

City of Keene
New Hampshire

JOINT PLANNING BOARD/
PLANNING, LICENSES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 13, 2023

6:30 PM

**Council Chambers,
City Hall**

Planning Board

Members Present:

Pamela Russell-Russell-Slack,
Chair
Emily Lavigne-Bernier
Roberta Mastrogiovanni
Armando Rangel
Kenneth Kost, Alternate

Planning, Licenses &

Development Committee

Members Present:

Kate M. Bosley, Chair
Michael Giacomo
Philip M. Jones
Gladys Johnsen
Raleigh C. Ormerod

Staff Present:

Jesse Rounds, Community
Development Director
Mari Brunner, Senior Planner
Dan Langille, Assessor

Planning Board

Members Not Present:

Mayor George S. Hansel
Councilor Michael Remy
David Orgaz
Harold Farrington
Randyn Markelon
Gail Somers, Alternate
Tammy Adams, Alternate

Planning, Licenses &

Development Committee

Members Not Present:

All Present

I) Roll Call

Chair Bosley called the meeting to order and a roll call was taken.

II) Approval of Meeting Minutes – January 9, 2023

Councilor Michael Giacomo made a motion to approve the January 9, 2023 meeting minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilor Raleigh Ormerod and was unanimously approved.

III) Virtual Presentation: City of Keene Housing Needs Assessment – The City’s consultant, Camoin Associates, will present preliminary data and findings and discuss project outreach efforts. More information about the Housing Needs Assessment project is available online at keenenh.gov/community-development/housing

Dan Stevens, the Director of Camoin Associates, addressed the Committee first to provide an update and overview of where they are with the City’s Housing Needs Assessment. Mr. Stevens stated that Camoin Associates is an economic development and real estate consulting firm based

out of Saratoga Springs, New York. He indicated that his colleague, Jordan Boege, is also present tonight. He indicated they have been working very closely with city staff and stated that they have completed quite a bit of data research and collected public input through a survey. They are now moving into Phase III of the project, where all this information is being used to create a Housing Strategy for the City.

He indicated some of variables that the data would show are population demographic changes, economic changes, job trends, current housing stock, and market trends. He indicated the community lines up with other communities but noted that there are some interesting demographic differences. With respect to commuting patterns, Mr. Stevens stated approximately 12,000 workers commute into Keene, while about 5,500 commute outside of Keene. He indicated there are various reasons people commute into a City and noted that affordable housing is one of those reasons.

He referred to a graph that showed the amount of housing constructed in Keene grouped by age and noted that the largest proportion of the houses were constructed in 1939 or earlier. He noted that the age of housing, the quality, and the condition is an issue for housing in Keene. He added the recent change in remote working and working patterns also have an implication of housing needs; the number of people working from home has increased between 2011 and 2021 – pandemic related impacts playing a large role in this.

Median Home Prices – From 2016 – 2019 the prices were pretty stable. The onset of the pandemic brought on a significant price hike (growing 45% in the past three years).

Rents – Rents have seen a dramatic increase, low income housing has increased from \$1,200 to \$1,500 per month.

Short Term Rentals – He noted that the prices of short-term rentals have stayed relatively flat – there are about 50 active rentals in the City right now. 28% are full time.

Mr. Boege addressed the community survey findings next. Mr. Boege stated there was a good response to the survey (354 responses total). 56% of the respondents were ages 55 or older and were spread across income levels between \$45,000 - \$135,000 per household. According to the survey responses, there were three top housing issues: cost of property taxes, cost of utilities, cost of rent/mortgage. 20% of respondents indicated that their housing is in need of major improvements/repairs. 37% indicated that current housing will not meet their needs for the next ten years. Over 50% also indicated they spend 30% of their household income on housing and 9% indicated they have had flood related damage to their housing.

