

TOWN OF BEDFORD
September 20, 2023
Bedford, A Place to Live – Government Stakeholders Meeting
MEETING MINUTES

A joint meeting of the Bedford Planning Board, Zoning Board of Adjustment, Conservation Commission, Energy Commission, Historic District Commission and Town Council was held on Wednesday, September 20, 2023, at the McAllaster Room, at the Bedford Public Library at 3 Meetinghouse Road, Bedford, NH.

Present: Charlie Fairman (Planning Board), Matt Nichols (Planning Board), Logan Johnson (Planning Board), John Nelson (Planning Board), Jon Levenstein (Housing Working Group), Priscilla Malcolm (Planning Board), Julie Donovan (Conservation Commission), Patricia Grogan (Conservation Commission), James Dumont (Energy Commission), Michael Strand (Town Council/Planning Board), Lori Radke (Town Council/Historic District Commission), Chuck Nettleship (Energy Commission), Kathleen Bemiss (Town Council/Conservation Commission), Alex Kellerman (Zoning Board of Adjustment), Matt McLaughlin (Energy Commission), Bob MacPherson (Zoning Board of Adjustment), William Carter (Town Council/Conservation Commission), Logan Johnson (Planning Board), Dave Gilbert (Town Council/Zoning Board of Adjustment), Chris Bandazian (Energy Commission), Christian Seasholtz (Bedford Resident), Daniele Gust (Bedford Resident)

Also Present: Becky Hebert (Planning Director), Kathleen Ports (Conservation Planner), Rick Sawyer (Town Manager), Mark Fougere (Fougere Planning & Development), Steve Whitman (Resilience Planning)

Mr. Fairman called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m.

The following discussion ensued:

Ms. Hebert welcomed the group and introduced the housing project “Bedford, A Place to Live.” She explained that this is joint meeting of the Planning Board, Zoning Board, Conservation Commission, Energy Commission, Historic District Commission and Town Council. The agenda has been posted in accordance with the right-to-know law and minutes would be taken. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss housing in Bedford.

Mr. Fougere explained the phases for the project and the timeline. The first phase is to review existing conditions, economic conditions, housing needs and market analysis, review key impacts of housing on government, conduct community surveys with Bedford citizens, government officials, the development community & employers. The results of the research will be presented at the first of three public engagement sessions planned for November 14th.

The second phase includes a regulatory audit of zoning and development regulations & buildout analysis, development of possible regulatory amendments, and the creation of an updated buildout analysis based on regulatory recommendations. A second public engagement session highlighting findings will be held in January 2024.

The third phase of the project is to present recommended changes at a third public forum along with an updated buildout analysis. Then the consultant team would work to draft regulatory changes that are supported by the community and develop public educational materials to explain recommended changes. The project will wrap up in June 2024.

Mr. Fougere explained that the project is supported by Bedford's Master Plan, which includes the following recommendations and statements:

- Develop a strategy to ensure that Bedford remains an inclusive and multi-generational community and evaluate opportunities to expand housing options for those of all ages and household sizes.
- Develop opportunities for the construction of 'Missing Middle' housing types, or more compact housing types compatible in scale with single-family housing, such as cottage-style development or townhomes.
- Continue to provide realistic opportunities for workforce housing development consistent with state law and regularly assess the effectiveness of Bedford's workforce housing ordinance.
- Regularly assess Bedford's zoning and land use regulations and existing housing stock to ensure the Town is responsive to demographic changes in the community and region.

Mr. Whitman provided an overview of the public outreach and engagement activities including an employer survey, resident survey, developer survey and prospective resident survey. He said the surveys are available online and linked to a project webpage on the Town's website. His team has also created a project logo and a postcard with a QR code to the project website and surveys. He explained that this joint board meeting is the first public event.

Mr. Whitman provided an overview of the group activity. He said that each table will be working to answer the discussion questions on the worksheets. Please have one person at your table take notes on your discussion. We will give the groups about 45 minutes to discuss the questions, then each group will report back.

