

Housing Advisory Committee

Friday, March 12, 2021

meeting minutes (approved as amended)

This meeting was held from 8:30 a.m. to 9:35 am via Zoom

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

Also in attendance: Darren Winham, Economic Development Director; Sarah Wrightsman, Director of Seacoast Workforce Housing and Robert Pruyne, Rockingham Planning Commission; Rachel Ela, First VP Cambridge Trust Consumer Banking District Manager; Gina Dickenson, Senior Director of Human Resources, Riverwoods Exeter and Matt Burke, owner of Los Olas Taqueria, Exeter.

- a. Review and approval of meeting minutes: The draft meeting minutes of February 12, 2021 were approved.
- b. Darren Winham, our Economic Development Director introduced local business community leaders from Los Olas Taqueria, Cambridge Trust Bank, and Riverwoods of Exeter 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. Rachel Ela discussed paying \$20/hr for a client advisor position. These openings remain unfilled for 3 to 6 months. Dover and Rochester area tend to fill these positions more quickly but now Dover is starting to see that area being priced out. One employee at a higher rate of pay opted to live in the Hooksett area and commute because the cost of a two bedroom apartment in the seacoast was cost prohibitive. These examples are typical throughout the area. It was explained that “banks tend to talk to each other” and share their information.
 2. Gina Dickenson discussed Riverwoods struggle to hire for the Exeter campus. Riverwoods is a non-profit that struggles to compete with for profit entities. Entry level pay averages \$14/hr for their LNA program and \$14/hr for facilities positions (food service, landscaping, security, etc). Riverwoods is affiliated with Birch Hill in Manchester. They are not having as many difficulties as Exeter due to the availability of public transportation and other factors. The new campus in Durham has a pool of college students to pull from.

3. Matt Burke discussed his employees average \$20/hour with gratuity. Some of his employees are high school and college age students but not all. An average annual income would need to be in the \$100,000 range to be able to afford housing in the seacoast. He also has attended meetings that people stated they did not want housing that would include children and is concerned by this. Matt pointed out that our teachers cannot afford to live in our community. Matt also stated that Exeter appears to be carrying the load for surrounding communities who are limiting their affordable housing stock. Dave Sharples stated that “fair share” has not been defined.
4. All attending agreed that this issue needs further discussion and “putting a light on the situation” is imperative. We need to reach out locally, regionally and statewide. Sarah Wrightsman and Robert Pruyne talked about the need for these stories to be told and that education is important. Putting a focus on business owners, business representatives and employees’ stories is what makes the situation real. Future conversations need to also address financial and tax perspectives, that there is not necessarily and increased cost of infrastructure or school impact, and how density may be part of the solution. Lovey Roundtree Oliff talked about looking at other communities and other states as possible solutions.

The committee members continued our discussion on next step. The next step will be for Darren Winham to invite business leaders from our neighboring communities to our April 9, 2021 meeting to continue this discussion. Following our April 9, 2021 meeting the committee is looking forward to inviting business leaders and community leaders to a round table discussion.

Our next meeting is scheduled for April 9, 2021.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy Belanger, Chair