Mr. Stevens addressed the Committee again and addressed the topic of affordability. A typical household in Keene would need an additional \$18,000 in income to purchase a typical home in Keene. For a typical worker, a home would need to be priced at around \$63,300 to be affordable. An hourly wage earner would need to make \$21 an hour to be able to afford a rental unit in Keene. There are many jobs in Keene that don't pay this rate and this is indicative of the housing gap.

Mr. Stevens stated they also did a quantitative analysis to determine the number of houses in need. He shared the following figures.

- There are 3,103 cost burdened households in Keene;
- There are 84 displaced worker households (ones who would prefer to live close to their employment but can't find something they can afford);
- 321 future household growth – looking ahead ten years at population growth;
- 274 households in future obsolete housing – in the ten years the portions of housing that would become obsolete;
- 59 households in substandard housing – households in inadequate housing conditions.

Mr. Stevens next referred to housing needs broken down by income level and housing type. He noted at the low income level of the spectrum is where most of the City residents are cost burdened – but there is housing need across the income spectrum. He indicated they also did a separate analysis of housing needs of households that need some type of new or improved housing situation. In terms of the new housing that needs to be added, it has been estimated to that 1,400 additional units will need to be added to the City in the next ten years (140 units per year). This number will be required to put a meaningful dent in the housing need and would require policies and procedures to make this happen. This number would be for both owner and renter occupied.

Mr. Stevens went on to say in addition to the survey, the consultant talked with quite a few stakeholders – Southwestern Community Services, Keene Housing, the Monadnock Interfaith Project, Keene State College, Cheshire Medical Center, and C&S Wholesale Grocers. Some of the themes they took away from speaking to stakeholders were the mismatch between income and housing costs, the City becoming an active partner to address some of these issues, the minimal room for new development within the city, opportunities for renovation of older housing stock, and the impact of lack of housing on employers.

In closing, Mr. Stevens stated that they are in the process of putting the housing strategy piece of the project together. They will be back before the Joint Committee on April 10th and at a Housing Open House at Hannah Grimes on April 20th.

Chair Bosley asked whether the consultant will have any ideas for policy changes to impact some of these findings at the next meeting. Mr. Stevens answered in the affirmative.

Councilor Ormerod referred to the 54 active short-term rentals and asked where this data was derived from. Mr. Stevens stated it comes from a data source referred to as Air DNA (private data source). This source scans active Air BNBS and provides the information. The Councilor asked about those rentals that were priced at nearly \$2800 and asked what size these rentals were. Mr. Stevens stated that the price may be that high primarily because of professionals displaced out of the community.

Councilor Jones asked Mr. Stevens if he was familiar with what urban economists call SMSA (“standard of metropolitan statistical area”), which looks at the City and what interacts with the City. Councilor Jones noted that housing is part of that. He felt if the outskirts of Keene are looked at, those statistics could change. Mr. Stevens stated when a housing needs assessment like this is looked at, it is correct if it is looked at regionally. However, the quantitative analysis focuses particularly on the City and informs city leaders about what they need to do. A housing needs assessment would not require the City to accommodate the needs of its neighbors. However, there

are exceptions to that. For example, when people are commuting into Keene for employment. In that case, the City is in fact shifting its housing burden onto its neighbors. Through this analysis, what they are trying to model is to bring those displaced workers back to the community.

Chair Bosley asked whether the consultants have done assessments for other communities in New Hampshire. Mr. Stevens stated this is their first assessment in New Hampshire, but noted that they have done one in Brattleboro. The Chair asked how Keene compares to Brattleboro. Mr. Stevens stated one of the items that stands out for him is the cost burden per household is relatively higher than he has seen in other communities – Keene does not have the highest, but the figure does stand out for him.

Councilor Giacomo asked what data is coming out of the survey versus what data is coming out of Air DNA. He used the example of homes that could use work and whether this number could be self-selecting or whether the consultants looked at the age of houses and their condition and based the number off of that. Mr. Stevens stated for that particular analysis, they did not go off the survey results; they look at the age of housing in the community, tax assessment data, etc.

