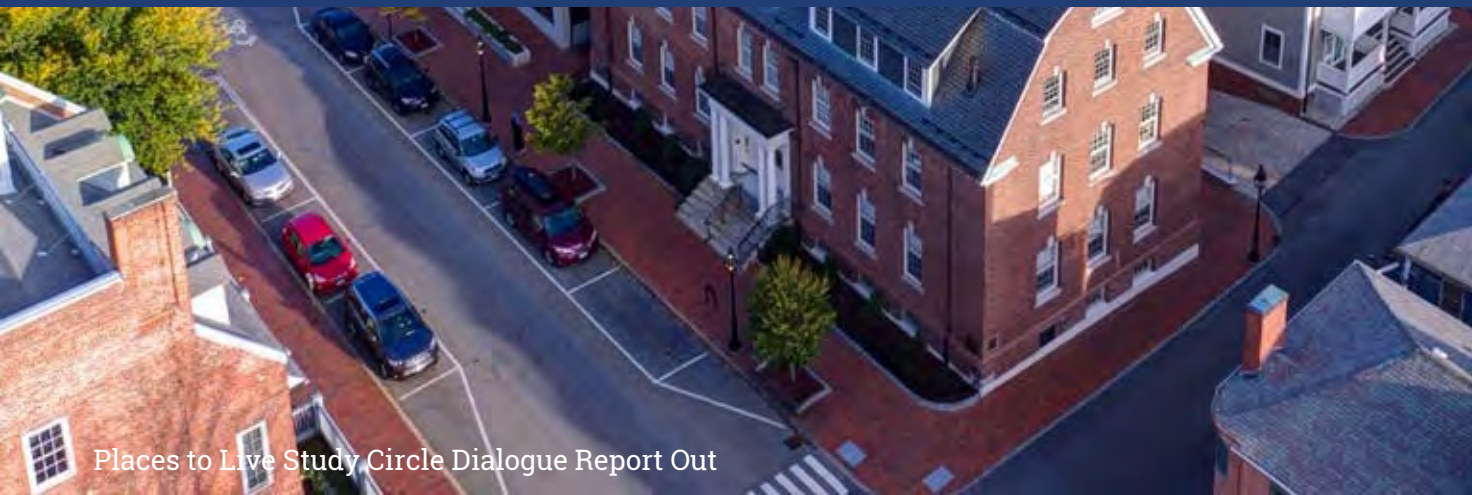


- Five people
- All in our 70s
- Professional
- One renter, two condo-owners, two single-family owners
- West End, Downtown, Christian Shores  
Sagamore Creek and Pheasant Lane



# Who Gets To Live In Portsmouth Today and Tomorrow?

- Ability of seniors to stay in their homes
- Affordability for all income levels to live here
- Renting is unaffordable and ownership is unattainable
- Demand far exceeds supply





# Top Needs



- Masterplan that emphasizes housing
- Subsidized housing for target groups
- Transportation implications must be addressed
- Preserve what makes Portsmouth special



# Considerations for the City

## Goals for Housing Choices



- Look for cooperative regional solutions to housing challenges
- Need for demographic analysis to project housing needs
- Walkable neighborhoods e.g. Portsmouth Green (Cinemagic/McKinnon), West End, Yokens
- Zoning must allow greater density in existing housing stock – ADU, boarding houses, rentals, duplexes

# Considerations for the City

## Actions for Housing Choices



- Explore regional cooperation to expand housing and transportation development
- Adjust zoning: encourage walkable housing clusters
- Encourage housing mix of rentals and ownership: provide path for transition from renting to owning property (desirable to promote home ownership??)
- Preserve open space to discourage sprawl: publicize open space inventory
- Base zoning on demographic study of future changes



# Considerations for the City

## Additional Thoughts on Housing



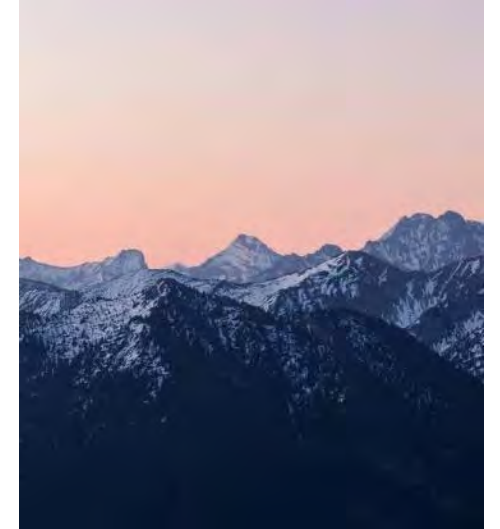
- Expand and publicize programs to support low- and middle-class population who are “pinched” by rising taxes, water and sewer rates, and cost of living, e.g. tax deferral and abatement.
- Promote regional cooperation to enhance housing and transportation development.
- Preserve character of existing communities.

