

CITY OF PORTSMOUTH

CITY COUNCIL POLICY No. 2016-03

HOUSING POLICY

WHEREAS, the goals of the City of Portsmouth, as expressed in its 2025 Master Plan, include encouraging walkable mixed-use development, adapting the housing stock to accommodate changing demographics and accommodating the housing needs of the City's current and future workforce; and

WHEREAS, the City Council finds that construction of additional housing is critical to the City's continuing economic and civic vitality by supplying a new generation of workforce, attracting talent and new business, preserving affordability for long term residents to remain in the City, and increasing our resident base to allow for greater variety of participation in our City Boards, Committees, Commissions and Departments; and

WHEREAS, the City Council recognizes that in support of this objective it will be beneficial to provide guidance to City Boards, Committees and Departments as to interpretation of City regulations and ordinances, project approval and review, staff approval of permits and guidance to developers, and other City involvement in the housing process;

NOW THEREFORE, the City Council adopts the following policy (the "Housing Policy" or "this Policy"):

I. VISION

Portsmouth will support a housing stock that addresses greater housing supply and variety, including an adequate supply of workforce and moderate-income housing; reflects and enhances the City's historical development patterns; provides a human-scale design ¹that allows for vibrancy of civic life; and allows for optimal investment in and use of public infrastructure.

II. CORE COMMITMENT

¹ Human-scale design, in this context, refers to the size and proportions of buildings along a street being tailored to the comfort and usability of people walking nearby.

The City of Portsmouth will promote the design, construction, operation and maintenance of residential development appropriate for a variety of different residents, including the elderly and seniors, families, young professionals, seasonal and service industry workers, and people with disabilities; and will make efforts to ensure that housing costs are affordable to a wide range of income levels.

The City of Portsmouth will approach planning and zoning as an opportunity to expand the housing stock and provide increased variety to address the needs of those who work in Portsmouth and its region.

III. KEY PRINCIPLES

In planning for development and reviewing proposals for new residential developments, the City will apply the following principles:

1. **HOUSING CHOICE AND AFFORDABILITY:** Residential growth in the City should include a range of housing types to address the needs of different household types, lifestyles and income levels.
2. **CHARACTER AND HERITAGE:** New residential development should be sympathetic to the local heritage and character of each area, and should incorporate quality built form and streetscapes, including pedestrian-friendly environments.
3. **HOUSING TARGET AREAS:** The City will identify housing target areas that are suitable for more residential development and will focus studies, detailed zoning changes and development controls to guide future development in each of these areas. Context-sensitive standards which address design will accompany each target area.
4. **INFILL DEVELOPMENT:** Outside housing target areas, the City will promote infill development of residences (and, where appropriate, mixed-uses) within existing neighborhoods by rezoning to promote and allow established, traditional development patterns.

IV. FOCUS AREAS

In keeping with the 2025 Master Plan, this Policy recognizes that different solutions are appropriate for different types of areas and neighborhoods within the City. Therefore, the application of this Policy will vary accordingly by focus area, as follows:

1. **URBAN CORE:** The Urban Core, consisting of the historic Downtown and the North and West Ends, accommodates apartments, condominiums and affordable housing in existing and new mixed-use buildings.
2. **CORRIDORS:** On the City’s current major corridors—Lafayette Road/Route 1, Woodbury Avenue/Market Street, and (to a lesser extent) the Route 1 Bypass—provide opportunities to integrate new multifamily residential and mixed-use developments into existing commercial environments and create additional centers of activity.
3. **URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS:** The dense walkable neighborhoods close to the Urban Core provide housing in various sizes and tenancy types. The variety of options helps to preserve neighborhood character, provides affordable housing options, and allows for reduced automobile usage due to proximity to the Downtown and West End. New development in these neighborhoods will consist of small-scale infill and “missing middle” redevelopment.
4. **SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOODS:** Portsmouth’s low-density suburban neighborhoods provide a range of housing stock from luxury to affordable. These neighborhoods are suitable for incremental infill development including accessory dwelling units.