Mr. Kost referred to the 3,000 houses that are cost burdened and asked what this number translates to in terms of percentage. Mr. Stevens stated it is about 1/3 of the homes.

Chair Russell-Slack referred to what Councilor Jones had stated and felt Keene should focus on surrounding towns and noted that Swanzey is proposing to build 400 units, which she felt would impact Keene's numbers. She also noted the Planning Board has approved projects that would be moving forward soon. She indicated that the entire State is looking at the housing crisis. Chair Bosley clarified from staff whether it was Southwest Region Planning Commission who recently completed a housing study for the region. Ms. Brunner answered in the affirmative and added all Regional Planning Commissions in the state are completing regional housing needs assessments, but noted that she wasn't sure when this was going to be completed. Chair Bosley stated it would be great if Keene could coordinate to request a presentation.

Councilor Ormerod asked that with respect to the cost burdened household, how that divides between renters versus homeowners. Mr. Stevens stated they have this number in the report but didn't have it available today. He added that a greater percentage of renters are cost burdened versus homeowners. Mr. Boege stated that according to census data, 34% of Keene houses are tax burdened, including 26.5% of owner-occupied households and just under 43% of renter households. Chair Bosley stated that she had seen data that indicated that there was significant increase in the cost of homeownership (around 45%) over the last four years compared to a 20% increase in the rental cost. She asked if the consultants had data on wage changes (are employers starting to catch up?). Mr. Stevens stated he will provide this information at the next meeting.

This concluded the presentation.

IV) Public Workshop

Ordinance O-2023-02 – Relating to amendments to the Rural District Minimum Lot Size. Petitioner, City of Keene Community Development Department, proposes to amend Sec. 3.1.2 of Article 3 of Chapter 100 “Land Development Code” (LDC) of the City Code of Ordinances to change the minimum lot size in the Rural District from 5 ac to 2 ac.

Chair Bosley stated the public comment at this time will be limited to three minutes. She indicated she will not tolerate any disrespectful language from anyone.

Community Development Director, Jesse Rounds, and City Tax Assessor, Dan Langille, were the first two presenters. Mr. Rounds stated the proposal before the Committee is to change the minimum lot size in the Rural District from five acres to two acres. He referred to a slide that showed areas in the Rural District with prohibitive slopes, land locked parcels, and wetlands removed (development potential in the Rural District).

Mr. Rounds stated a lot of public comment was received the last time this item was before the Board and noted that those concerns have been broken into five categories:

Impact to Rural Character – Concern that changing lot size would increase development along the main road and change the feel of the Rural District. Mr. Rounds stated that staff looked at the Land Development Code to see if there were existing regulations that would permit the Planning Board to protect that rural character. He noted that there are existing regulations that would protect rural character, including those addressing no cutter buffers, specifying where a house could be located, etc.

There are also more than 10,000 acres of Conservation Easements in the Rural District, which is land that will be permanently conserved and will never be developed.

There are also existing tax protections on properties that are in current use (which must be ten acres in size or greater) that have development restrictions on them.

Subdivision Regulations are another tool the Planning Board has.

Unwanted Densification – Concern that there would be more density seen in an area of Keene where density is not required. Staff recognizes there is densification required in Keene’s downtown and that is in fact happening. In addition, within the Land Development Code, there are controls to increase the distance between homes. There are also larger existing lots that won’t see densification.

Misplaced Development – Why does development need to be placed in the Rural District – why can’t it be placed in higher density areas of the City? Mr. Rounds stated the higher density areas are already seeing densification; the Planning Board and City Council amended the Land Development Code, which allows for residential dwellings to be located above commercial properties in the Commerce District and increased densification downtown. Accessory Dwelling Units were also encouraged, which is another tool residents can use to increase densification. Mr.

Rounds added what is being proposed for the Rural District are single family homes, which is a pattern of development that already exists in the Rural District that is just being repeated.

