



AD HOC HOUSING STABILITY COMMITTEE REPORT

City of Keene
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George Hansel, Mayor, City of Keene
Bryan Lake, City Councilor, City of Keene
Natalie Darcy, Human Services Manager, City of Keene
Stephen Bragdon, Bragdon, Baron & Kossayda
Craig Henderson, Southwest Community Services
Doug Iosue, Cheshire County Department of Corrections
Joshua Meehan, Keene Housing
Stacie Pickford, Homeless Advocate
Jennifer Seher, New Hampshire Care Collaborative

Keene, like communities across the state and nation, is experiencing a serious housing shortage. Vacancy is extremely low, and increasing rental rates continue to outpace income growth. This directly affects the availability of stable, affordable housing for Keene individuals and families, and it impacts the opportunity to attract and retain workforce which is needed to sustain and grow the local economy. Solutions are needed to increase housing supply.

The New Hampshire Council on Housing Stability Strategic Plan advises, *“Needed services and support should be delivered in each community, based on the unique assets, resources, strengths, challenges, and needs unique to each area of the state.”* The City of Keene Housing Stability Ad Hoc Committee convened its first meeting in May of 2022 to begin the process of evaluating strategies and making recommendations to address housing stability locally. The Committee met monthly and reviewed relevant data, reports and programs to inform its analysis and to prepare the following recommendations.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

Homeless Support and Transition to Permanent Housing

Homelessness is on the rise and requires positive change. Housing is a basic human need and is directly linked to health, social, educational and economic outcomes. The pressure on rental rates makes it harder for low income individuals and families to secure adequate housing. The solution is to provide timely and effective transitional services. The Committee has formulated recommendations that aim to help the local unhoused population transition to immediate and, ultimately, permanent housing.

Increase in Available Housing

The low availability of housing is a supply problem that requires a supply solution. In New Hampshire, demand has outpaced supply for over a decade. The recent pandemic has sharply increased demand for both rural living and improved quality of life; it has further stressed rental rates and the need for housing development in Keene. The Committee has formulated recommendations that aim to increase housing available to all income groups.

Regional Engagement in Collaborative Solutions

There are many regional, state, and federal programs that provide funding and guidance for housing development and assistance services. There is an opportunity, however, for better coordination that could positively impact the timeliness, extent of, and participation in solutions. The Committee recommends that the City contribute to collaborative efforts amongst providers to avail more effective and comprehensive housing solutions for all.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Housing development

1. The committee supports the City’s completion of a comprehensive housing needs analysis that articulates current critical issues, opportunities, and solutions to address the community’s specific housing needs. This will provide critical information to formulate goals and priorities

key to effective short and long term solutions.

2. Multifamily housing development provides the most promising opportunity to increase Keene's housing stock in a manner that can avail multiple housing options and meet a broad variety of needs. As a municipality, the City should work expeditiously to update local zoning laws to address modern-day housing development needs and reduce regulatory barriers. This includes moving ahead with a change from minimum five-acre zoning in the Rural District to two acres to promote housing development.
3. The City has begun the process of reviewing zoning restrictions regarding residential development in the Commerce district. Advancement of new opportunities to provide multifamily residential development in the Commerce district supports the Committee's desired outcomes.
4. The Committee also recommends that the City help developers leverage all available development incentives to advance construction of multifamily housing units. The State of New Hampshire's *InvestNH* housing fund, for example, acknowledges the direct impact of the housing shortage on the local economy. It aims to stabilize the workforce housing market through grant programs that incentivize development and creative regional solutions targeting low- to moderate-income housing. It specifically provides grant funding to address costs caused by inflation, supply-chain constraints and rising interest rates. Eligibility requirements include construction of new residential units and affordable rents.

This program also incentivizes multifamily housing development by providing funding to municipalities for demolition of vacant, dilapidated buildings and for new units of affordable housing for which permits are issued within six months of application. The multiple opportunities availed by State of New Hampshire programs to positively impact housing availability should be utilized to the full extent to both improve the regulatory process and to expedite affordable, multifamily housing construction in Keene.

5. In addition to multifamily housing, the development of new accessory dwelling units (ADUs) can provide creative solutions for a variety of housing needs and maximize the use of existing structures. The City's current regulations require no exceptions or special permission for ADUs. It is necessary, however, to review requirements and take advantage of opportunities to reduce barriers to entry for ADU development - such as minimum square footage and City water and sewer services. This is particularly important when considering the present high cost of construction. The opportunity to allow detached units may also incentivize more development.

In order to encourage development of accessory dwelling units, it is necessary to improve public awareness of specifically what can be done. This calls for a comprehensive, detailed, public, ADU-development educational campaign upon final review and update of ADU regulations.

