



Regional Housing Workshop



What We Heard



On March 29, 2013 the Nashua Regional Planning Commission hosted a Regional Housing Workshop to gather community input regarding the current state of, and future needs related to, housing in the region. Members of the public were invited, as well as planners, planning board members, developers, real estate professionals, representatives from relevant state agencies and advocacy groups and other interested individuals and organizations. Participants were divided into three breakout groups where they focused on major issues related to housing including Supply, Demand and Existing Conditions, Affordability and Access to Opportunity. Several speakers presented on existing conditions, demographic projections and state and federal statutory requirements including Ben Frost of the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority (NHHFA), Chris Wellington, fair housing consultant, and NRPC staff members. Participants then brainstormed and identified *what worked* in the region, *what needed improvement*, and *regional needs* related to each topic area. Staff facilitators noted this input in writing as well as in a shared spreadsheet through the use of iPads.



Ben Frost

In a Nutshell:



Across all breakout groups, several dominant issues emerged. Participants expressed satisfaction with the region's urban and rural balance and noted that housing diversity was abundant in many areas. Participants expressed appreciation for the region's commitment to preserving community character and pointed to the mixed-use nature and diversity of housing options in Downtown Nashua and Milford as models for the rest of the region. Participants also noted many areas of concern, including that affordable housing options were too few, that zoning and land use regulations were often burdensome, and that housing was situated too far from employment and activity centers. Participants noted more transportation options as a regional need and consistently called for more flexibility in zoning and land use regulations to incentive mixed-use development and a greater diversity of housing types.

Supply, Demand and Existing Conditions

Workshop participants discussed different features and limitations of the region's existing housing supply and how well it was positioned to meet future demands and needs associated with the region's changing demographic profile.

What Works:

- Good supply of rural, single-family housing
- Strong sense of community character
- Prevalence of housing options for seniors
- Open space and good schools make region attractive
- Excellent downtown models in region, such as Nashua and Milford
- Good public transit access in some areas
- Housing is attractive and neighborhoods are desirable



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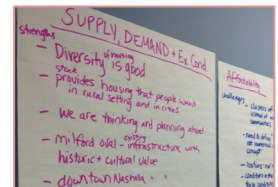
What We Heard



Supply, Demand and Existing Conditions, Continued

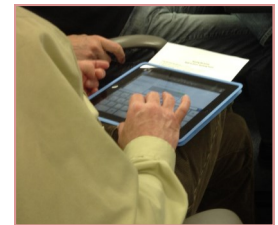
What Needs Improvement:

- Zoning is outdated, constricts supply
- Many towns don't offer housing diversity
- Minimum lot sizes can be too large
- Senior housing may be saturated
- Too many vacancies from foreclosures
- Need for more rental options
- Lack of small housing units
- Land use regulations need to reflect current conditions



Regional Needs:

- Land use regulations and zoning should be more flexible and accommodating of current conditions
- There is a need for public education about multi-family housing, what it looks like, and contextual options
- Community water and sewer should be extended to accommodate new housing
- Need to build with all age groups, family sizes in mind



Affordability

Workshop participants discussed regional assets and barriers to the availability of affordable housing options in the region.

What Works:

- There are excellent resources available related to home-buying, financial help and credit maintenance
- Many towns have a good selection of affordable options in accessible areas
- There are good opportunities in region to retrofit homes to meet multi-generational needs



"We should consider incentivizing other forms of housing the same way we have already with senior housing."

-Janet Langdell
Town of Milford

What Needs Improvement:

- Land use regulations can constrict affordability
- More housing in accessible areas
- Clustering affordable housing together in low income areas is segregation
- Access to affordable housing is limited by transport and credit issues
- Affordability threshold is too high
- Some towns /cities shoulder disproportionate share of affordable housing



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Affordability, Continued

Regional Needs:

- Need to better define a town's 'fair share' of affordable housing
- Economic opportunity must be linked to affordable housing
- Need to reorient land use regulations to support affordable housing
- Need for more financial literacy programs
- Need to incentivize mixed-use development

Access to Opportunity

Workshop participants discussed housing choices in the region relative to areas of opportunity. In this context, areas of opportunity include those where opportunities for employment, recreation, education, child care, health care, infrastructure and natural resources are prevalent. Participants also discussed how existing regulations and zoning ordinances affect housing choices in safe and opportunity-filled areas.

What Works:

- Excellent access to Manchester Airport
- Nashua Transit System functions well
- The region's high median income is a sign that we are doing well economically
- Strong commercial options and tax base in region
- Excellent school system across region
- We have excellent downtown models in the region

What Needs Improvement:

- Median incomes differ significantly by town or city
- Many parts of the region are not walkable
- Need to attract young people by focusing on better options in transportation and nightlife
- Land use regulations can inhibit growth

Regional Needs:

- The region needs to better embrace the trend of baby boomers and young people moving to downtowns
- Need to attract more artists and professionals in creative fields
- We should consider micro-housing and assess our regulations to encourage it
- Need for more political support of affordable housing and its relationship to economic development
- Need to develop a plan about how to handle our supply of large single-family housing in a market where consumers are demanding smaller living spaces
- Need to make investments to expand broadband access
- Need for more housing options in accessible, mixed-use areas
- Housing design standards should support community character but also be responsive to market needs
- Environmentally sustainable housing is needed
- Transportation costs need to be factored into housing costs
- Need for investments in schools, particularly in low income areas