# Summary

The problem is global in nature and goes beyond the “housing issue.”

There are many factors that drive the idea of “affordable housing.”

It is more complex than what can be solved by Portsmouth alone.





# Group J

*Places to Live* Study Circle Dialogue  
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# Group Overview



Group J is comprised of dedicated and engaged citizens sharing common goals of listening, learning and ultimately finding realistic solutions to address housing.

- 11 participants
- Age range 30s to 70s+
- All residents, Professionals, Parents, Volunteers
- Various Portsmouth neighborhoods



# Problem Statement

Portsmouth, NH is a highly desirable place to visit and live with only 1% of developable land remaining which would be considered available and attainable for additional housing.

What factors should be taken into consideration to maximize both public and private development or Redevelopment. To insure that individuals and families earning less than/equal to 120% of AMI (Average Median Income) as well as seniors looking to downsize and age in place have that opportunity in Portsmouth..



# Top Needs



- Improve accessibility within and into Portsmouth, shifting to a regional approach to housing crisis.
- Continue to increase availability of housing options with respect to limited greenspace for development in Portsmouth, while also balancing open space, sports facility needs and outdoor recreation.
- Continue to look for both public and private opportunities to develop programs and solutions to assure that housing is attainable to those making 120% AMI or less or residents that want to age in place..



# Considerations for the City

## Goals for Housing Choices



- Goal 1: Engage and partner with our neighboring communities to pursue a mutually beneficial regional and local transit system.
  - Housing is a regional issue, transportation can close the gap.
- Goal 2: Implement a systemic approach to housing solutions, carefully considering availability of transportation, access to amenities, impact on our water and sewer infrastructure and climate impact.
  - Creating sustainable, connected, and safe places to live.
- Goal 3: Ensure that housing solutions benefit first current residents/taxpayers, then future residents.
  - We are the stewards of the of land, history and culture of Portsmouth; it is imperative to focus on creating sustainable, connected and safe places to live.





# Considerations for the City

## Additional Thoughts on Housing



- The scarcity of developable land remaining in Portsmouth, with only 1% of public land able to be developed or used for recreation, public safety facilities, i.e. Police station, or housing.
- Current workforce housing incentives are non-negotiable and should be enforced and not allowed to be reversed later in development process.
- The group as a whole during our discussions was amazed that the same studies over the past 5 years identified the same barriers/limitations and the City keeps repeating the same studies.



# Summary

This is complex problem, which will require a complex solution!

The Study Circle Initiative was overall a positive experience for all participants in Group J.

We all enjoyed collaborating with community members, learning from one another, and working together.

We truly hope that the City Council & Planning Board will take into consideration the research, time and thoughtful deliberation that has gone into this Study Circle by the Citizens of Portsmouth.





# Group K



Classic Portsmouth Neighborhood, scale of intimate homes in proximity

*Places to Live* Study Circle Dialogue

Report Out

February 22, 2024

# Group K Overview



5 members and our facilitator. We reside in a mix of Portsmouth neighborhoods -- Downtown, West End, South End and Portsmouth Proper

- Mix of employed and retired individuals all with some level of higher education
- Age ranges were 40-65+
- Some of us are long time residents (here for decades), others are “newer” to the area (arrived in the last 10 years or so)
- Met in virtual format



# Problem Statement

There is a lack of diverse housing in the city – including, affordable and workforce housing, senior living opportunities, and the ability for current residents to scale down or expand their housing needs.





# Top Needs



1. Increased inventory and diversity of options for affordable and workforce housing
2. Deeper understanding by residents of the housing needs, factors to consider in development and community impacts of expanding housing
3. Stronger leadership and greater vision to allow for more creative design options while considering climate change and incorporating sustainable and resilient building practices



# Considerations for the City

## Goals for Housing Choices

- ❖ Develop an actionable city plan and timeline to address the city's critical housing needs. (Curate City and Smart Growth Portsmouth resources on housing into a library)
- ❖ Engage with residents to address NIMBYism through education and positive visioning.
- ❖ Partner with developers, and cities and towns in the region, to address housing needs.



