

Housing Committee

Committee Members: Amanda Spears (chair), Amy Coletti, Bill Fink, Bill Wightman, Denise Preston, Donna Holdman, HB Martin, Peter White, Rosa Whipple, Sheryl Rich-Kern, Steve Horan

Project description:

On October 28, 2024, members of the Sunapee Harbor Riverway (SHR); the Sunapee Heritage Alliance (SHA), the Town of Sunapee and concerned citizens met at the Livery building in Sunapee Harbor to discuss Plan NH's report on the Sunapee Community Design Charrette (April 12-14, 2024).

Several committees were formed by this initiative, one of which was the Housing Committee. Its assignment, like the other committees, was to review the Charrette report with a specific focus to determine how to address concerns outlined below.

Summary of housing concerns**Sunapee Community Design Charrette - April 12-13, 2024**

Sunapee Heritage Alliance (SHA), with support from the Town and SHR hired Plan NH in Sept. 2023 to identify issues in and around the Sunapee Harbor area related to economic development, traffic and more. They sought assistance addressing:

1. **How to stimulate and sustain year-round economic development in the Sunapee Harbor area** (dining, shopping, recreation that benefits residents and tourists).
2. **What to do about underutilized buildings and spaces** (with repairing and restoring buildings while preserving historic significance).
3. **Improve navigation** to and around Sunapee Harbor (attracting visitors and improve navigation for pedestrian and vehicular traffic).
4. **Reconfigure Route 11** (for safety and connectivity)

Housing concepts

Sunapee residents and leaders expressed concerns related to housing and housing affordability during all three listening sessions.

Residents want to:

- **Age** surrounded by friends and family.
- **Afford to live** in Sunapee. (They cite there is a lack of 'right-sized' and 'right-priced' housing for various income-levels and life stages.)
- **Address concerns that available homes** are being purchased as second homes or used as STRs, adding to the stress of inventory for current and prospective full-time residents.
- **Maintain housing solutions that fit the historic character**, and "quaint New England" feel of the community.

Housing Committee Task Force objectives:

- Assess the current housing supply
- Explore regulatory barriers
- Seek opportunities for type of housing the community needs and desires
- Research grant opportunities and other resources to support the housing goals

Options to increase housing options already exist ***but are not all applicable to the project area of this charrette.*** A housing committee can more broadly study the housing needs in Sunapee and recommend *two main design concepts*:

- Mixed Use and Compact Design
 - Create cottage-style homes on small lots
 - Is possible (although challenging) if appropriate density is allowed through local land-use regulations.
 - Consider creating an overlay district where appropriate density is allowed
 - Assess available land as part of public-private partnerships
 - Consider inspiration from other towns that created municipal partnerships for specific demographics (such as workforce, municipal employees)
- Conversions
 - Create cottage-style homes on small lots
 - Convert existing single-family homes to duplexes, triplexes, or quads
 - Advantages include:
 - Multi-generational living
 - Better use of oversized homes
 - Additional units make residences more affordable.

PLANNING and ZONING overview:

- Sunapee is poised for sustainable and controlled growth (2010 Master Plan)
- Regulations need to be fair for all
- Land use and Sunapee vision are not aligned
- Inconsistent standards (what does “adequate for safety” really mean)
- Regulations don’t match existing conditions, creating the need for special exemptions.

Recommendations (made by Plan NH):

- Dimensional:
 - Lot size amendments
 - Setback changes
 - Overlay districts
 - Replace min/max lot sizes with floor ratios to manage density
 - Reduce min road frontage
 - Apply to State for urban exemption from Shoreland Water Quality Protection Act (SWQPA).
 - Maintain stormwater management practices.
- Process:
 - Clarify planning and zoning regulations, making standards measurable and not wide open to interpretation
 - Streamline site plan application and approval process
 - Allow for small and low impact applications, such as remodels
 - Conduct historic building inventory and registry and/or historic village district
- Incentives:

- Allow historic buildings to become eligible for grant funding and federal tax credits
- Establish a Village Improvement District to help plan and fund infrastructure improvements, boat and bike amenities, etc.

Forward Sunapee - Housing Committee findings

This committee of 11 Sunapee residents is chaired by Amanda Spears and has met four times (approximately once a month from Nov. 2024 to Feb. 2025). Members have summarized findings related to needs, inventory and efforts from other towns.

Needs:

- We are not certain where the predominant needs are – young families or simply those in the workforce (teachers, firefighters, police and other municipal workers)
- Sullivan County median income, as per latest [American Community Survey](#)
 - Median household income (in 2023 dollars) 2019-2023 is \$75,929
 - Persons in poverty, 9.1 percent
- Some suggest it is the cost of construction – and not town regulations – that prohibit affordable housing
- Do town voters want to convert larger homes into two and three-family dwellings? What are the downsides to greater density?

