

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AD HOC HOUSING STABILITY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, December 7, 2022

3:00 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Members Present:

Mayor George S. Hansel, Chair
Councilor Bryan Lake
Doug Iosue
Natalie Darcy
Steven Bragdon
Jennifer Seher
Joshua Meehan

Staff Present:

Elizabeth Dragon, City Manager
Rebecca Landry, IT Director/Assistant City
Manager

Members Not Present:

Stacie Pickford
Craig Henderson

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Mayor Hansel called the meeting to order at 8:05 AM.

2) Approval of Minutes- November 2, 2022

Mayor Hansel asked for any minute corrections. With none, he asked for a motion to approve.

Councilor Bryan Lake motioned to approve the minutes and the motion was seconded.

Ms. Jennifer Seher pointed out that she was incorrectly marked present at the last meeting. With that noted, there was unanimous approval to adopt the November minutes.

3) Review Committee Report Final Draft

Mayor Hansel opened the meeting for comment and feedback on the final draft of the report. The Mayor recognized Mr. Josh Meehan who said he thought the draft report was strong, but wondered if there was a way to call out in the introduction segment the fact that the housing that we need is housing that is available to all income groups or all market segments. He suggested doing it at the beginning to help state the principles that drive it and that housing availability for all segments, including those who are very low income are being investigated. Mayor Hansel responded that Mr. Meehan makes a good point that could probably be accommodated. Ms. Rebecca Landry noted that the available housing for all market points was mentioned later in the

document, but recognized Mr. Meehan's point of also mentioning it at the start. She asked that rather than going back and forth, if she could propose a sentence. The last sentence under increase in available housing says, "The Committee has formulated recommendations aimed to increase workforce housing and affordable housing". She asked if she could expand on that sentence by adding all forms of housing, including affordable housing, workforce housing or something to that effect or would he prefer changing it further.

Mr. Meehan responded that we run the risk of going into deep edits. He noted this draft was great, but he was not sure what the process was going to be for the review so he spent quite a bit of time yesterday editing and has a series of similar comments. Mayor Hansel noted that was fine and that they can certainly make those edits and recirculate it or just discuss it.

Mr. Meehan continued by saying that one of the questions people commonly ask is what is workforce housing versus what is affordable housing. In New Hampshire, there is a workforce housing statute that defines workforce housing as a specific housing product. It is also affordable, but it is not affordable to people at 30% area median income or less. It is more affordable to those individuals in the 50-60% of area median income. He suggested speaking more broadly in the introductory segment to include a statement along the lines of, "housing that is available to families and individuals of all incomes".

Mayor Hansel said he was sure they could come up with a broader and more appropriate sentence.

Mayor Hansel invited a member of the public up who wished to speak.

Angela Pape, staff with Monadnock Interfaith Project (MIP) stated that MIP had lots to say about generally being very happy with the document, but in the first section, "the committee has formulated recommendations that aim to increase workforce housing, affordable housing", she noted that it should be both increasing housing and supporting people when they are homeless by adding case management to people who are living in hotels, etc. She felt it would be more accurate to add in that the group is also trying to support people while they are experiencing homelessness, knowing that everyone agrees the intention is to move people into housing.

Ms. Jennifer Seher noted that Ms. Pape's suggestion was already included in the second part. She added that she liked the structure used to put it together where it pulled out increasing available housing stock as its own category and if anything, suggested changing the language to "in the transition to permanent housing". Mayor Hansel responded that he saw it as "the solution is to provide timely and effective transitional services" and asked if they were thinking that it needed more. He suggested adding homeless transition services, and permanent housing or services and the transition to more permanent housing. She responded that it felt better.

Ms. Seher asked if reordering the document would feel more appropriate because she said the supporting piece is a big interest of the committee, but reiterated that she liked the fact that they are separate outcomes and that she thought that separation was important.

Mayor Hansel suggested adding "services" to the title and reordering the three groups so that support services was first. The group was in agreement with the changes.

