



DOVER PLANNING REVIEW

AN UPDATE FROM THE OFFICE OF PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



March 12, 2021

Welcome from the Planning Director

How do you follow up a [three-part series](#) about what city planners do? With a timely topic: affordable housing.

It is an important topic with impacts across the board. How do you build community? Affordable housing. How do you provide vibrant economic development? Affordable housing. How do you promote healthy living and environmentally sensitive development? Affordable housing. How do you promote diversity of thought and action? Affordable housing. Finally, how do you ensure that we continue to be a place where you can grow up, move out of your parent's house, buy your own, raise a family, have those children move out, and age in place? Affordable housing.

This topic isn't about creating a place for those people; it's about creating a place for all people.

Enjoy,

Christopher G. Parker AICP
Assistant City Manager: Director of Planning and Strategic Initiatives

Upcoming Meetings

Energy Commission, 3/17/2021

The [Energy Commission](#) is meeting on Wednesday, March 17, to:

- Review options for implementing the Energy Report

The meeting begins at 5:30 p.m. in the Council Conference Room at City Hall and is open to the public.

The full agenda is [available here](#).

Zoning Board of Adjustment - No meeting

The [Zoning Board of Adjustment](#) typically meets on the third Thursday of the month. However, there were no applications for the ZBA this month, so a meeting was not scheduled.



Results of Last Meetings

Planning Board, 3/9/2021

The [Planning Board](#) met for a regular meeting this past Tuesday, March 9. At the meeting, Planning Board members:

- Approved a request for site plan approval for 44 cottage-sized units at 54 Back River Road.
- Approved a request to subdivide 64 Littleworth Road to create a lot off Crosby Road.
- Continued a request for a lot line adjustment at 26 Bellamy Road to the March 23rd meeting.
- Approved a request for a three-lot subdivision at 51 Bellamy Road

The meeting can be watched by clicking the image above or at this link:
<https://dovernh.viebit.com/player.php?hash=8bmuKbyGPvdH>

The next Planning Board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 23.

Conservation Commission, 3/8/2021

The [Conservation Commission](#) met this past Monday, March 8. At the meeting the Commission:

- Reviewed and endorsed a Conditional Use Permit for Michael Runey of Portsmouth Christian Academy, to remove and replace an existing drainage outfall within a 50-foot wetlands buffer, with an impact of 320 square feet to the wetlands buffer at 50 Seaborne

The meeting agenda and minutes, including an audio recording of the meeting, are available [here](#).

In-depth: Affordable Housing

Having diverse and affordable housing options is a timeless need. Affordability can mean the cost to buy a home/unit or rent one. It has many implications, and there is a need to be constantly aware of what the market is like and how times are changing.

On March 3, the City Council [had a workshop](#), which included a conversation about affordability. For the special topic this week, I want to cover the background about housing affordability, review opportunities Dover has in place, and ones we should be looking forward to.

Affordable housing: the background

Housing costs are tied, in part, to what I consider the 5 L's: Land, Lumber, Labor, Lending and Legislation. Land is the base. Without land, you don't have a place to build. In Dover, housing lots range from \$120,000 to \$160,000.

Lumber stands for all materials needed to build a unit. In the past few years, material costs have escalated for a variety of reasons. The next L is labor. If you haven't tried to find a tradesperson recently, you are lucky. The trades have suffered from a lack of employees over the past decade, and their rates have increased as availability has decreased. Calculating the price of lumber and labor, the cost to build a home is about \$184-\$190 a square foot.

Lending is the portion of providing financing to both builders and home buyers. Finally, Legislation looks at zoning and other regulations that govern residential construction. Legislation is the only area the City has control over.



I discussed affordable housing at the March 3 City Council workshop, which you can watch by clicking the image above or this link: <https://dovernh.viebit.com/player.php?hash=dIjT0wcdWz1g>

To give some context, New Hampshire is seeing an increase in population, though home construction is down and has been since 2008. In the 10-year period from 2010 to 2019, the state added approximately 32,000 residential units, with 12,000 built within one of New

Hampshire's 13 cities.

Dover added the third most units in that period: 1,234, while the state average was 140. Interestingly for Dover, there were 300 more units created in the previous 10 years -- 2000 to 2009. Out of the past 5 decades, 2010 to 2019 was the fourth-lowest level of construction. The period between 1990 to 1999 was the lowest.

Current affordable housing tools

As noted above, the City really can only impact legislation. To that end, we have focused on density, keeping an eye on supply and demand.

In Dover, we allow:

- Multi-family housing in over half of the City.
- Manufactured housing in most residential areas.
- A variety of natural density throughout the City.
 1. In more urban areas, we allow 1 unit per 2,000 square feet of lot size, to 1 unit per 40,000 square feet in more rural areas.
- Rooming houses in certain zones.

