

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
HOUSING TASK FORCE MEETING
Minutes of December 9, 2022**

I. ROLL CALL. Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Economic Development Director Tom Davis, Committee Erin Hicks-Tibbles, and Committee Member Lydia Petty. Also in attendance were Mitch Osiecki (Northfield Zoning Administrator) and guest Shawna Foran.

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled): None.

III. DISCUSSION

a. Collaboration With Other Departments on Zoning Bylaw Modernization Process. Mr. Davis reported on communicating with the Chair of the Planning Commission, about zoning modernization. Mr. Osiecki said that the next Planning meeting would be talking about home occupations, accessory dwelling units, and short-term rentals. Ms. Petty asked if we knew the number of short-term rentals in Northfield. Mr. Davis said he had done it by looking at short-term rental (STR) websites. He said it is not a big industry in Northfield, given that the town does not have a ski resort or other tourist magnet. Ms. Petty said she didn't think the town should make it harder to offer a property as an STR, but rather get an understanding of what the "right" number of STRs in a community should be. Mr. Davis agreed, pointing out that Northfield doesn't have a hotel. Mr. Davis will be appearing at the next Planning Commission as a scheduled guest. He invited other task force members to join him or provide thoughts to share at the meeting. Ms. Hicks-Tibbles pointed out that zoning was the biggest factor that could impact housing development and suggested we keep an open mind and push down the tendency to overregulate before there is a problem. Ms. Petty suggested we find out from the Planning Commission the best ways to communicate with one another so that they are apprised of what we are discussing and are the best moments for us to have a joint meeting. Ms. Hicks-Tibbles suggested the group invite the Planning Commission to join the group for the January meeting when Seth Leonard from the VHFA will be attending to inform us of the latest developments in housing in Vermont, having Mr. Leonard speak first so that any Planning Commission member who chooses to attend have the option of leaving the meeting after his presentation

b. Housing Needs Assessment Follow-Up: Mr. Davis informed the group that a new housing needs assessment, last completed and distributed by Downstreet Community Housing and Development in 2016, will be available within a week or two and will be shared with this group, the Economic Development Subcommittee, and the Planning Commission. Ms. Hicks-Tibbles asked if anyone knew what the homelessness situation was in relation to the housing crisis. Ms. Petty said that she had been studying this issue and that central Vermont is estimated to have 450 homeless citizens. The need for tiny houses as an option was discussed in relation to this topic.

Ms. Hicks-Tibbles pointed out that another issue was citizens finding the money for the first and last month's rent as a deposit. There was a discussion if the community revolving loan fund could be used to assist with this problem.

- c. Mission/Vision Statements:** Ms. Hicks-Tibbles suggested that we complete filling in the remaining available positions on the task force before moving forward with finalizing the mission and vision statements. The group agreed. Ms. Hicks-Tibbles also suggested that we set a deadline for information gathering to help the group establish the final form and function of the committee.
- d. Areas of Focus –** Ms. Foran asked if there was a specific focus on the types of housing the group was focusing on. Mr. Davis explained the needs are across the board, including homeless and affordable housing, market-rate rentals, and single or multiple-family dwellings. Ms. Foran asked how many abandoned properties in Northfield could be recaptured. Mr. Schulz said that there are about 8 to 10 at any given time.
- e. Task Force Composition – Round 2:** Discussion continued regarding the final composition of the task force. Ms. Hicks-Tibbles noted that the group should include a resident from Northfield Falls. She also asked if it was possible to have affiliate memberships where people who can't make the usual meeting time of the task force, an alternate meeting time could be created for that specific group. Ms. Petty said that if the group has potential members that could not serve because the set meeting times were prohibitive, that the task force could adjust its meeting time. Petty said that, during the recruitment process, the task force should not rule out changing meeting times in order to attract potential members. Discussion about the possibility of stipends for members with childcare or other costs was discussed. Creating a deposit assistance fund with some of the town's ARPA funds was also considered. Discussion of a "more formal" designation for affiliate members was discussed. Mr. Schulz felt the group should focus more on the core members of the task force first. Mr. Davis said he wanted to see members who are willing to take on tasks or projects that they would work on between meetings. The group discussed posting a notice to the public asking for people who are interested in and passionate about the housing crisis and have them send an email to tell the group why they are interested. Ms. Hicks-Tibbles suggested the group could use the same strategy to recruit affiliate members for specific projects. Ms. Petty and Ms. Hicks-Tibbles suggested that the public call for service would state that the group is looking for members and also looking for people to contribute knowledge, experience, or other valuable assets. Mr. Davis will send out a draft solicitation for the group to review and edit before a final version is made public. Ms. Hicks-Tibbles asked if the recruitment process, which can be ongoing, should be a regular part of every task force meeting agenda.

Ms. Petty said she thinks that the task force would welcome comments from unscheduled public participants to take place at the beginning of each task force meeting rather than at the end. The group agreed to change the agenda to say “public participation” as the first agenda item after the Roll Call, whether the participation is scheduled or unscheduled. Ms. Petty pointed out that if a participant wanted the task force to take action on an item, they will be informed that they will have to return as a scheduled participant so that the official notice of the meeting and planned action on the agenda takes place.

- f. **Related Matters.** Ms. Hicks-Tibbles discussed the need to set up a landing page on the town website with documents and valuable housing information.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled): Shawna Foran introduced herself. There is a trust in the name of Ms. Foran’s son for a 181-acre parcel of land in Northfield set up by the late Barry Chouinard and is managed by his wife, Bonnie Chouinard. Previously, Mr. Davis had met with Ms. Chouinard to see if she would be interested in selling the property for the purpose of developing more housing in Northfield. Ms. Foran discussed the conversation with Ms. Chouinard and, pointing out that her son is six years old, the need for housing too urgent to wait until her son is old enough to develop the property. Ms. Foran stated that she is passionate about the housing problem and that she was working to steer her mother in helping. Mr. Davis suggested that he meet with Ms. Foran and any other participants that she would like to attend to discuss in greater detail. Ms. Foran agreed.

V. ADJOURNMENT. The subcommittee was adjourned at 3:17 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas G. Davis

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Economic Development Director and Acting Clerk