Mayor Hansel asked if there were any other comments on the introduction or desired outcomes. Mr. Meehan responded that he had a small edit to the very last paragraph, “Regional Engagement and Collaborative Solutions”. He noted that through the document the language shifts from “recommend” to wording it as a suggestion or consideration. He urged the group to be intentional and consistent with the language and use recommend throughout. In holding to that, in the second to last line in that section, it says, “Recommends that the City participate in collaborative efforts” he suggested editing that to “City contribute to collaborative efforts, because it demonstrates active participation rather than passive. Mayor Hansel was in agreement with the change and asked if anyone else had input or disagreed. Ms. Landry spoke saying that when she started drafting this, there were some recommendations that were great ideas, very clear, and were items that could be presented as strong recommendations. There were others that would likely fall outside the purview of the City management and Council and so those were put forward more as encouragement for participation.

Mr. Meehan said that one of his big questions reading this document was whether the committee was going to jettison from this draft things that the City cannot actually do or control in any way or leave them in as ideas for the Council.

Mayor Hansel clarified that in the past, all of those ideas have been included because it is good to get the ideas out, as there may be area organizations who are more able and willing to take them on.

Regarding the specific recommendations about housing development, Mayor Hansel asked if anyone had any questions, comments or suggestions about them.

Mr. Meehan noted that he had some questions regarding the five-acre zoning because he was under the impression that topic had been settled. Mayor Hansel clarified that it was not settled and it had been separated out as an initiative.

Mr. Meehan wondered if the group wanted to include examples of ways that they could consider reducing regulatory barriers or just leave it a statement and let them process it. Mayor Hansel suggested leaving it more open-ended.

Mr. Meehan stated his understanding of the InvestNH funds was that the money that went to the projects is already gone and the money that is left is with the municipalities. Mayor Hansel was unsure they had distributed all that money out yet.

A member of the community, Tom Julius, Monadnock Interfaith Partnership (MIP), spoke and praised the committee members. He appreciated that the group really dove in and made an effort to address the concerns of the City Councilors who originally brought this issue forward. He wanted to add on to InvestNH and point out that it is one-time funding. It is noted on page five in “Regional Coordination Opportunities”, a recommendation was made that the City, together with other agencies, pursue housing development funds. Housing development funds are considered a long-term strategy for housing development so he encouraged the group to include that in this section even if just as a reference.

Another community member, Ken Costa, MIP, commended the report and the group. Under the recommendations section, some of the recommendations are going to be more long-term, but item five, the Accessory Dwelling Units, seems to be more in control of the City and homeowners rather than large developers. It seems to him as a more feasible, fast-track option especially if it could be tied with funding that helped the homeowners convert those units. He sees that option as a quick way to provide housing and hopes the City pushes that one forward.

Mayor Hansel asked if in number four, along with State and Federal, they added all development incentives because then that opens up the opportunity to some of these other options.

Mr. Costa and the committee was agreeable. Mr. Steven Bragdon suggested being careful about making the recommendations too specific, especially regarding the five-acre portion.

With no further comments, the group moved on to shelter services. Mr. Meehan noted the document discusses how everyone in the city has the opportunity to receive services. He wondered if that was true. Mayor Hansel said the opportunity is there and the City certainly has the legal obligation. Ms. Natalie Darcy clarified that every person coming in and presenting as homeless has the option to be placed and has been offered services. Mr. Meehan responded that he was pleased to hear that.

Mr. Mike Kennedy, pastor of the Nazarene Church, spoke and wanted to address number eight, the safe parking program. He noted that his congregation has been in conversations with Southwestern Community Services to navigate what that would look like and to create or embody this recommendation. He hopes to have it in the community sooner rather than later. He also wanted to publically say that he thought this draft was great and MIP is really looking forward to the action items and what they can do as a community to advocate for some of these recommendations.

Ms. Landry thanked Mr. Kennedy for looking into it.

Mr. Doug Iosue asked for clarification on number two. In that paragraph, it mentions the timeframe that identifies the most recent town of residency should be extended to six months. He questioned whether that was feasible. With the nature of people being so transient and some individuals only having residency for three months, he wondered if that meant we would not seek funding if it was less than three months.

Mayor Hansel asked City Manager Dragon if she wanted to speak to that and she suggested that we strike that sentence. She believes that sentence was mixed in with the changes the group discussed concerning recuperating money from other communities for services that we provide. She believes the comment came from how it is hard for us to place anyone in thirty days and that it should be more like six months. She did not think getting into the weeds on that topic would be helpful, but thought eliminating the statement might clarify and reduce any confusion.