Environmental Impact – The concern is that development would have an impact on the environment – staff agrees with that. However, this is why there are environmental regulations in place, such as the Surface Water Protection and Hillside Protection Ordinances, which act to limit development in these areas. In addition to this, the State has its own restrictions. Another restriction would be if a lot cannot support a septic system – you cannot develop on that property. Mr. Rounds further stated that any homeowner can seek a conservation easement on their property, which is a private action and allows individuals to protect their land in the Rural District.

Mr. Rounds referred to a slide, that showed the parcels that would be impacted by this change. The parcels between four acres and 9.999 acres are the ones that would have a tax implication and they make up less than 20% of the parcels in the Rural District. The remaining parcels are either smaller than four acres and thus cannot be subdivided or larger than ten acres and are can therefore be protected from this implication by various methods.

Housing Benefits

- The City wants to allow for a variety of housing types – from studios all the way up to single family homes.
- Permit property owners to take advantage of additional unused acres – At the present time, anyone who owns five acres can't subdivide their property; however, under the new regulations they would be able to.
- Development will need to be sensitive to steep slopes and surface water restrictions – The Planning Board has the power to evaluate any of these potential impacts.

Mr. Rounds reiterated – the housing needs analysis showed that 4,500 houses were either cost burdened or considered substandard housing. Of the 1,400 units that were referred to, 300 of the units cost more than \$300,000 and are located in the Rural District. Mr. Rounds added the assessment showed there is a housing need across the entire spectrum.

Dan Langille, the City Tax Assessor, was the next to address the Committee. Mr. Langille indicated when that zoning changes happen, state law (RSA 75.1) requires that all properties have to be taxed at market value. He explained that market value is determined by how property is bought and sold and that is applied to all properties in the City and that is how the assessed value is determined.

He explained that assessments have to be adjusted annually to reflect changes. Mr. Langille noted what the Assessing Department does is that they look at the market potential of properties when determining their assessed value.

How is land assessed? You first look at the primary size of a lot. For example, with a seven acre parcel, currently five acres will be the primary site and two acres will be residual land. With the zoning change, two acres will be the primary site, four acres secondary site (potentially) and one acre will be residual land.

Mr. Langille stressed all conditions of a land are looked at, as not all properties can be subdivided even though it falls under the subdivision regulations. He added that the City would look at each parcel individually in the Rural District to see which ones can be subdivided and which ones cannot be subdivided.

Mr. Langille went over some hypothetical value demonstration: At the present time, an average five acre lot is valued at around \$65,000 and a two acre lot is valued at around \$45,000. With the zoning change, the five acre lot would increase to about \$85,000: The two acre primary site will be valued at \$45,000, secondary site around \$35,000 (80% of \$45,000) and the one acre residual land at \$5,000.

Mr. Langille indicated that even if this zoning change was to be approved next week, the values won't automatically change. Staff would have to look at each parcel one at a time. When revaluation is done, the City looks at one to two years of sales before parcels are reassessed. This concluded staff's presentation.

Chair Bosley asked for clarification on the current use rule; is it your housing lot and ten acres or just ten acres gives you the ability to put property in current use. Mr. Langille stated you need to have ten acres in its natural state; the primary house is excluded. Chair Bosley asked whether there are tools staff can provide a property owner if they have concerns about their assessment. Mr. Langille answered in the affirmative.

Chair Bosley stated her hope is that staff will take every measure to make sure the property owners who are affected by this change are assisted appropriately. Mr. Langille stated staff does its due diligence in working with property owners.

Mr. Kost noted even though zoning allows a site to be subdivided, there could be other factors that won't allow for that subdivision. However, this information won't be known until perhaps an engineering study is completed and land can't be properly assessed until such work is completed. Mr. Langille stated staff will look at topography, wetlands, etc. and make a determination. However, if additional information is provided to refute that, an adjustment can always be made.

Councilor Johnson asked if there are two homes on a lot but there is room only for one septic; could a septic be shared. Mr. Rounds stated if it is large enough, then they could have an agreement to share a septic system.