The group discussion is summarized below:

1. What are the current issues or concerns you see related to housing in Bedford?

- The Performance Zone provides a location for increased development capacity including multi-unit apartment buildings.
- Bentley Commons as an example – more of this likely in the future – conversion of assisted living facilities or other commercial uses

- All for affordable housing as long as it is not in their backyard – need to de-stigmatize (put faces on who is being housed)
- Lack of available and accessible units
- What the housing developments look like should be left to the developers and the town and not through mandates – local control
- Need workforce housing – tough for young people, all people really
- If 95% of Bedford is built out, what tools exist for the remaining land?
- Increased density? Sewer and other infrastructure needs?
- There is a perception of inclusiveness in the regulations
- Infrastructure – and limited water, sewer, stormwater infrastructure in some areas
- Cost of land is too high and drives the prices up
- It is a shame that teachers, firefighters, and police officers can't afford to live here (and others in the workforce)
- Lack of options currently for new and existing residents to move into
- Need to understand the impact on services from additional units before moving forward with changes
- We need more housing? According to who? Need to explain this to the public
- Higher bar to get into the housing market
- Not enough affordable housing available for purchase
- Is our goal a more diverse population?
- Need more starter homes and places for people to downsize
- There are no easy options left for development
- Take the limited land that is left and look at ways to build at a higher density – apartments, cluster housing, condos

1a. Do these issues relate to both rental and owner-occupied housing?

- Yes

2. What types of new housing units are needed in Bedford to address these needs?

- Mixed use, single family and limited but deliberate multi-family apartments
- Apartments, condos – need to find places for these
- Cluster single family development opportunities on remaining land?
- Possible solution – reuse of buildings (adaptive reuse)
- Starter homes and downsizing opportunities

- Some young people not looking to rent an ADU
- Can't keep building rental units only because the renters can't get out of them – not building equity (Look at examples of a Limited Equity Model?)
- Manufactured homes, clustered homes, and cottage developments – including starter homes
- Missing middle
- Re-use of existing commercial space
- Mixed-use development was residential above and commercial below

2a. Where in town should these housing units be encouraged?

- Area behind Hannaford's? What could it look like? Maybe cottage development?
- By Walgreens?
- West side of town not much opportunity
- South River Road
- Performance Zone
- Service Industrial Zone
- Need to look at other areas where there are restrictions now – R&A Zone

3. Should the town encourage more rental units for families, workforce, elderly, and younger populations? If so, how?

- Yes, if the rentals are super affordable.
- Be careful with rental units for families – may impact schools
- Yes, need more options
- Incentivize by investing in the needed infrastructure ahead of time?
- Yes, but how and where?
- Not through state mandates – local control
- This is a challenge – maybe streamline permitting for desirable projects
- Other aspects of a development that should be encouraged and could earn streamlining, including energy efficiency, resilience, Vehicle to Grid infrastructure, cost effectiveness

4. Are there areas where multi-family housing units are currently not permitted and should be?

- Donald Street – three-unit example may not be desirable in existing neighborhoods

- Yes
- Performance Zone
- Look at R&A restrictions as well
- Service Industrial
- Inlaw apartments/ADUs – an option for some but not all
- The argument against housing used to be that housing would replace or prevent business development, need to better understand the impact on the town from a tax standpoint and impact on business

5. Are there areas where other types of housing units are currently not permitted and should be?

- Manufactured homes or parks
- Decrease acreage in residential zone if that is possible
- Yes
- Yes – same as #4 above - Performance Zone, Look at R&A restrictions as well
- Not sure
- Look at the requirement for 2-bedroom units - this is a state mandate. Need to better understand the true impact to the schools

6. Do you believe housing for all incomes is necessary to support existing and future businesses and their long-term viability?

- Yes
- What is the impact of multi-room units/apartments on taxes – based on school service impacts and others?
- Service Industrial Zone has infrastructure and older warehouses – is this an opportunity for housing? Some rezoning of adjacent land has happened already.
- Performance Zone – not much land left in this zone is suitable for industry. Might be suitable for housing though.
- Yes, if not it will just become transitory with no sense of community.
- Mega-mansions – will eventually change to multi-unit buildings – the zoning does not address this currently.

Mr. Whitman and Ms. Hebert thanked the group for attending. Mr. Whitman reminded the group that the next public event will be on November 14th at 6:00 at the Bedford High School Cafeteria.

Mr. Fairman adjourned the meeting at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted: Becky Hebert, Planning Director