Ms. Darcy stated that anyone who is transient that comes to them for services is taken care of and they do not let anybody slip through the cracks if they can help it. If they are at the door and from another state, we do not tell them no.

Tom Julius, community member and member of MIP, spoke again and said he was glad to see issues of homeless camping addressed and the use and disposal of hypodermic needles mentioned in the shelter services portion. He noted these are definite issues that will continue to need to be addressed. One thing he wanted to bring attention to from the original City Councilor letter was the trash. He encouraged them to include the concern of the community around trash. He encouraged including as part of the recommendation increased trash dumpsters, disposal units or trash bags as ways to make it easier for people to dispose of waste. The other was concerning the public bathrooms and he encouraged the group to recommend to the City that they continue to look at and investigate ways put those in place.

Mr. Meehan brought attention to number seven, which relates to the voucher program. He had some technical corrections or recommendations. He said that Section Eight housing includes many different types of housing. He believes that this particular section was referencing the Housing Choice program, so he suggested just deleting Section Eight housing and starting with Federal Housing Choice Program. He believed the last sentence in that section was an important one and thought it might be useful to strengthen it by changing the end of that last sentence to “protects voucher holders from discrimination”. The other thing he offered was rather than the City bearing the weight on this, he urged the City to work with his organization if it is so inclined as they have already done work towards this.

Mayor Hansel agreed those were all good ideas. He asked if anyone had a problem modifying the language to say that this committee recommends that the City encourage strong protections for Section Eight voucher holders from discrimination. Ms. Landry commented that this was a bit of a shift in the spirit of what it was originally about, which was making it so that property owners were less hesitant to participate. The intent was to make it more encouraging of property owner participation and feel like less of a threat to property owners so they could be more confident in participating.

Mr. Meehan responded he sees advocacy at the State level synonymous with supporting efforts to make it so that you cannot discriminate against people based on incomes and suggested wording that highlighted supporting advocacy at the State, Federal and local levels.

Everyone agreed. Ms. Seher spoke to Ms. Landry’s point and said she also believed that they also needed to emphasize that they want the City to encourage more homeowners and landlords to embrace using Section Eight vouchers, potentially by using more positive public messaging and she was concerned that might get lost. Ms. Dragon suggested separating them out.

Ms. Seher said in number five, it has become easier for the unhoused or those experiencing mental illness to connect. She is not sure why that sentence is there and thought it was misleading. Ms. Dragon agreed with deleting that line, as she believes it came from another section.

Ms. Seher was appreciative of the inclusion of the library piece, but believed that it should be noted that it is a consistent, collaborative effort.

Ms. Seher wondered about brainstorming ways to increase public knowledge of the blue light project so that the public is aware of them before implementation and knowledgeable of who is making the decision of where they go and why.

Ms. Dragon said it would not be up to the City, it would be up to the participating churches and organizations, but that the City could put the information up on the website to promote it.

The group moved onto regional coordination opportunities. Mr. Meehan said he was glad to see the development funds called out. In the second paragraph at number one, “the Committee recommends that the City together with local housing assistance agencies and developers”, he suggested also pulling in investors and businesses affected by the lack of workforce housing. There was no opposition to the change.

Ms. Seher asked to expand number three in the last sentence. She asked if social services could be added to that sentence. All were in favor of the change.

There were no further comments on the report as a whole or at the Regional Coordination section.

Mr. Meehan pointed out the conclusion states housing solutions are on the horizon, but he countered that it is actually ideas on housing solutions and could be misconstrued as misleading. Mayor Hansel suggested adding “housing stability solutions are on the horizon, but will take time, energy and community investment.” Mr. Meehan and the group were in support of the suggested change.

With no opposition to moving it forward as a recommendation with the discussed changes, Mayor Hansel asked for a motion. Mr. Iosue made the motion with Mr. Bragdon offering a second. The recommendation was approved unanimously.

Mayor Hansel thanked the committee members, staff and members of the community that participated in the creation of this report. He suggested everyone recognize and promote this in the community to get people excited for the implementation of some of these ideas that have come forward.

4) **Communications**

5) **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Mayor Hansel adjourned the meeting at 8:45 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Amanda Trask, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Rebecca Landry, Assistant City Manager & Communications and Marketing Director