Ms. Lavigne-Bernier referred to the land value that went from \$65,000 to \$85,000, which increased the property by \$20,000 worth of value; she asked what this tax increase would be. Mr. Langille stated at the City's tax rate of \$31, the tax increase would be around \$620.

Councilor Ormerod asked if the zoning change went from five acres to two acres, how many more households could the City accommodate. Mr. Rounds stated in terms of properties under five acres, a number of those are vacant now and these could be developed without a variance. He added developing a property would be entirely up to a property owner, hence estimating this number might be difficult. Councilor Ormerod questioned why the City is doing this change, if it doesn't know what the benefits are going to be. Mr. Rounds stated any time a zoning change is made, the

City cannot predict the exact number of properties that would be impacted. The City does not make those market decisions. What the City does is that it provides an environment in which private property owners can make the best decision for their property. Councilor Ormerod stated he would like to see for the next meeting an estimated number.

Ms. Brunner agreed Mr. Rounds is correct, in that the City cannot create a build out scenario. She indicated there are many constraints in the Rural District, but there are many lots which can be subdivided and get two or more lots. What the City is hoping for with this change are for smaller subdivisions. The City is looking at the Rural District as the last area in Keene where single family homes can be built. In the rest of Keene, we are looking at more infill style development; single family homes being converted to two to three family or densifying lots. Chair Bosley stated Keene is recognizing its housing needs and is creating an environment to assist with this need; however, nothing can be forced.

Councilor Ormerod stated he agrees that the City cannot do a complete engineering build out analysis, but noted that there will be people who will do that work and come back to City. He stated he would like to at least have an estimate of what this is going to be.

Councilor Giacomo referred to the slide that included the prohibited features and asked if this map included current use as well as conservation land. Mr. Rounds stated he did not include this because it is not a permanent feature and went on to say that of the 13,000 acres in the Rural District, 10,000 acres are in current use. The remaining areas already have homes or constraints on them.

Chair Russell-Slack asked staff to explain what “current use” means. Mr. Langille explained that current use is when you own ten or more acres of land and you leave it in its natural state. It can be farmland, forestland, wetlands, etc. The benefit is that the landowner agrees not to develop it and there is a significant tax benefit to this. Councilor Giacomo clarified that when property is taken out of current use there are back taxes that would need to be paid and those funds are used to create additional conservation land. Mr. Langille stated it is not back taxes that need to be paid, it is a one-time penalty (10% of the value of the land at that time) and those funds are used to turn more land into permanent conservation land. Chair Russell-Slack asked how often land is taken out of current use and put into conservation. Mr. Langille stated he has been with the City for ten years and has maybe seen one a year.

The Chair next asked for public comment and reminded the public of the three minute time limit.

Mr. Matthew Hall of 431 Hurricane Road addressed the Committee and stated he heard Mr. Rounds indicate that the only change being proposed is the change from five acres to two acres and asked whether he heard reference to 50 feet of frontage. Mr. Rounds stated 50 feet of road frontage is the current requirement and will be the same requirement going forward as well. Mr. Hall stated the City is trying to address a housing shortage, which he indicated is to be applauded, but cautioned the City of creating hardship for property owners who own four acres and above. He noted that if these landowners would now have to hire an engineer to defend a mistaken assessment of development potential – this will be shifting the burden from one group to another. He did not feel this would be a step forward, but rather masking a problem. He questioned whether the comments and letters from the public regarding this zoning change that were presented as part

of O-2022-19 A and B will be included in the record for O-2023-02. He asked that these comments be included.

Mr. Hall agreed that current use properties do have a lower tax rate, but also have considerably lower burden on a town. They don't demand public services and create fewer demands on the public.

Ms. Pamela Parrish of 123 Meadow was the next speaker. Ms. Parrish stated she is active with the Monadnock Interfaith Project (MIP) and stated this statement is on behalf of MIP.

