

Minutes of Housing Sub Committee Meeting

January 26, 2009

Present:

Bill Regan
Scott Pope
Alan Croteau
Peter Dzewaltowski

Superintendent Guillette was excused due to a school emergency.

Discussion centered around getting the final product started. Peter will provide a final "format" template to use to maintain report consistency.

A way to determine existing housing stock was discussed, much of that information is in the "Land Use" chapter of the current master plan, but the committee would like data to determine changes since the last census. It was agreed that after the 2010 census, these numbers will change and should be looked at when this occurs. However, one method would be to look at the total new homes built, new lots, consolidations of lots and housing units through site plan approvals, demolitions, and other changes of record since 2001 to get a better picture of the current stock. The school district "Power School" package may also be of help in this matter.

The new format will follow the old 1991 format in many ways, using a "goals", objectives", and recommendations format.

The idea of a survey was brought up, the members present believed it would be best to "take this report on the road" to various community groups, organizations and open forums. This will allow for a cross section of opinion on the "draft final product".

The group spent time looking at the 1991 Master Plan to determine the following:

- **What is still true**
- **What has changed (attitudes, completed)**
- **What may be no longer applicable.**

For reference to the following, see the 1991 Master Plan "Housing" section.

The 1991 goal was affirmed as still true.

The first recommendation was changed. It read previously "Encourage a gradual increase in the housing supply through new construction and rehabilitation of older homes."

The new suggested statement reads:

"Encourage a gradual increase in the housing supply through the **rehabilitation of older homes and new construction.**" This recognizes the need to find a way to improve and rehabilitate older housing stock to

standards and also recognizes the current planning trend and community wish to create a better “in-fill” area within the community where density currently exists, creating better neighborhoods. This also touches and honors our past and in many cases fine homes while realizing the need of others to build new homes on larger “non-urban” lots.

Discussion also centered on ways to create community methods to encourage rehabilitation of older homes. Many communities have done this with great success, creating highly sought homes in formerly “run down” urban centers.

The objective of Recommendation 1 was also changed, to read only “Encourage the improvement of the quality and condition of housing.”

The second set of recommendations had only one change, this in the final one. It was suggested this read:

Pursue innovative combinations of financing mechanisms for housing rehabilitation programs, including private-public partnerships involving public funds private non-profit groups **and tax incentives.**

The objective remained unchanged.

Recommendation set three was left for later discussion when Superintendent Guilette is present, respecting her dealings with low income and homeless persons. Andrew Fennely will also be invited to this meeting and others to discuss the ramifications of this recommendation and how it applies now. It was realized (and reinforced by guest Bernie Folta), that Claremont is a “hub community”, thus this is a need that must not be ignored. This was agreed upon by the entire committee and it was determined that this would be discussed appropriately.

Recommendation set four had one change and one recommendation to highlight. A recommendation to change the second statement “ensure that zoning ordinance affords reasonable opportunities for the siting of manufactured housing.” was made to reflect the changes of building technology. The term “Manufactured Housing” used to mean one thing, now it means several things with new building technology. Therefore this was changed to reflect “panelized, modular, or other types of home building that is done primarily off site”. This reflects the new technologies in panelized and modular homes that are available today from local businesses such as LaValley’s and Oxbrook among others.

The highlighted recommendation was the fourth of the five in this set,, which includes the statement “...transform public housing projects into single family ownership”.

Additional Statements:

The following additional statement ideas and philosophies should be worked into the “Housing” section of the Master Plan.

Housing needs and efforts must respect the efforts of economic development and business growth while maintaining tax rate stability to protect the investment of current home owners. This will require a continual re-evaluation which adjusts to maintain this balance.

The statement reflects the need to maintain the balance of the needs of new “younger” home owners and those of older home owners. This will require, as noted, a constant “thinking on your feet” by the city government and the entire community.

The city should review the existing lot size and set-back allowances as they currently exists to allow for rehabilitation and improvement of existing homes and the building of new single family homes on lots that do not currently meet the city zoning standards. A committee should be formed to review these standards and to create standards that realistically reflect the needs and challenges of the vast number of non-conforming housing lots in the city.

It was mentioned that the vast majority of the housing lots in the inner city areas of pleasant Street, North Street, and even “on the Bluff” and on “Maple Avenue” do not meet the 10,000 foot requirement for a housing unit, nor could they meet set-backs should an owner take over a decrepit unit and try to improve it substantially or replace the unit in its entirety. Zoning “special exception” allowances should be more readily available for these situations and easily determined by the Zoning Board. This helps meet a need to renovate and re-vitalize neighborhoods and maintains open space while utilizing existing opportunities for affordable housing in our community.

The current standards were created to meet a need to rid the city of “decaying multi family homes that were spiraling into disrepair” and to rid the city of the inner city decay that was occurring by apartments and buildings that were being “run into the ground and left in extreme disrepair”, creating blight, undesirable neighborhoods, and undesirable business districts. Through the foresight of that city council, these efforts were successful for the most part. The committee realizes the need to be vigilant so the “special exemption” requirement should remain (and is reinforced in the Master Plan of 1991 and will be in the future).

The committee also realized though, especially after several comments at city council meetings and several planning and zoning applications, that there is a need to review this entire section of the zoning code in order to grow the city in a manner that is beneficial to the needs of the future to maintain and enhance neighborhood quality as well as use the existing housing stock to the advantage to growing our community.

The city should create an atmosphere of cooperation that allows for improvement, rehabilitation and creating “green” homes in existing housing stock and in new construction.

All building and zoning codes should be reviewed for applicability and to meet the needs of the current situation where philosophies and codes collide between what should be done for new housing, weighing also what is realistically and economically possible/feasible when (or against) renovating older homes or business properties.

The idea of creating small “TIF Districts” for some neighborhoods to create opportunities such as those used as well by the Mill District was discussed. This has been used in cities like Portsmouth and could be used successfully in Claremont.

