

# Working Towards Housing Choice: Lessons Learned From the HOP Grant Program

# Speakers

- John Christ, Planning Board Chair, Town of Plymouth
- Joseph Perez, Town Planner, Town of Plymouth
- Susan MacLeod, Land Use Secretary, Town of Sandwich
- Mike Tardiff, Executive Director, Central NH Regional Planning Commission
- Judi Barrett, Founder and Managing Director, Barrett Planning Group LLC

# Agenda

- Brief Intros
- Roundtable Discussion
- Q&A



# Working Toward Housing Choice: Lessons Learned from the HOP Program

## Reporting from the Town of Plymouth by Joseph Perez & John Christ

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### HOP Grant Recipient for all Three Phases

Needs Assessment | Regulatory Audit | Regulatory Development  
Assembly of Housing Steering Committee and Choice of Consultant

### Why tackle this project in Plymouth?

Plymouth State University - enrollment trending lower over past decade  
A regional center for employment, services, healthcare, education, etc.  
Last housing study was completed in 2003, under very different circumstances.  
Cost of housing is a concern in Plymouth, as elsewhere in the State.  
Question of mismatch between regulations, built environment, and community preferences.

### Built Environment

Main Street/Historic Village area | Plymouth State University (on- and off-campus housing) | growing commercial/"big-box" corridor | scattered suburban development | rural dirt road communities | manufactured housing parks | Tenney Mountain ski area



# Community Outreach: Strategies and Takeaways

## Outreach Initiatives

- Online survey
- Stakeholder interviews
- Community meetings
- Informational videos
- Walking Tours
- Landing page, mailers, & fliers
- Public hearings

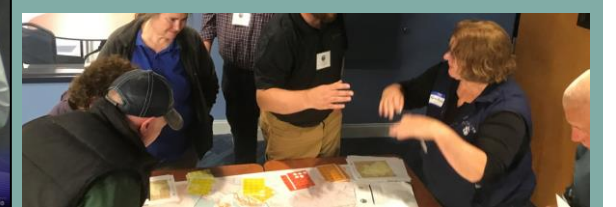
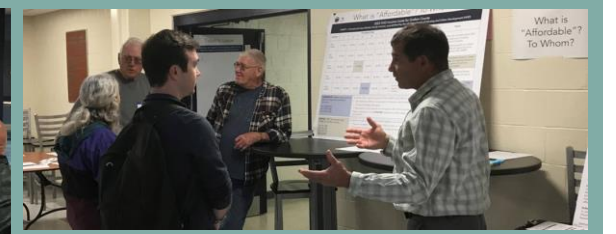
## Outreach Takeaways

- Taxes & parking on our minds
- Appetite for beneficial change
- Desire to preserve character
- Aspirations toward SF housing
- Prohibitive costs of SF housing
- Concern over demographics
- Concern for school enrollment



## Lessons Learned

- HOP funding & outreach capacity
- Housing Academy and modeling
- Targeted neighborhood outreach
- Building upon existing strengths
- Linguistic treachery of housing
- The Importance of visual tools





# Community Outreach: Walking Tours

Walking Tours provide an opportunity to invite members of the community and decision makers alike to “feel” the type of neighborhood that could be created under various Zoning provisions - especially useful for dimensional standards.



Wentworth Street was one example. It’s a well-loved neighborhood - all lots on the south side of the street combined equalled 0.95 acres. Not enough to subdivide into two single-family lots, let alone the six that have existed since the 1930’s (or prior).



## Lot size

Specific examples - 10,000 vs. 21,780 vs. 43,560

Does this seem like an appropriate size for new development? What is too small?

## Frontage Requirements

How does the spacing of houses along this block feel? Are there too many? Could the street support more?

## Setbacks and Parking

How are parking areas arranged? Where is each house placed in relation to its surroundings?



