

Housing Public Outreach Synopsis

With the assistance of various members of the housing committee, I facilitated four public forums in Hopkinton in October: October 4 at the library; October 10 at the Slusser Center; October 14 at the American Legion Post; and October 19 at the Slusser Center again. Attendance varied between nine at the first event to more than 30 at the final event. In total 64 people attended the events; most stayed for the entire event and participated in the design activity.

The forums were conceived as having two purposes. One was to inform residents about the work of the housing committee as well as the state of housing generally in New Hampshire and more specifically in Hopkinton. The second was to engage participants in thinking about what kinds of housing types and building types would be acceptable in Hopkinton.

I gave a 20 minute presentation about Hopkinton's housing situation and demographics, along with an explanation of the Housing Opportunity Planning Grant program to open the forum, after which I showed a short film created by New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority to showcase who lives in workforce housing. It includes real-life examples from Littleton and Portsmouth. Workforce housing is defined as rental housing affordable to a household of three earning 60% of Area Median Income, purchasable for a family of four earning 100% of AMI. AMI for Hopkinton is \$92,667 (American Community Survey); 60% of that is \$55,602.

Participants were encouraged to ask questions at any point in the presentation. Questions mostly focused on whether there would be changes proposed this year by the housing committee (Answer: No); and what the effect of adding housing would be on the local schools (Answer: Not clear cut but better information will be available soon). People also asked about the proposed zoning changes being discussed at the planning board this fall: the answer is those are not part of the work of the housing committee.

We encouraged people to say why they had felt it was important to attend the meeting, which produced several stories about housing needs similar to those that were told at the large public meeting on September 27: the difficulty of finding appropriate housing, concern from older residents about where they could downsize to, concern over changing the character of Hopkinton, concerns over their current housing no longer suiting them but there was no place for them to go, concern over where adult children might live.

Most participants arrived with an understanding of and belief in New Hampshire's housing crisis, and they cited that as reason to attend. A handful objected to the idea of allowing more housing in general and, specifically, more housing choices beyond single family residential, but I would characterize the great majority of those who attended the forums as being receptive to the idea of housing choice in Hopkinton. The final forum did have several representatives from a citizens' group which is very concerned with the tax rate in Hopkinton and who expressed their belief that the more important issue in Hopkinton is attracting businesses not residents.

The second half of the forum was an exercise to allow participants to select building types and housing types that they thought would be possible/workable/suitable in Hopkinton. Each participant was given a deck of 50 Monopoly deed-sized cards with front elevation drawing of some kind of building on one side and a perspective drawing of the same building, along with some other information, on the other side.

I find these cards very useful because it's hard for people to visualize housing choices outside of the big apartment building or the single family house. These cards give everyone a common visual vocabulary.



The decks run from tiny pop-up retail, houses on wheels, and food trucks through classic missing middle housing types such as duplexes of all kinds, small apartment buildings, and cottage courts, to courtyard apartment buildings and three story Main Street mixed use buildings.

Participants spent anywhere from 15 minutes to half an hour sorting their decks into possible/not possible. We explained that the question wasn't "do **you** want to live in this building" or even "would this building fit next to **your** house" but "could this building work **somewhere** in Hopkinton."

Nearly everyone who came did the exercise with enthusiasm and real engagement. Questions were asked about exactly what the information on the cards meant, whether current zoning was intended to be considered (Answer: No), and whether location of buildings could be regulated (Answer: Yes).

In the end we had a record of 38 sets of cards. Some people worked in pairs, and some declared it was too difficult to decide, and a very few didn't feel inclined to do it, although nearly everyone talked about the cards even if they didn't do the sort.

The median number of cards chosen was 29; the average number chosen was 28; and the number of cards chosen most often was 30. Two people chose every card in the deck; the smallest number chosen was 8.

So what does all that mean? It means that people in Hopkinton are ready to have a conversation about housing that includes all kinds of choices. Residents could have come to the forum with the idea that nothing should change in Hopkinton, and that the kind of housing currently available is just fine. That happens in some towns but it did not happen here. Participants were excited about the possibilities of housing types besides single family housing being available in their town.

There was quite a bit of conversation about appropriate building types for the villages in Hopkinton, and a general agreement that many of the mixed-use Main Street building types would be a good fit in one or more of the villages.

After the big sort into possible/not possible, I asked everyone to choose their five favorite housing types from the cards they had placed in the possible pile.



These three building types were chosen the most overall: the renovation apartment house was chosen 13 times; the cottage and the grande dame conversion were each chosen 9 times. From my listening to people I believe that, while part of the attraction of the two renovations was using

existing buildings, part of it was the scale of the buildings. They are both house-sized, which people generally thought was a good scale for buildings in Hopkinton.



These five building types were each chosen eight times: two are quite small, but three are not.

While none of the top vote-getters were at the largest end of the building type spectrum, those larger buildings did show up frequently enough that they should be included in conversations about housing in Hopkinton going forward. Duplexes were well-liked, and if there hadn't been four variations of duplex available to choose, would have ended up in the top five.

This was a very encouraging beginning to a longer housing conversation that the committee will need to pursue between now and zoning amendment season in 2024.