“One thing that most of us have in common is that we would like a safe, warm place to call home, that is in our price range. Home is a place to sleep, unwind, recharge and a home base that we live our lives from. Our community will be strongest if each of our residents has a place to call home that they can afford. As we know we are facing a housing crunch in Keene. Today on indeed.com there are 1,201 jobs available in Keene and on apartments.com has only 33 apartments open. This is a huge disparity. Another statistic many of us have heard is that Cheshire County currently has a .6% vacancy rate. A healthy rate is 3%. For us to thrive economically as a community, as families and people, we need enough housing. At MIP, we are grateful that the City continues to put forward smart zoning changes in all of our districts. We need to be intentional about this zoning that will allow for thoughtful development. We also recognize that historically, two acres was the lot size for Rural District in Keene until it was changed to five acres a few decades ago. Tonight we would like to share that we support the proposed minimum lot size change from 5 acres to 2 acres in the Rural District. We are grateful to hear and wish to encourage you to prioritize concentrating development to maximize affordable housing and to protect our environment and open space natural areas. We all need housing: young adults, seniors, families, daycare workers, school teachers, small business owners - all of the community. We appreciate the City of Keene's efforts and encourage you to support this proposed change.”

Ms. Parrish added that on a personal note, having to pay for something related to the potential development of your land is a little scary.

Mr. Tad Lacey of Daniels Hill Road addressed the Committee next. Mr. Lacey referred to what staff stated, which was that of the 1,121 parcels, 80% would not see their taxes affected, which means that 20% would be affected and he felt that was a lot of people. He felt a tier of people will be adversely affected and would be faced with having to deal with their mortgage companies to escrow their taxes, etc. He felt the City could be causing some damage to certain property owners due to this change. Mr. Lacey went on to say that most of the land that is available to build on is in current use and this is where the disparity lies. Mr. Lacey stated the issue is not the lack of land, it is providing landowners the incentive to make it available.

Ms. Laura Tobin of Center Street stated that change is always difficult, and people are afraid of their taxes increasing. She indicated that when she asked the Department of Health and Human Services what their budget was, it was indicated to her they did not have a budget, but that they bill the City when they have a need to house people. This means the more people that are housed, the higher the property taxes would be. She talked about the impact on roads due to people commuting into the City, which can also add to the tax burden. She felt the local economy will be

impacted when there is lack of housing for workers. Encouraging people to live in this community and supporting what has been created is important.

Rev. Derek Scalia of 16 Hillside Avenue was the next speaker. Rev. Scalia stated he is before the Committee on behalf of MIP. He stated he is in support of the proposed changes. He felt what is being proposed is not new for Keene – the Rural District had a minimum lot size of two acres prior to the change to five acres in 1977 to reduce Keene's population growth, which increased by 12% between 1950 and 1960 and then by 16% between 1960 to 1970. Once the lot size was changed, Keene's population growth fell to 4% between 1970 – 1980 and 2% in the 2000s. According to NH Business Review, the vacancy rate in 2021 was 0.9% and as of 2022 it has fallen to 0.5%. Because of this imbalance, the housing costs have increased, which is a huge problem. Rev. Scalia felt that the proposed change could make a difference to some people. Rev. Scalia felt doing nothing will only exacerbate the issue.

Mr. Nathaniel Stout of 446 Hurricane Road stated that nobody has mentioned the master plan, a project the City spent multiple years on, which included many participants. Mr. Stout stated he and his wife own 7.3 acres and stated he does not disagree about the need for housing and added that no one has mentioned demographics. He questioned what happens in 5 to 10 years, is the City going to sacrifice a radically rural area due to a trend?

Mr. Paul Roth representing Cheshire Medical Center began by calling the Committee's attention to Dr. Don Caruso's letter November 4, 2022. He extended his appreciation to the Committee's hard work and stated that Cheshire Medical Center is in support of this proposed change and felt this is a positive move for the economy and in turn for Cheshire Medical Center.