# Community Outreach: Visual Engagement Strategies

## Prioritize Visual Outreach Tools Early

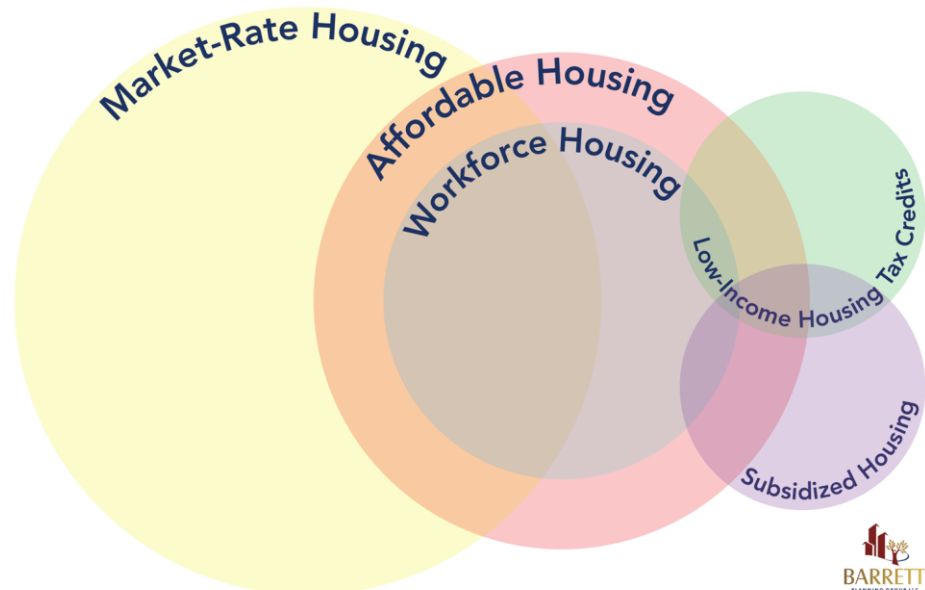
Words evoke rich mental images AND misconceptions

Words convey legally binding definitions

Images are engaging and draw upon the familiar

Images, used smartly, can break through misconceptions

## Housing Terminology



## Visual Preferences Activity

Misalignment between textual survey and visual activity preferences

Untangling morphology and typology in multifamily housing

Regulatory responses to the variety of built forms within categories of housing



# Navigating the Politics of Housing Choice and Finding Common Ground

## The Perils of Planning for Housing

Dreams and fears of new housing  
 Discussing Demographics | Fair Housing  
 Private interests and/or the public good  
 Industry professionals & community voices  
 Information, Misconceptions, Disinformation  
 Harmonizing our Motivations →

## Looking Beyond NIMBY and YIMBY

Targeted density vs sprawling backyards  
 PLAN for housing where capacity exists  
 Grow capacity and reduce barriers smartly

## Understanding our Goals

Addressing the current housing shortage  
 Planning for long-term housing opportunity

## Harmonizing our Motivations

**Want**

The Good Life

**Ought**

Moral Imperative

**Shall**

Legal Obligations

### Want: The Good Life

Mixed-use or R1? Diverse or homogeneous community?

### Ought: Moral Imperative

Facilitate affordable housing across income levels

### Shall: Legal Obligations

Zoning Ordinance, RSAs, Fair Housing laws, etc.

## Town Meeting Politics

Assess needs & appetite  
 Build consensus in town hall  
 Educate the public and listen  
 Respond to misconceptions  
 Reconsider divisive articles  
 Vote on warrant articles

## Engagement Timeline

Survey  
 Interviews  
 Community Meetings  
 Public Hearings

Largest samples frontloaded  
 Small hearings often decisive  
 Maintain the broader picture





# Open-Ended Process: Celebrating Accomplishments and Looking Forward



## Town Meeting 2024: Seven amendments passed

- The Planning Board put seven amendments forward at Town Meeting, all passed with over 60% of the vote!
- Revised lot size, setback, and frontage requirements to align with traditional built form in many areas of Town. Reduced barriers to new development matching historic patterns.
- Allowed attached single-family dwellings, in groups of up to four, in much of the community.
- Accessory Dwelling Units permitted by-right in most of the Town, requirements simplified.

## Looking towards the next steps

- Several identified potential regulatory changes are still under consideration for future years, discussions are ongoing about what should be addressed next.
- Opportunities at Tenney Mountain? Inclusionary Zoning? Modernized subdivision regulations?
- Holding a “what’s next” community meeting in June to discuss these considerations.

## Takeaways and considerations

- Approach the process organically - don’t assume where it will lead! The community should feel a sense of ownership over both the process and product.
- Differing visions among citizen leaders and decision-makers isn’t a bad thing.
- Capacity is key for being able to undertake large-scale public engagement (Thanks HOP!)
- Don’t cut the process short if possible - Town Meeting isn’t the end of a planning process.



- One of the physically largest communities in the State with over 60,000 acres or approximately 94 square miles.
- Around 17,000 of these acres, about 29% of the town, are within the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF).
- The town has a total of 2,366 acres of open surface water (largest is Squam Lake), ~ 5,767 acres is in the floodplains, and 3,200 acres of wetlands.
- An additional 2,430 acres are protected lands in community ownership and another 3,240 in private ownership bringing the total including the WMNF to 25,900 acres.
- Much of Sandwich's developed areas occur in a linear fashion along the town's roads or in small village areas. Only a small portion of Town center is serviced by Sewer District.
- About 10% in agriculture and open land and about 2% developed as buildings—mostly single-family homes. Survey showed 37.3% residents have lived in Town 21-31+ years and 31.4% have lived in Town 1-5 years (some newly retired to formerly seasonal homes).