Another option Dover provides is incentivizing affordable housing through our Transfer of Development Right ordinance, which allows property owners to purchase density. There is a variety of options, with some homes being size restricted. In 2020, a provision was included to allow a density increase if rent rates are restricted. Another change was to allow going above the fifth-floor limit downtown if the additional units meet Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Fair Market Rent rates.

Since 2010, Dover has increased density by:

- Removing density calculation requirement downtown.
- Offering a range of density (2,000 to 4,000 square feet per unit vs 5,000 square feet) in the Gateway District now.
- Lifting the density limit requirement when units are rents are restricted to HUD Fair Market rates.
- Allowing bonus density to be created (1 unit/2,000 square feet of commercial built) in industrial zones to incentivize commercial growth with proximate employee housing, which was also added in 2020.

Dover has recognized the value in creating mixed uses, which is a blend of commercial and residential use. The community has created zoning that allows commercial on the first floor with residential above in most non-residential zones and in the Residential/Commercial Mixed Use Overlay District. This allows a higher density with mixed-use buildings in commercial zones, and in selected areas like Pointe Place off Dover Point Road.

Dover has allowed Accessory Dwelling Units — or ADUs — since 2010. These are “in-law” apartments or units and were put in place before the state model was created; in fact, the state’s model was informed by Dover’s ordinance. Dover has allowed Customary Home Occupations, which in many cases, increases options for live/work. Finally, Dover does not have a “family” requirement for single-family homes, nor do we prevent private leases between parties for rooms. As long as the life safety code is met, you may have multiple people sharing a home.

How Dover is looking to remove barriers to affordable housing

On [February 9, 2021](#), the Planning Board posted zoning amendments to reduce barriers to housing availability. These changes include allowing smaller homes to be built without zoning relief on non-conforming lots, allowing more than one ADU if the additional ADU is rent-restricted, and allowing two-family homes by right in all single-family zones if the home looks and operates like a two-family home. This will allow for increased density and the opportunity to create housing options for people while still having the look and feel of an established neighborhood.

Finally, in the urban multi-family district, we already allow the conversion of a two-family home into a three or four-family home by special exception. A posted Zoning Amendment removes dimensional requirements if the owner agrees the new units follow HUD rent restrictions. (I discussed the public process for posted Zoning Amendments to become part of the City's zoning ordinances in the [Feb. 12, 2021 edition](#) of Dover Planning Review).

Beyond the above, we are also reviewing the following policy changes, which will require City Council support:

- Identifying public land to make available to a developer for affordable housing.
- If the City has taken ownership of a parcel for a tax deed, it would sell those units to low/moderate-income buyers/users.
- Provide Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to landlords who have not updated their property with the requirement that they keep rents level for a period after the improvements are made

The intent of this week's topic is to not say how great we are, and how much effort Dover has made, so don't worry, life will be good. The intent is to say that policy/decision-makers have tools in place for property owners today. They also have the ability to add tools and revise those regulations for tomorrow. Dover is lucky to have decision-makers in its public boards who recognize the need to evolve and continue to make changes where needed, and to be aware of the impacts of those changes. I suspect that we will continue to monitor the impacts and make changes where possible to continue to provide diverse housing options in the community.

Book review

"The 99% Invisible City: A Field Guide to the Hidden World of Everyday Design" by Roman Mars, Kurt Kohlstedt

This is a very cool book. It has a great deal of information and is well researched, seeking out stories about how the infrastructure we don't see impacts the way we live. There are longer essays, factoids, doodles and bits of trivia thrown in to create an easily accessible text, and the illustration is fun and informative.

The structure can be idiosyncratic at times, but overall it feels reasonable and flows well. The flow does feel more inline when you see that the idea for the book is drawn primarily from a popular podcast.

The main downside is that a book like this really needs to show and not just tell. Overall, there really isn't an abundance of photos. Those that appear aren't in color, and while there are doodles, they would benefit from detailed illustrations. It's like reading this e-newsletter with no images. You can do it, but it really is improved by images. For the book, the real irony are the sections about using color for emergency vehicles and how colored markings improve pedestrian crossings. All are illustrated in black and white.

Don't get me wrong, there is a lot to enjoy here, and if you are an infrastructure geek, there is a ton to enjoy. Want to know about the power grid, how traffic engineering works, ways that roadway design impacts life? You'll be happy with this book.

Summary: The editorial content is interesting and entertaining, the overall flow lacks jargon and pretension, and the style is engaging. But if this was more a book and less a podcast transcript, it could have been much more rewarding, entertaining, and informative.



