Housing Advisory Committee

Friday, February 12, 2021

Draft meeting minutes

This meeting was held from 8:30 a.m. to 9:40 am via Zoom

In attendance: Dave Sharples, Town Planner; Pete Cameron, Planning Board Representative; Lindsay Sonnett, Nancy Belanger Lovey Roundtree Oliff, Select Board Representative; Tim Roache, Executive Director, Rockingham Planning Commission. **Absent:** Russ Dean, Town Manager.

Also in attendance: Darren Winham, Economic Development Director; Renet Dion, Human Resource Director of Sig Sauer, Tom Ferry, Recruiter for Sig Sauer; Paul Valentine, Plant Manager for Osram; and Christopher Callahan, Human Resource Director for Exeter Hospital; Sarah Wrightsman, Director of Seacoast Workforce Housing and Robert Pruyne, Rockingham Planning Commission.

a. Review and approval of meeting minutes: The draft meeting minutes from January 8, 2021 were approved.

b. Darren Winham, our Economic Development Director introduced local business community leaders from Exeter Hospital, Osram and Sig Sauer who came to talk to the committee about how our current workforce housing inventory in Exeter and in our neighboring communities is affecting our businesses and their ability to hire and retain employees. Business leaders represented the following:

1. Lack of Workforce Housing stock is the biggest challenge they are facing;
2. They are paying competitive pay rates but the lack of workforce housing which adds to commute time of forty-five minutes to an hour each way is both time and cost prohibitive for employees and potential employees.
3. 55+ housing stock has made lack of affordable housing stock worse. This is not the typical targeted age group needed to maintain their workforce.
4. It is anticipated that, post-Covid there are concerns that there will be an increased need for mental healthcare and a workforce to support that need.
5. Employers are now trying to fill openings by hiring out of state because there are not enough people within the state of New Hampshire to fill available positions. For example, potential employees who currently live beyond our neighboring towns cannot find affordable housing that would allow them to move closer to the available jobs leaving potential employees declining job offers.
6. Lack of available public transportation was discussed. Is this also an added deterrent? For example, one company is now busing employees in from a neighboring state to offset the cost of travel (gas, tolls) but it also means our local business are not being utilized by these employees.

7. If a solution to more available workforce housing cannot be found, one business indicated that the option of relocating the business is possible.

There was continued discussion on the committee's next step. The next step will be for Darren Winham to invite smaller, service-oriented business to our March 12, 2021 meeting, and to include but not limit the invitation to include PEA and River Woods.

Tim Roache, Director of Rockingham Planning Commission talked to the business leaders about the possibility of working together to raise public funds to help pay for an updated housing needs assessment in 2021 or 2022. All the business representatives agreed to continue this conversation with the Tim and Rockingham Planning Commission.

There was disscission about the need for business leaders to attend public hearings on bills that are related to workforce housing. All the business representatives agreed to continue this conversation with Sarah Wrightsman and Seacoast Workforce Housing.

The committee agreed to asked Darren to reach out to three to four local businesses and invite them to come to our February 12, 2021 meeting. The committee will provide three to four workforce challenge related questions for each business owner to consider prior to our February 12th meeting.

Our Town Planner, Dave Sharples and Sarah Wrightsman, Director of Seacoast Workforce Housing gave an update on upcoming legislation.

Our next meeting is scheduled for March 12, 2021.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy Belanger, Chair