## HOP Grant for Phases 2 & 3 Survey (204 responses):

### HOUSING PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED BY RESPONDENTS:

- Helping people stay in the community as they age (61%)
- Attracting younger residents with families/children (51%)
- Allowing/encouraging ADUs (45%)
- Other priorities (all approx. 40%)
- Enabling a mix of housing options
- Helping people stay in their current housing
- Ensuring new housing be sustainably built

### COMMON THEMES/CONCERNS IDENTIFIED

- Preservation of rural character – many who move to this town do so because of its rural nature
- Preservation of shoreland
- Lack of employment base for workforce
- Short term rentals are a perceived threat to housing opportunities
- 51% support regulation; 23% oppose regulation; 26% have mixed opinions depending on the details of regulation.
- Lack of access to amenities, healthcare, adequate transportation are equally important barriers to vibrant & diverse communities

## RESULTS in 2024

10 Warrant Articles relating to housing with 324 ballots cast:

- 4 to amend definitions: all passed by 4 to 1 margin
- 2 to amend ADU requirements: passed by 3 to 1 margin
- 4 to allow two-family housing with single-family dwelling requirements in three districts and on steep slope lots: passed by at least 2 to 1 margin
- The Planning Board is reviewing the Master Plan, particularly the Housing Chapter, to update following the same outreach strategies that encouraged public participation with the zoning amendment process.

## Boscawen

- The Planning Board worked concurrently on Master Plan and zoning updates.
- A community engagement plan was established, with a special housing event on Old Home Day in August and a river walk at the former Commercial Street mill site in September.
- A broad amendment to zoning was proposed as a warrant at Town Meeting with changes focusing on redevelopment of the Mill Redevelopment District, cluster development, PUDs, and ADUs.
- A warrant article was also proposed for the Town to adopt the provisions of RSA 162-K, allowing it to create a TIF District.
- The zoning and TIF warrant articles passed overwhelmingly.
- The next steps are final adoption of the Housing Chapter and the development of a TIF plan for Town Meeting 2025.

## Canterbury

- The Planning Board focused on community engagement with a roll-out at the Canterbury Fair in summer 2023 and four events in the fall and winter.
- Despite some skepticism at the community engagement events and public hearings, a number of housing related zoning amendments, which included a new “Cluster Neighborhoods” Ordinance, modifications to the Table of Uses to allow residential uses in the commercial zone, and changes related to ADUs were approved at Town Meeting.
- The development of a Land Use Handbook with updates to the Subdivision and Site Plan Regulations is now underway.

## Sutton

- Proposed zoning change addressed the creation of overall Village Overlay District zoning article that would establish standards for residential and small-scale non-residential uses within Sutton's villages through a Conditional Use Permit process. The boundaries of the the overlay districts were not proposed for Town Meeting 2024.
- Community engagement was primarily at public meetings and hearings. There was skepticism of the changes expressed at a number of the meetings.
- The warrant article did not pass at Town Meeting.
- The Planning Board is considering next steps in the process, beginning with a review of housing related recommendations include in the 2021 Sutton Master Plan.

## Warner

- Housing Advisory Committee appointed to assist the Planning Board with a draft of a new Housing Chapter.
- The Committee has met on a monthly basis.
- Community engagement event held as part of the Fall Foliage Festival. A well-attended Housing Forum was held on April 30, with a Zoom only version scheduled for May 14. The Community Survey had 404 responses.
- Final step is to complete draft of chapter for Planning Board consideration.

# Some Lessons Learned

## 1. Community Engagement can be in many forms

Multiple opportunities for the public to get involved is key. Public meetings are key, but other events like a walking tour or attending local festivals helps to broaden involvement.

## 2. Change takes time

Zoning changes can take more than one zoning season – and getting started earlier in the year is helpful.

## 3. Character Matters

Community character resonated with residents. Some of the best-received changes to address housing affordability were adapted from the past.

**Housing, Community  
Development, and Public  
Education:  
You can lead a horse to water ...**

New Hampshire Office of Planning &  
Development 2024 Planning & Zoning Conference





“We don’t  
see things  
as they are.  
We see  
them as we  
are.”

anais nin

**What is workforce housing?**

myth-busting defined

Oh, the things we  
think about each  
other ...



# Geographic Meaning

- Workforce housing means housing near employment centers affordable to the people who have jobs there, whatever those jobs may be.
- **Link geography, wages, and housing costs.**



why this matters!



# Learn!

- Housing proposals in your community
- Zoning changes on your town meeting warrant
- What are the needs in your community?
- What are the barriers?
- What are people opposed to, and why? (Don't dismiss legitimate concerns)
- Talk to your local businesses





# Speak!

- Housing is a human right
- Housing is a community need
- Housing and economic development: inseparable
- Support local officials and town staff trying to do the right thing
- Write letters to the editor
- Submit written comments at public hearings



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