Mr. Walter Lacey of Daniels Hill Road referred to Dr. Caruso's letter and stated that he had questioned Dr. Caruso as to how much of the 50 acre site on Maple Avenue was going to be devoted to housing. Mr. Lacey felt Cheshire Medical Center has the opportunity to be part of the solution and felt this was not addressed by Cheshire Medical Center. Mr. Lacey went on to say there is a confusion about conservation easements – a conservation easement benefits the community.

Mr. Cole Mills of 68 Langley Road addressed the Committee next. He felt staff did not provide accurate information to the Committee – 219 properties times \$1,500 - if all those properties qualify to be subdivided, he felt that would equate to about \$340,000 total. He went on to say that going from five acre to two acre minimum zoning in the Rural District would not have the impact of providing affordable housing, but rather it will destroy a part of what makes Keene a special and diverse community. By reducing the minimum lot size to two acres, a 20 acre lot could potentially be subdivided to allow for 10 houses to be built where only four could be built under the current Rural District zoning, which has a minimum lot size of five acres. By reducing the minimum zoning with the CRD Modification, you place tremendous stress on a part of the City that is not served by public water or sewer, has a of lack sidewalks, has narrow scenic roads, and is furthest from police, fire, and public transportation services. There are also environmental and noise impacts to consider, as you will have increased traffic and activity in these quiet neighborhoods. Two acre zoning does nothing to solve the housing shortage. He indicated that not

having enough available land is not the problem. It does cost however, to drill a well and septic. Recently built homes on lots less than five acres have sold for between \$400,000 - \$550,000.

He further stated that currently other things that do not make Keene affordable is the cost to build; interest rates, which are now between 6%-7% for a thirty-year mortgage; and Keene property taxes, which even at 31.1% continue to be one of the highest in the State. For the past 30 years, Keene's population stayed between 22,000-23,000 people. During that time, we have had substantial housing come online, including privately owned college dormitories, senior housing, and the conversion of several industrial public buildings to apartments. During that time, Keene State College has dropped from about 5,500 students to 3,000 students. This has opened up housing in the center of the City that was once surrounded by students. The City is also not considering projects that have been approved, such as Whitcomb's Mill or 310 Marlboro Street. In other words, Keene has more homes now compared to the history of this community, but has had flat population growth.

He added that the reason Cheshire Medical Center is having a difficult time hiring people is very simply because there is large shortage. 200,000 nurses per year would need to be hired just to maintain a status quo. He felt that people are not going to move to an area where there is just one hospital, they will move to areas where there is more opportunity.

Chair Russell-Slack felt the comment by Mr. Mills regarding staff was an unnecessary comment.

Councilor Johnson stated that as indicated by Chair Bosley, nobody is being forced to do this and added that a committee similar to this committee has been working on this issue for a long time.

With no further public comment, the Chair closed the public hearing.

Councilor Ormerod felt the that the Rural District is under densified and even with under developed lots, if we were to count them, the proposed change would be worth it to get Keene to its 140 units per year. He felt that Keene is in a crisis and noted that Keene needs young people to get to something more normal. He stated that he supports this zoning change.

Chair Bosley addressed the Committee and stated the Committee has a few options tonight. At the end of tonight's meeting if the Committee wants to move this item forward to the PLD Committee, then it will need to make a motion to request a public hearing in front of the full City Council and the Planning Board will need to determine how this item aligns with the Master Plan. The other options would be to continue the workshop to amend the ordinance. The Chair stated this item has been addressed several times and she sees on a daily basis what housing constraints are doing to the economy as an employer and as a homeowner. She felt all zones need to be reviewed to help make housing available in the community. She stated there is a lot of need for single family homes in Keene.

Councilor Giacomo stated that his biggest concern going into this was the financial aspect and appreciated the Tax Assessor's comments tonight. He added that the tax burden on the 219 households is a concern for those households. He felt that if a property owner can demonstrate their property cannot be built on, the tax burden will not affect that property owner. He added that

switching from five acres to two acres is not as big of a change as he was expecting it to be. The Councilor stated that he appreciates Mr. Matthew Hall's letter regarding a compromised solution of going to four acres rather than two and stated he was open to looking at that.