Inventory – Properties for sale or rent on Zillow as of 1/5/25:

- For Sale: Under \$500K = 1 (\$340K - 3bdrm/2bth)
- For Rent:
 - Ten are under 3K/month; Four are under \$2k/month
- No low-income housing in Sunapee
- 15 outside of Sunapee (7 are senior housing)
 - Newport – 6 (see descriptions below)
 - Claremont – 7
 - Warner – 1
 - Windsor, VT – 1

Known housing projects in Newport:

- [Spring Street workforce housing project](#) (see definitions below)
 - Developer - Avenir Development Group Ltd., Walpole, NH
Jack Franks, CEO (Planning & zoning permits applied for in 2020)
 - 42 units / Workforce Housing project
 - Estimated cost - \$13.1 M
 - Rents below market rate
 - Max household income: 60% or less area median income
 - Federal Affordable Housing tax credits (approx. \$8M + additional Invest NH program funds) contribute to funding the project and are issued by the NH Housing Finance Authority (NHHFA). Project makes a PILOT payment (in lieu of taxes) to Newport (expected to be approx. \$100,000 annually).
 - Construction now complete with residents
- [Sunapee Street mill building](#)

- Developer - DRSWM Limited Partnership of NH - Agent: Jon Livadas
- Property Management: Elm Grove Companies of Manchester (responsible for credit, criminal/background checks and verified income)
- 70 unit / Workforce Housing project
- Estimated cost - \$17 M
- Building is on National Historic Register
- Rent eligibility: Min. Income: \$40,000 / Max Income: \$60,000 or 60% of area median income.
- Town eligible for \$700,000 of Invest NH funds / Other funding sources include NHHFA funds.
- Expected completion is first quarter of 2025.

DEFINITIONS

- *Workforce housing*—housing that's "affordable" for:
 - Renter family of 3 making 60% of Area Median Income.
 - Owner family of 4 making 100% of Area Median Income.
 - Does not include age-restricted housing.
 - Does not include developments with >50% of units having less than 2 bedrooms.
 - Affordable—no more than 30% of income should be spent on housing (rent + utilities; or mortgage principal and interest, taxes, and insurance).
 - Reasonable and realistic opportunities
 - Economically viable workforce housing.
 - Collective impact of land use ordinances and regulations.
 - Natural features and market considerations may be beyond the control of a municipality.
 - Multi-family housing—5 or more dwelling units.
- Low income housing categories
 - Public housing (owned/operated by Housing Authority)
 - Section 8 - Rental Assistance
 - Project Based Section 8
 - LIHTC - Low Income Housing Tax Credit
 - VLIHD - Very Low Income Housing Development

Other info from the Housing Committee:

- Newport Planning & Zoning (based on an interview with Christina Donovan)
 - NH is short by 25,000 dwellings
 - NH's supply for low-income, workforce, market rate and senior housing is deficient
 - A healthy town has these four types of housing for teachers, police, firefighters, town employees, hourly wage earners, seniors and professionals.
 - Process:
 - Developers approach towns with interest in specific properties for specific types of housing.
 - Developers submit applications to planning & zoning.
 - Cite incentives for town and explore variances for non-compliant properties.
- Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission (UVLSRPC)

- See [Keys to the Valley Report](#)

- **Municipal Details for Sunapee, NH**

Population:	3,404
Households:	1,553
Owner Occupied Households:	1,409
Renter Occupied Households:	504
Seasonally Occupied Households:	962
Median Year Built:	1980
Median Household Income:	\$63,750
Poverty	6%

- **More housing info**

- Development of high density housing is almost always connected with municipal services (water/sewer) and most Sunapee land does not have this access
 - Construction costs double every 10 years (was \$350/sqft - now \$600/sqft)
 - Sales:
 - Small units (730 sqft and less = \$400,000)
 - Large units (1000 sqft and greater = greater than \$400,000)
 - Med. density = 10-20 units /acre
 - Zoning allows 4 units / acre
 - Studio apartments are renting for \$2,000/mo.
 - Family Housing Cost formula: one third of total income
 - Family Income = \$150,000 / \$50,000 housing costs
 - Individual Income = \$75,000 / \$25,000 housing costs
 - Sunapee Zoning has regulatory but not financial incentives for construction of higher density housing. State funding allows for that.
- Links to Sullivan county and statewide statistics
 - [Sullivan county population](#) and economic statistics
 - [USAfacts.org](#) – Sullivan county
 - [NH Fiscal Policy Institute](#) – Growing population and changing demographics

Summary

While the Charrette identified four areas of focus (see top of page), the Housing Committee has wrestled with how the housing supply in the harbor might need to change.

Does the committee address housing for the entire town or only for the harbor?

Does the harbor need more housing, or housing of a different type (for example conversion to two-family dwellings)?

The Housing Committee would like input from the steering committee to further define its purpose and how it can be helpful.