# Considerations for the City

## Actions for Housing Choices



- ❖ Develop and implement a resident education strategy to generate support for housing plan
- ❖ Propose and implement changes to current city ordinances and advocate for changes to state rules and regulations, to maintain priorities of creative, sustainable design, while making process more efficient and effective at creating more diverse housing options.
- ❖ Work with city boards and direct city staff to implement the housing plan
- ❖ Investigate avenues to minimize costly and time-consuming appeals



# Considerations for the City

## Additional Thoughts on Housing



- ❖ Improve city and state policies regarding incentives to incorporate work force and/or affordable housing as part of future development.
- ❖ Examine efficiency of public transportation and ways to more effectively link neighborhoods further from downtown, existing or potentially developed.
- ❖ Consider underutilized commercial properties for innovative housing
- ❖ Reduce parking requirements that may run counter to promoting workforce and affordable housing development.



# Summary

- The housing challenges in Portsmouth are not unique and part of a much broader housing problem.
- With strong leadership, creative, innovative design, thorough review of current ordinances, effective resident engagement, and smart partnerships with developers; we could take action on long discussed solutions and create a more diverse, sustainable housing stock to create a **stronger, more resilient Portsmouth community.**





# Group L

*Places to Live* Study Circle Dialogue  
Report Out  
February 22, 2024



# Group L Overview



- **Number of people:** 10
- **Age range:** 28-77. Clustered in the 28-42 and 65-77 ranges.
- **Background:** Mostly college educated. Retired or working professionals spanning a variety of industries from education/social work to tech, IP to engineering, the arts to small business ownership. 50/50 m/f. All white.
- **Location of Residences:** Downtown, North End, South End, West End.



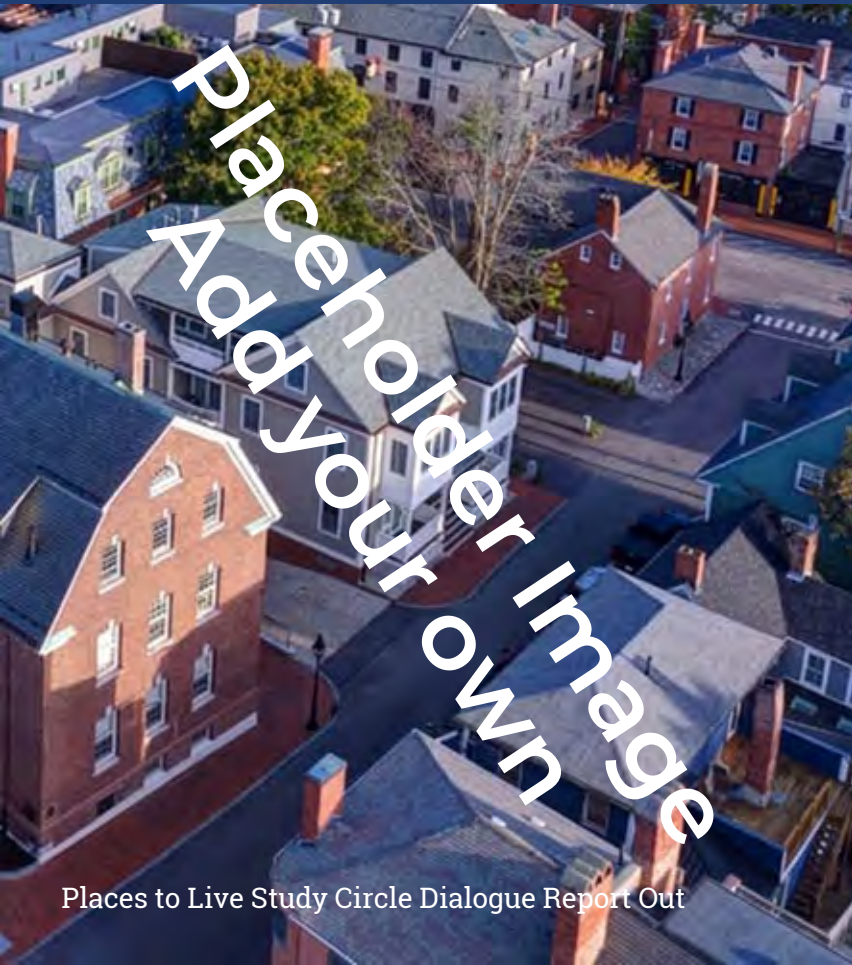
# Problem Statement

The character and economic health of the city is increasingly jeopardized by rising housing and living costs that are squeezing out or excluding all but the most fortunate. Current and past efforts to steer development towards more equitable outcomes have been woefully inadequate.