Ms. Lavigne-Bernier asked whether going from five acres to three acres was an option. Ms. Brunner stated the reason staff proposed going to two acres is because historically it has been two acres. She added that as a good practice, the City should not have too many non-conforming lots in a district because it can cause hardship for property owners. 58% of the lots in the Rural District are less than five acres today and over a third of them are less than two acres. Hence, staff felt two acres made sense for historic reasons and wanted to get as few non-conforming lots as possible. Even with the change to two acres, there will still be about 35% of the lots that would be non-conforming.

Ms. Brunner went on to say that in the 1960's, the Rural District was referred to as the Agricultural District and at that time the minimum lot size was one acre, then it went up to two acres. Due to high population growth and the impact it was having on City services, it was changed to five acres. The City is now trying to undo this action, as the City has ample sewer services and other City services available and the school district is trying to find more students. She added that an analysis was not done to change it to three acres but stated that staff could work on that.

Ms. Lavigne-Bernier noted concern about the 2% of potential landowners that would be impacted by this change but felt that this would also benefit the community overall.

Mr. Kost stated that a lot of compelling discussion has happened today. The last comments made by Ms. Brunner really resonate - all of this is public policy and changes to the land use codes are put in place to accommodate certain things. In the past, we wanted to slow down growth, but now we are looking at the opposite scenario. Mr. Kost felt that this is public policy and an important aspect to keep in mind.

Chair Russell-Russell-Slack reminded the Planning Board that what it votes on tonight is whether this ordinance is consistent with the Comprehensive Master Plan and asked staff to elaborate on that. Ms. Brunner stated she does not have the exact contents of the master plan, but noted that it does address housing affordability, housing in general, the importance of open space, and protecting environmentally sensitive areas. Chair Russell-Slack stated that the Comprehensive Master Plan that the City is following is outdated and does not address the housing crisis the City currently is in. Mr. Rounds stated the master plan will be updated in the coming years and apologized for not referencing the master plan in his presentation, as he was focusing more on the comments rather than the history. He added that when this zoning change was addressed the first time, Ms. Brunner did touch on the master plan quite extensively.

Chair Russell-Slack referred to what Mayor Hansel stated in January, which was that he was on the Statewide Housing Stability Council, which kicked off the localization of the housing discussion and at that time the State was short by approximately 20,000 units. This was prior to Covid and since then the number has increased drastically. The Mayor stated he feels bad that the staff has to defend bringing this issue forward as it is, as it is a very controversial topic. He felt that this item, this particular ordinance needs to be brought before the Council to be voted up or

down and he hoped that staff will continue to give the community the opportunity to how it wants to handle this housing crisis.

A motion was made by Harold Farrington that the Planning Board find Ordinance O-2023-02 consistent with the City's Comprehensive Master Plan. The motion was seconded by Kenneth Kost and was unanimously approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Giacomo that the Planning, Licenses, and Development Committee request that the Mayor set a public hearing on Ordinance, O-2023-02. The motion was seconded by Councilor Ormerod. Councilor Jones stated he does not agree with the ordinance but he will vote to move it to a public hearing.

This motion was unanimously approved.

Chair Bosley stated that the public will have the opportunity to address this item as part of a public hearing before the City Council. After the public hearing, the item will go before the Planning, Licenses, and Development Committee for additional public comment before it goes before Council for a final vote.

Chair Russell-Slack stated that this is her last Joint Committee meeting, as her term ends with the Planning Board at the end of March. Chair Bosley thanked Chair Russell-Slack for all her service on the Board.

V) New Business

None

VI) Next Meeting – Monday, April 10, 2023

VII) Adjourn

There being no further business, Chair Bosley adjourned the meeting at 8:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Krishni Pahl, Minute Taker

Reviewed and edited by,
Megan Fortson, Planning Technician
Jesse Rounds, Community Development Director