

APPROVED MINUTES
Durham Housing Task Force
December 9, 2024
10:00 am – Council Chambers

Housing Task Force members present

Sally Tobias, chair

Al Howland

Michael Mulhern (on Zoom)

Paul Rasmussen, Planning Board Rep

Judith Spang

Michael Behrendt, Town Planner

Taylor Cray, Workforce Housing Coalition, Advisor to Task Force

Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 10:03 am. There was not a quorum, so no decisions were made nor votes taken. For a quorum five members must be present in person.

Next Initiative. Discussion of next potential zoning changes.

Sally showed portions of a powerpoint that Michael B produced in 2020 showing the state of zoning related to housing in Durham.

Various items were discussed. Allowing conservation subdivisions at the option of the property owner for 2 and 3-lot/unit subdivisions. There is an exemption for 2- and 3- lot subdivisions so it is unclear now whether a property owner can choose to do a conservation subdivision for these. There could be an advantage in that the ordinance allows one to place more than one residence on a lot without subdividing, though it is uncertain if allowing this would be desirable.

Paul suggested revising the way that impervious surface is used in the Table of Dimensions. This could be treated as the total amount of allowed development area on a parcel.

Michael B. noted that within the allowed development area on a conservation subdivision there is a lot of flexibility in lot sizes, multi-unit residential, and site configuration. The challenge is with the lot density.

The task force discussed potential zoning changes to explore now. Paul said that density is a priority. He said the Planning board is going to be busy at least until March.

Al said that conservation subdivisions should be a priority. ADUs are being addressed at the state level. We should know more by March.

Sally said we should leave minimum lots sizes where they are for now but look at density in the conservation subdivisions. We should allow duplexes, follow the state's guidance for ADUs, and look at multi-unit residential. The Downtown Subcommittee will look at mixed-use with residential in the downtown.

Michael B. said we should change the name of the Workforce Housing Overlay District as the Town Attorney recently advised so that it is not confused with the state's workforce housing law. He suggested the Affordable Housing Overlay District. Taylor suggested the Attainable Housing Overlay District since that term is now being used more commonly and is not tied down with specific meanings.

Michael B. suggested that the Planning Board might look at Conservation Subdivisions as its next project with the Zoning Rewrite.

The task force suggested coming up with various ideas for potential housing changes and presenting them to the Planning Board for discussion (instead of preparing specific amendments and then presenting them for prospective adoption). We can shoot to present these to the board in February or March.

Judith asked about financing for housing projects being a limiting factor. Al said that the Housing Champions program covers everything – zoning, financing, and infrastructure. Sally said that density is key as this is what we can control but the Town should also be open to using RSA 79E and TIFs as incentives. Michael M spoke about some financial tools including the Low Income Tax Credit.

Taylor spoke about the perspective of young people looking for housing. They tend to be creative, finding different ways to live together. Sally said that many people in town are sensitive to this judging from the responses that she has received in the numerous housing presentations that she has given.

Sally said that people are receptive to ADUs, duplexes, missing middle housing. The idea of existing student housing rolling over for non-student housing is not easy. Al said owners are resistant to changing student housing. Paul said that they will keep the rents high until vacancies push them to lower them.

Michael B said that we can't meet the housing goals in just the downtown area, the five core commercial areas. Smart growth talks about bringing the highest density in the core areas but the transect speaks to the need for a continuation of development from the center outward. If we want to facilitate creating more housing opportunities there is not enough land downtown. We have to look at the residential and office-research zones also.

Al said there are challenges in developing downtown. It is expensive and managing stormwater is challenging. Sally said that people need access to parking.

The next meeting will be on January 13.

Adjournment. The meeting adjourned at 11:55 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Behrendt

Approved January 13, 2025