# Top Needs



- Housing options for low to middle income residents
- Accommodations for current or prospective residents being priced out of the market
- Galvinze political will to make effective and lasting changes



# Considerations for the City

## Goals for Housing Choices



- Preservation without strangulation, i.e., address zoning, permitting and state impediments to the development of affordable housing.
- Broaden incentives for individuals and collaboration with non-profit organizations like PHA to resolve issues of supply and affordability.
- Effective marketing materials and diagnostic tools that articulate the problem and educate the populace.

# Considerations for the City

## Actions for Housing Choices



- Develop pre-approved “blueprints” for affordable housing with historical precedent (e.g., Atlantic Heights) and ease restrictions on ADUs or aging in place accommodations
- Tax incentives for a Community Housing Trust. Collaborate on demonstration projects (e.g., Ruth Griffin House) to provide and destigmatize workforce housing
- Create and disseminate narrative driven marketing materials that explain the challenges and limitations of the housing crisis as well as tools that diagnose the ever evolving nature of the problem.



# Considerations for the City

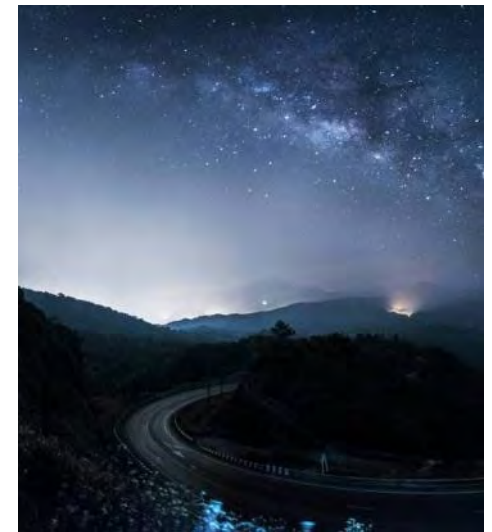
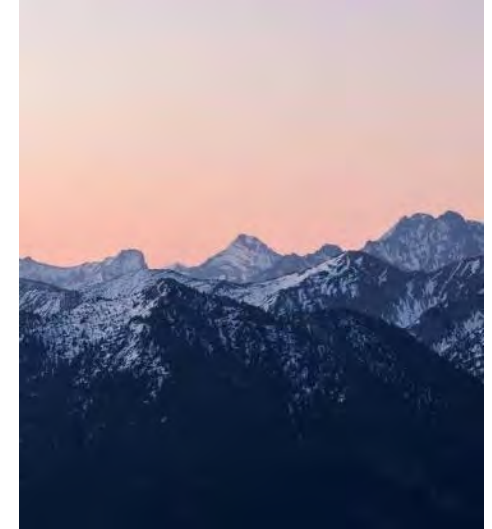
## Additional Thoughts on Housing



- Discouraging redundancies between what was expressed in the 2017 listening sessions and this current round
- Current incentives do not appear to be compelling to developers and the city lacks the “teeth” to enforce workforce or affordability requirements
- While much of the discussion centers on workforce and starter family housing, there is little discussion of the needs of the unhoused and homeless

# Summary

Group L was impressed by the fact that there was far more consensus than opposition amongst our members. While participants brought their own sets of personal concerns, there was a shared empathy for all those in our community struggling to find or maintain adequate housing that only deepened as the sessions continued. All were alarmed by this trend's impact on our community and our inability to steer development towards more equitable, attainable outcomes. Now is the time to address this issue with the sincerity and conviction that it warrants.





# Group M

*Places to Live* Study Circle Dialogue  
Report Out  
February 22, 2024



# Group Overview

## Group M



### Some features of **Group M**

- Our group contained a wide age range.
- Our group contained both renters and homeowners.
- Our group contained long-standing residents and new arrivals.
- Our Group contained residents from a range of neighborhoods.



# Problem Statement

There is not enough affordable housing to support our economically diverse community.

There is a systemic inability to take action on this issue.



# Top Needs

## Three categories of needs:



### **Build Now!**

- Build more affordable housing NOW!

### **Zoning Strategy**

- Adjust zoning to promote development of more affordable and accessible housing throughout the city at all scales.

### **Civic Engagement**

- Engage a wider range of voices in community discussions.



# Considerations for the City Goals



## **Build Now!**

- Increase below market rate housing stock by at least 200 units over the next 5 years - including workforce and accessible senior housing.

## **Zoning Strategy**

- Incentivize smaller scale private housing development throughout the city.
- Make it easier to develop the type of housing that supports the community's goals for affordability.
- Incentivize housing near public transportation.

## **Civic Engagement**

- Better representation for renters, more economically diverse residents and a wider range of wards.
- Better engagement with citizens who support the community's goals.
- Better distribution of information about the community's goals and solutions in process.
- City Council elections which focus on longer-term substantive issues with more continuity of representation.