Shelter Services

1. Continued provision of case management services is essential to improve opportunities for the unhoused to receive needed services that will pave the way for transition into short and long term housing. It is important to note that case management services are already in place and utilized to assist each and every homeless person in the community who opts to participate. It can be difficult, however, for people to secure required official documentation such as social security information, non-driver identification, birth certificates, bank statements, etc. There are also stigmas associated with mental illness and prior life experiences that can prevent people from choosing to engage in the case management process. A review of case management requirements should be conducted to identify and implement opportunities to reduce barriers and improve homeless engagement in the services and programs available. This should include evaluation of the possibility of a standard application as well as a review of the City welfare guidelines to add assistance to applicants for acquiring birth certificates, valid identification and other resources. A complete review of case management requirements will also require collaboration amongst other community agencies.
2. New Hampshire RSA 165, "Aid to Assisted Persons," provides guidance and requirements for municipal responsibilities in the provision of welfare services. There is a need to better define residency as it pertains to housing, shelter and other responsibilities of each municipality. Presently, when shelter or housing is provided by the City as required by statute, a funding request is made of the origin municipalities that recipients most recently resided in to cover the first thirty days of services. There was a recent effort by welfare administrators to create an ethics resolution that more clearly defines responsibilities of NH municipalities. The language of the ethics resolution should be added to the RSA 165 language to clarify expectations of each community.
3. The City has recently worked with the State to map service offerings and track services provided with partners and other communities. This should be happening at the State level, as well, and the State Homeless Management System should be updated to better track why people have become homeless which will better inform potential State solutions and assistance programs.
4. The New Hampshire Emergency Rental Assistance Program (NHERAP) presently provides funding for hotel stays when shelter and short term housing options are not available. It comes at a very high cost per week. It also lacks case management requirements that are essential to assisting with transitions to housing. Whether NHERAP and/or other alternative short term shelter options are funded going forward, the Committee recommends that case management services be required to connect all housing assistance participants with available services and, ultimately, transition to permanent housing. This includes assisting people who may experience barriers to housing options – such as those with criminal history or previous evictions, for example.
5. There is a need for more homeless outreach services by trained professionals who can build relationships, engage with, and successfully connect people to services and housing. The goal is

to build bridges to the services needed that make it easier and less intimidating for people to transition to housing. There has to be more effort to connect with those who stay in encampments and support transitions to safe, healthy, stable housing. The Committee recommends that the City increase outreach services in partnership with other local agencies.

6. There is a need to better support the needs of people in need of housing being released from hospitals and the jail into the community. The Committee recommends the City discuss this with representatives of the local jail, hospital and other organizations that interact with people who may be homeless to determine ways to better connect them with available services.
7. The Federal housing choice voucher program is administered locally and provides housing assistance to low income families. This can include assistance for single family homes, townhouses and apartments. It can provide property owners and landlords with guaranteed income, less vacancy and higher rents. There is some hesitancy, however, amongst property owners to participate in the voucher program which may be based on perceptions about both voucher holders and regulatory requirements. The Committee recommends that the City work with Keene Housing to conduct an educational campaign to improve property owner participation, expand low income housing options, and support advocacy at the State level that increases options for tenant use of housing vouchers and prevents income discrimination.
8. Safe parking programs may provide homeless persons living in their vehicles with a place to stay in their vehicles overnight. The ultimate goal is to provide a temporary safe space in the process of transition to stable housing. The Committee recommends encouraging a pilot “blue light” safe parking program involving Southwest Community Services, local churches, and other organizations willing to participate. This will include best practices such as outreach services, police safety checks, lighting, trash removal, bathrooms, training of staff and volunteers and additional measures necessary for the health and safety of all participants. The City will also play an important role in sharing information with the public in person at the Human Services Department and online about the availability and details of safe parking programs.
9. Homeless camping is not supported as an option for safe housing. Transition to temporary and permanent housing is what is needed. Current City Code does not allow for camping on City land, however, the Parks Director has worked with campers to allow reasonable flexibility when needed in transitioning to safe housing solutions. This includes connecting campers with community service providers. The Committee recommends that the City Code be updated to expressly provide the Parks Director with the opportunity to work with Human Services to transition campers.
10. The Keene Public Library began hosting office hours for human service providers to share information about their services with the public, provide referrals, and make community connections. Thus far, this has included Better Life Partners, The Serenity Center, Monadnock Family Services, Home Healthcare Hospice & Community Services, Monadnock Peer Support, House of Hope, and the Greater Monadnock Public Health Network – who have interacted with the public over 400 times since January of 2022. The office hours provide more opportunities to

connect people with the services needed to support, among other necessities, transition to safe and stable housing. The Committee recommends the continuation of the Keene Public Library collaborative effort with human service providers to encourage and expand public engagement, and deliver support via the services available in the community. In addition, it is recommended that messaging between providers be better coordinated and engagement be expanded where possible.