V. LAND USE REGULATIONS AND PERMITTING

To apply Key Principles from this Policy to each focus area and housing target area, the City will consider the following changes to land use regulations and the permitting process:

1. **DENSITY:** The City will incorporate historical land use patterns and human-scale development principles into local land use regulations (Zoning Ordinance, Site Plan Review Regulations, Subdivision Rules and Regulations) and permitting processes, as well as other standards, plans, rules, regulations and programs as appropriate.
2. **PARKING:** The City will review parking requirements in housing target areas and specific neighborhoods, revise land use regulations as appropriate to reduce housing development costs while preventing street congestion, and proactively seek parking infrastructure solutions or shared parking arrangements that can be substituted for individual unit parking requirements.

3. **IMPACT ON AFFORDABILITY:** Recognizing that local land use regulations can have a direct impact on housing development costs, all Boards, Committees, Commissions and Departments should consider the impacts of their actions on housing affordability within legal guidelines, and should coordinate with each other to the extent possible to provide advice consistent with this Policy.
4. **PERMIT STREAMLINING:** Private investment in the City's housing stock should be encouraged and the development process be minimally burdensome on individual property owners to comply with City regulations. Minor site or building changes should not necessarily trigger requirements for review by City Boards or Commissions. All Boards, Committees, Commissions and Departments should review local land use regulations and other requirements so that de minimis changes may be approved administratively.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION

The City views this Housing Policy as integral to everyday planning and decision-making practices and processes. To this end:

1. **APPLICATION:** The Planning Department and other relevant departments, agencies or committees shall incorporate this Policy's principles into the City's Master Plan and other appropriate plans, and manuals, checklists, decision trees, rules, regulations, and programs as appropriate, requesting funds through the annual City Budget or City Council when necessary.
2. **REGULATORY AUDIT:** The Planning Department and Department of Public Works shall review the City's Zoning Ordinance, Site Plan Review Regulations, Subdivision Regulations and permitting processes, to ensure that they effectively implement this Policy.
3. **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** When available, the City shall encourage staff professional development and training on best practices in planning, zoning, and principles through attending conferences, classes, seminars and workshops.
4. **COLLABORATION:** The City shall promote project coordination among City departments and agencies in implementing the Housing Policy in order to better use fiscal resources and produce the best results.
5. **MUNICIPAL INVESTMENT AND PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE:** The City should support new workforce housing development in designated areas through provision

of capital improvements and services, and proactively submit projects which support these principles to the annual Capital Improvement Plan process.

6. ANNUAL REPORTS: The Planning Department shall make an annual report to the City Council showing progress made in implementing this policy. This policy shall take effect upon passage by the City Council.

VII. PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The Housing Policy should be continuously evaluated for success and opportunities for improvement. This policy encourages the regular evaluation and reporting of progress through the following performance measures:

- Reduction in the affordability gap for rental and ownership units relative to income levels in the housing market area. Reduced applications for variances required to build workforce housing
- Increased density in new residential construction or applications for residential construction
- Reduced processing time for applications/permitting for new housing development

Adopted by the Portsmouth City Council on: **December 19, 2016.**

Ratified by the Portsmouth City Council on: January 16, 2018.

Ratified by the Portsmouth City Council on: January 8, 2020.

Ratified by the Portsmouth City Council on: January 24, 2022.

Ratified by the Portsmouth City Council on: January 16, 2024.

Kelli L. Barnaby, MMC/CNHMC
City Clerk

ATTACHMENT: MASTER PLAN STRATEGIES

The following housing strategies related to the theme of Diversity are identified in the Master Plan:

- 3.1.1 Develop regulations for accessory dwelling units that promote affordable housing for all income levels and protect neighborhood character.
- 3.1.2 Implement housing rehabilitation programs using CDBG and other funds to improve housing stock.
- 3.1.4 Identify locations and conditions under which live/work units can be safely and appropriately allowed.

- 3.2.1 Streamline the approval process for affordable housing in order to reduce development costs.
- 3.2.2 Promote the development of mixed-income multifamily housing in appropriate locations with incentive zoning provisions, such as reductions in parking requirements and increased maximum heights.
- 3.2.3 Support the activities of housing agencies in the development of affordable housing.
- 3.2.4 Provide incentives for low- to moderate-income first-time homebuyers to purchase homes in Portsmouth.
- 3.2.5 Encourage the creation of smaller housing units, such as micro-units.
- 3.2.6 Encourage businesses to establish employer-assisted housing programs.
- 3.2.7 Support mixed-use redevelopment of suitable Portsmouth Housing Authority properties for long-term viability.