

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
HOUSING TASK FORCE MEETING
Minutes of April 14, 2023**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Economic Development Director Tom Davis, Committee Members Erin Hicks-Tibbles, Lydia Petty, Blake Pierson, and Megan Roush. Also in attendance were Mitch Osiecki (Northfield Zoning Administrator) and guest Tom Bright.

The meeting was called to order at 3:15 p.m.

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled): None

- III. DISCUSSION:** Prior to the commencement of the meeting, Mr. Pierson wanted to address the meeting with some thoughts from his attendance at the last few meetings. Pierson pointed to resources that can be used to structure the Task Force. He also wanted to make sure that the task force is very judicious with members' time.

Mr. Pierson wanted to suggest that the Select Board was the best group to set the goals of the task force. He also spoke about representation and, looking at guidance from organizations like and including the Vermont Housing Finance Association (VHFA), suggested we needed representation from our regional planning commission, a local developer, a local landlord, someone from Norwich, and possibly other areas and that Select Board should be advising on that representation.

Mr. Pierson also wanted to address the lack of a specific group structure to date, and the need to elect a president (or chair), vice-president (or vice-chair), and a secretary. He feels that the task force should not personally be setting its own goals, again suggesting that the Select Board should be doing this.

Mr. Schulz addressed Mr. Pierson's remarks, explaining that the Select Board had tasked the town manager and economic development director with forming the core task force and coming back with some recommendations on its focus, as well as structure and composition. He noted that was the original intent of the core group.

Mr. Pierson reiterated that he felt the Select Board should be accountable at a high level for the goals of the task force and the task force should be accountable for supporting the pursuit of those goals.

Mr. Davis reported that the original purpose of this meeting was to take those next steps of structure and composition. He pointed out that the research the group has been doing since the formation of its core has been to better understand the specifics of the housing problem so that we could better inform the Select Board. Not having had a committee or department devoted to housing, the Select Board had not had any entity to provide the information they would need to take the lead on setting the goals of the task force. Mr. Davis pointed out that the group, in its recruitment of members, was looking for specific representation from similar areas as Mr. Pierson noted, but the reality was that it was unlikely that we would get all of the representation we are seeking mostly because of the time commitment required to be a task force member.

Ms. Roush said she agreed with Mr. Pierson that the guidance provided by VHFA is valuable as a toolbox.

Ms. Hicks-Tibbles said that we need to account for the realities of Vermont that there just aren't that many people to do the work. She also said that the group should set goals regarding things it can control. For instance, setting a goal of how many housing units to build in any given time period is something that the group has no control of. Hicks-Tibbles gave examples of goals that are achievable, including making sure important zoning regulations are in the town zoning bylaws, and finding funds to encourage the under-served to be part of the process. She noted the need to have all of the resources assembled by the task force in one place for easy access to the public and the Select Board.

Mr. Davis pointed out that any time we need expertise or guidance from outside sources like the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) or the Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation (CVEDC), they will provide time to speak and work with us. However, asking them to become members of this task force is unreasonable, given they represent twelve (12) other towns.

Ms. Petty noted that the Select Board understood the importance of addressing the housing issue, but no one there was an expert who was prepared at this point to give more specific direction to the task force. She also noted that the early stages of forming this group brought much more interest from the public on the topic along with so much to learn. Petty suggested that the group could continue to form its own structure and present goal ideas back to the Select Board, or they could seek more guidance from the Board. She also noted that the group could look to the town plan, which has guidance and goals.

Mr. Pierson said he would at least like to see the formation of a charter, who should be on the board, and then create the different functions of the group, so the group stays focused and organized and uses everyone's time efficiently.

Ms. Roush added "and task-oriented."

Ms. Petty noted that the core group of Ms. Hicks-Tibbles, Mr. Davis, and Ms. Petty (the "core group") were tasked to build this structure and could continue with a first draft of the charter, structure, and composition.

Mr. Bright suggested a hybrid structure that would adopt the best practices from larger communities that are realistic and balance them with the reality of the size of the community and the available resources. With such a structure, the task force and the Select Board share the role of goal setting.

Mr. Pierson summarized his thoughts by asking that the core group come back to the task force with a draft of the charter, the goals for representation, and if setting specific goals can't be set at this time, what are the three or five questions the group wants answers to and over what period of time.

Ms. Petty noted that the group had run over the specified time allotted for the meeting and that it should work toward resolutions and adjournment.

Mr. Davis noted that he felt that the task force had to make a philosophical decision after gathering all of the data to make informed goals regarding housing on whether it was going to focus on what the town needs or what some residents of the town want. He pointed out that there will be residents who don't want more housing regardless of need. He felt that the task force while gathering input, should consistently make its goals based on Northfield's housing needs.

Mr. Pierson then made a motion that the core group draft and approve a charter, the composition of the committee, including the number of members on the committee and their target backgrounds and tenure so that existing members can thoughtfully consider and approve members to the committee and can use the charter to create the goals of the task force.

Ms. Petty agreed with Mr. Pierson and suggested the group could elect a chair, vice-chair, and secretary at the next meeting.

Mr. Pierson's motion was not seconded, but Ms. Petty, Ms. Hicks-Tibbles, and Mr. Davis agreed that there was a consensus among the group that the core group would take on the task suggested by Mr. Pierson. The core agreed to have a draft ready for another meeting within two weeks.

IV. The matters originally planned for this meeting in the original agenda were tabled.

V. ADJOURNMENT. The subcommittee adjourned at approximately 4:18 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas G. Davis

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Economic Development Director