11. One of the concerns for the homeless population involves the use of hypodermic needles and the risk of harm to others if they are not properly disposed of. There are a few needle disposal services located at places such as the Serenity Center and the Doorway in Keene. The Committee recommends that the City evaluate existing disposal options, and, if additional options are necessary, identify possible public locations for installation of safe needle disposal containers.

Regional Coordination Opportunities

The purpose of this report is to identify specific actions the City can take to improve housing stability in Keene. There are opportunities for regional efforts, as well, however, which are identified here to promote opportunities to engage a broader effort in housing services and programs and to encourage City participation in regional solutions.

1. Housing development funds using a collaboration of local funding partners have been utilized in communities around the nation to provide financing opportunities to create new options. There is precedence for this funding model in New Hampshire's Upper Valley where eight employers are partnering with developers and housing agencies to build apartment buildings.

The Committee recommends that the City, together with local housing assistance agencies, investors, businesses affected by the housing shortage and experiencing a lack of workforce, and developers, explore collaborative local funding models that could help create new affordable housing options.

2. Another example of collaboration that provides an opportunity in the community is The Urban Institute's Collaborative Approach to Public Good Investments (CAPGI) which uses a multi-stakeholder coalition approach. The University of New Hampshire (UNH) is a knowledgeable local resource that may be available and motivated to help this community learn about ways the CAPGI model could be used to develop an ongoing housing stability model.

"This process happens within communities and uses local capital, stakeholder self-interest, and a collaborative bidding process to source and pay for new services that any single stakeholder could not support at scale, but are expected to generate community-wide benefits. CAPGI is unique in that funding for new investments does not rely on private investment capital (which expects to be repaid) or new government expenditures. Rather, it leverages the combined self-interest of existing community partners..." (www.CAPGI.urban.org)

The CAPGI model brings together housing, healthcare and social service providers to develop an enhanced, more streamlined and collaborative approach to providing person-centered supports and services that are important for individuals to maintain stable housing. It utilizes an economic incentives model for each agency to work collaboratively to provide individuals an element needed to meet their stable housing goal (housing, care coordination, mental health or substance abuse services, healthcare, benefits counseling, etc.) Agencies receive a percentage share of the financial savings due to reduction in duplication of effort and reduced health and social system costs as a benefit of working as part of an intentional CAPGI collaboration.

The Committee recommends that City staff work with community service provider partners to contact UNH and research the possibility of facilitating the CAPGI model in Keene.

3. It became abundantly clear in the data gathering process that there are many programs in place intending to provide housing development, assistance, services and funding. There is a real opportunity for better collaboration of resources that could make broader impacts possible. It would be helpful to expand efforts to review existing social services and housing initiatives, coordinate, and bring initiatives together to maximize impact.

Southwestern Community Services presently convenes a Homeless Coalition group with regular meetings of regional providers including the City. This established collaborative effort provides direction and momentum in reviewing community needs and service potential. Ideally, the group will formalize and involve all social service agencies across the region.

4. Housing stability is, in part, related to effective coordination of effort of all providers to meet people and families where they are and to develop person- and family-centered plans that may include complex care coordination. NHCarePath aims to avail opportunities to better accommodate complex support needs that can be engaged in existing living situations so that people can stay in their homes and still receive the long term care that they need. ServiceLink, New Hampshire's Aging and Disability Resource Center, is contracted by the State to convene NHCarePath meetings in the Monadnock Region, and this will help to connect various agencies and providers.
5. Case management services can vary significantly from person to person and family to family, and the services made available depend upon identifying the unique needs on a case by case basis. In many circumstances, individual needs and situations are assessed as a prerequisite to services and short term housing. Shifting to a person-centered entry approach where providers identify and assist people based on their specific needs, rather than placing that burden on applicants, has the potential to improve engagement and ease the transition to safe and secure housing.
6. A lack of public transportation options throughout the region limits effective housing solutions. Expanding opportunities for public transportation between communities can make more regional, affordable housing options available while maintaining access to essential healthcare and community services. When people cannot get to needed services, it is important that the

community support mobile support resources to bring the services to the people.

7. Timely, thorough and accurate data empowers successful planning. There is a need for more information from all New Hampshire communities to track which services are being used how often and to what end. The City is now participating in a new State program to improve data collection and analysis. Broader participation amongst communities and agencies will enable better planning in order to provide services and help people in the most effective manner.

IN CONCLUSION

Housing stability solutions are on the horizon but will take time, energy, and community investment. The City has already started to take advantage of opportunities to support much needed development. Acting on these recommendations will help the City secure short term funding opportunities and advance the important process of developing a variety of housing options. Ultimately, implementing the Housing Stability Ad Hoc Committee recommendations will provide access to stable housing, employment, and educational opportunities, support economic growth, and maintain Keene's high quality of life for all who live here.