

First Meeting of the Waterbury Area Housing Task Force

Wednesday, January 25, 2023 | 6:00-8:00 pm

Steele Community Room (28 N. Main St.) and on Zoom

MINUTES

Attendees: Mark Pomilio Jr., Kati Gallagher, Skip Flanders, Chris Balzano, Joe Camaratta, Lara Lonon, Madeleine Young, Eliza Novick-Smith, Alyssa Johnson, Steve Lotspeich, Mike Bard, Dave Lathrup, Tom Leitz, Sam Jefferson (Waterbury Roundabout)

Review agenda

By consensus, the group agreed to the agenda as proposed.

Introductions

Members of the Task Force and other attendees introduced themselves and shared their background and interest in the work.

Group norms and expectations

It was noted that as the first meeting, there was an opportunity to agree on shared agreements for the group. The group agreed to try to minimize the use of acronyms in the meetings.

Background and overview of existing housing-related initiatives

Alyssa provided an overview of the background of creation of the task force, including the guidance document approved by the Select Board. The group also reviewed the relevant portions of the Waterbury [Municipal Plan](#) and the housing goals on page 35, while also noting that the housing data in the plan is from 2010, and not representative of current conditions. Of particular note is the two goals from the Housing Plan, which are to guide the work of the group: 1) Ensure the availability of safe, decent and affordable housing for all current and future Waterbury residents; and 2) Create new housing in locations that maintain the integrity of neighborhoods while increasing density, respecting the natural environment, and minimizing the need for infrastructure improvements.

The group reviewed the role of the Planning Commission, which works on comprehensive planning for the community, which is enforced through zoning regulations. The group is currently working on a comprehensive [Unified Development Bylaw update](#), and received a state Bylaw modernization grant to support this work.

Skip reviewed the history of the Edward Farrar Utility District (EFUD), which manages the water and sewer system. The water system was created in 1882 and the sewer system in 1902. In 1904, the management of these entities was structured as the Village. EFUD provides water and sewer in [its service area](#), which, broadly speaking, covers the area in Waterbury from the Ice Center to the former Parro's gun shop, and from the Winooski River to the County Club of Vermont. The District serves approximately 1,100 water customers, with an additional 100 in Waterbury Center and 100 in Duxbury/Moretown. There is additional sewer capacity, so it is possible (and desirable!) to add additional residential users to the system.

Mark provided an overview Revitalizing Waterbury (RW) [Housing Study](#). It was noted that the study was conducted by the consultant Main Street group, and that the amount of short term rental reported was underreported in the study.

There was a review of [Downstreet Housing and Community Development](#) and the services it provides. The organization is involved in the development and management of multifamily, perpetually affordable housing developments, usually involving tax credits. They own and manage three existing properties [in Waterbury](#): The Seminary, Stimpson-Graves building, and South Main apartments. They also offer down payment assistant and other shared equity homeownership programs ([additional information here](#)). It was noted that the EFUD voters had approved the sale of 51 S. Main Street to Downstreet to construct new units affordable housing by a significant margin.

There was discussion of additional existing regional and state resources pertaining to housing, including the [Housing-Ready toolbox](#), [Montpelier Housing Committee](#), [Enabling Better Places](#) guides. Additional resources shared by the group included EFUD's UDAG revolving loan fund, historic preservation resources, and [Main Street America](#).

Terminology review

The group reviewed terminology. It was noted that the definition of “affordable” housing is generally defined to mean housing that, all included, costs no more than 30% of an individual or family’s income. It was noted that there is some movement to move away from the phrase “workforce housing”, as its use has in some cases inadvertently resulted in some folks associated people in other types of housing as ‘not working.’ The group supported the creation of a terms document to track terms that are frequently used.

Brainstorm potential first action items

The group shared interest and ideas. Those proposed included:

- Seeking additional survey data regarding the existing housing stock in Waterbury, including specific and more updated information about short term rentals.
- Partnering with Habitat for Humanity on a housing project in Waterbury.
- Pinpointing opportunities for affordable and/or multifamily projects in Waterbury, especially those that could involve the reuse of buildings.
- Outlining and defining success for the group and community- housing for folks who work and live in the community?
- Engaging with contractors and builders, especially those who may be interested in building smaller units, and/or accessory dwelling units (ADUs).
- Review potential barrier and interactions between zoning and housing.
- Consider ways to engage with state employees, especially those who live in Waterbury, in support of housing. There are already organized union employees, a number of folks who commute into Waterbury.
- Host community workshops on housing.
- Research ways to support increased accessory dwelling units (ADUs), particularly as new construction is so expensive.

- Consider ways to incorporate housing in to existing vibrant civic life in Waterbury – meeting people where they are already gathered at trails, the Fire Department, schools, etc.
- Investigate obstacles to housing for folks looking for housing and/or building in the Waterbury.
- Start with an analysis/“lay of the land” regarding obstacles to housing to understand how to make an impact.
- Consider the impact of home sizes, and emerging themes around tiny homes, the need to downsize, etc. Figure out ways to “Make small cool again.”
- Understand and define the populations that the group is looking to serve, and what affordable means to our community.
- Get updated housing data for the community from the Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA).
- Conduct research on what type of housing the community wants to see, potentially in conjunction with the Planning Commission.
- Consider Tax Increment Financing to support housing development.
- Explore creating a Housing Trust Fund.
- Assisting with outreach with the Planning Commission, particularly related to the bylaw rewrite.

Task force logistics

The group discussed structures and roles. Mark, Eliza, and Joe all expressed interest in providing support in more formal roles. Alyssa will follow up to discuss further.

The group expressed strong support for the coordination of a municipal webpage for information. There was also interest in an additional way to share documents and information in a collaborative format, such as a Google document.

The group agreed to revisit a regular meeting time, as there were some issues with Doodle poll, and not all are available to make the meeting time. There was support for keeping the 6 pm timeframe.

Other business

There was no other business.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 pm.