# Considerations for the City

## Actions for Housing Choices



### **Build Now**

- Approve Sherburne project
- Begin work on the next project

### **Zoning Strategy**

- Eliminate single family zoning.
- Allow incremental increases in density across all residential zoning (up-zoning).
- Allow mixed uses in residential zoning.
- Eliminate parking requirements for new housing development.
- Zone for higher density near public transportation.

### **Civic Engagement**

- City Council terms should be three years with staggered terms.
- City council seats should be a mixture of ward specific seats and at-large seats.
- Periodic city newsletter outlining projects aligned with master plan. Newsletter to be heavily promoted to the community including at municipal touchpoints like vehicle registration.



# Considerations for the City

## Additional Thoughts on Housing



- Renters are 50% of portsmouth citizens, yet their voices are underrepresented in our civic dialog.
- Retaining long-standing residents and families in our community and preserving the physical form of our city are two important goals which can sometimes be in conflict. Threading this needle requires calm rational discussion, broad civic engagement and the ability of even the loudest voices to accept reasonable compromise.
- In addition to a lack of housing for young residents, there is a lack of options for older residents to relocate or downsize within portsmouth during retirement. When retirees are reluctant to sell their homes, it further reduces the amount of available housing.
- New England towns have a long history of success with density and mixed use. Increasing density and mixed use in our residential neighborhoods is a promising approach grounded in tradition.

# Summary

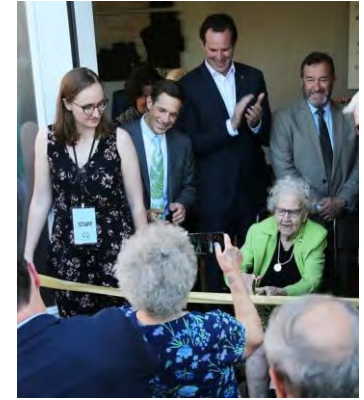
Our critical shortage of affordable housing has a significant negative impact on our community.

Over the last twenty years we have studied and discussed the issue at great length.

The community has consistently resolved to build more affordable and accessible housing...

**...Yet we have lacked the will to build enough.**

Now is the time to take action - first by constructing housing, followed by adjustments to our zoning and our process of civic engagement which will incentivize the construction of additional affordable and accessible housing.





# Group N

*Places to Live* Study Circle Dialogue  
Report Out  
February 22, 2024



# Group Overview



- Group N has 5 members
- Ages ranging from 40 to 70+
- Education, law, nonprofit administration, and engineering backgrounds
- Everyone in the group desires to age in place



# Problem Statement

There is a deficiency of housing throughout the income spectrum, but primarily at the high end and for those making 30-50% AMI both for rentals and for purchase. This impacts young adults (>18 yrs), older millennials (35-64 yrs) with families, and those over 65 years. A significant percentage of residents are cost burdened by housing resulting in a less economically, racially and ethnically diverse community. How can Portsmouth fulfill its mission of being 'The City of the Open Door'?





# Top Needs



- Housing options for people at all economic/income levels and ethnic/racial backgrounds
- Integrate housing options geographically throughout the community near services and amenities
- Educate City Council, City staff and residents to develop common ground on needs for housing to accommodate people from diverse economic backgrounds
- Examine our zoning regulations and restrictions to allow for a variety of housing options, and eliminate any barriers to appropriate housing development at all levels



# Considerations for the City

## Goals for Housing Choices



- Ensure a variety of affordable housing types and styles at all income levels in multiple neighborhoods/ geographies of our City
- How can we move productively from conversation to effective action on addressing the housing issue?
- Full public support for Portsmouth Housing Authority (PHA) projects; promote dialogue with project abutters to generate support
- Explore and develop new housing options such as tiny houses, accessory dwellings and others

# Considerations for the City

## Actions for Housing Choices



- Partner with and collaborate with abutting communities for future PHA projects.
- Portsmouth to give PHA more city owned land to develop projects.
- Increase density of projects by increasing building height.



# Considerations for the City

## Additional Thoughts on Housing



- Need to define and understand terms for boards and City staff, ensuring they can actively contribute to solutions and policy decisions.
- Regional approach to a regional problem: Look to engage and collaborate with other communities and municipalities to tackle housing needs, understanding pedestrian-friendly infrastructure while acknowledging public transportation access and consideration of schools and other municipal resources and facilities.
- Enable various activities in homes, such as subdividing or incorporating Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), to support individuals in staying in their homes as they navigate different life stages.

# Places to Live Study Circle Dialogue Report Out

*Joint Listening Session*

**City Council and Planning Board**

**February 22, 2024**

