

BEDFORD PLANNING BOARD MINUTES
Joint Discussion with the CP Advisory Ad Hoc Committee
Town Hall-Selectmen's Meeting Room
September 24, 2013

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN WORK SESSION:

Comprehensive Plan discussion on second round review of new drafts—

Planning staff provided the Board and CP Ad Hoc Advisory Committee members with handouts in preparation of this evening's discussion regarding a second round review of new drafts of the following:

- Housing Element
- Housing Actions
- Transportation Element
- Transportation Actions

HOUSING ELEMENT—the following are some highlights from the Housing Element and Housing Action Plan discussion on the second round draft review:

Sandra Hackman asked if 16.9% Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) figure in the snapshot was accurate, because she pointed out that the SHI under Bedford's Comparison with the State shows 16%. Director Garber informed Ms. Hackman that 16.9% is the latest figure.

A resident from 17 Sweeney Ridge questioned the accuracy of Bedford having 900 SHI units.

Catherin Perry, Assistant Planner, shared that Bedford's 900 SHI units is comprised of 862 rental and 38 ownership units; and that out of the 900 units approximately 488 units are actually restricted to low to moderate income households.

A further discussion took place regarding the available mix of affordable housing in town.

Chair Cohen explained the factors involved with 40B developments and affordable housing. Many questions followed.

Chair Cohen began reviewing the Housing Element and informed attendees that this evening's discussion is not about homeless families living at the Bedford Plaza Hotel; it's about reviewing the next round of draft elements in relation to updating the Comprehensive Plan, which happens to include a housing element.

Kevin Harrison, 76 Fletcher Road, wanted to know why the town is looking to increase the number of affordable housing units when the town is at 16.9% (6.9% over the state requirement)

Chair Cohen explained that the SHI percent can fluctuate over time and that there are many factors involved. The denominator of the 40B fraction increases each time a subdivision, new home, market rate multi-family unit, etc. is created, which decreases Bedford's SHI percent; and therefore, even though the town is over 10%, it needs to stay vigilant and not get into a position where it could fall behind its goal.

Lisa Mustapich gave Bedford Village as an example of a development that could cause the affordable housing percentage to go down because in the next 5-7 years, the affordability restrictions will expire and the developer has the potential to convert to condominiums. Ms. Mustapich said that the Housing Partnership is watching this and if the developer makes any changes/upgrades, then they would seek to extend the affordability restrictions in perpetuity. Lisa pointed out that if the Village becomes private ownership units, only a percentage of the total units will be counted on the SHI.

Kris Washington, 55 Wilder Drive, spoke about the Bedford Plaza Hotel; he had concerns regarding the impact that this state program to house the homeless in the hotel has on the community. Mr. Washington voiced that he feels there is a lack of information in respects to this matter and that is why people in the community have raised several questions. Mr. Washington said he believes there is a connection between the information shown in the CP housing element and the present situation at the hotel. Mr. Washington said he is worried about the number of children from the hotel impacting Bedford schools, and then questioned the need for Bedford to be significantly above the average state level on its SHI.

Amy Lloyd disagreed with Mr. Washington statement regarding there being a connection with the information shown in the housing snapshot (SHI numbers) and the situation at the hotel. Ms. Lloyd articulated that well before the Bedford Plaza Hotel began its program with the State to provide homeless families temporary housing, Bedford had the same amount of subsidized housing units without issue. Ms. Lloyd stated that 16.9% is from the official number of SHI units that came from existing 40B's, multi-family, mixed use, and other affordable housing development initiatives.

Jeff Cohen, (trying to return the focus of the discussion to the draft chapter of the comprehensive plan) spoke about the need for the town to continue its efforts to seek a broader mix of housing stock and mentioned incorporating more cottage style housing in that mix.

A resident asked why Bedford would look for a broader mix of affordable housing development when there is existing housing that is not being utilized. He gave the Coast Guard housing on Pine Hill Road as an example.

Sandra Hackman commented that a few years ago Bedford didn't have enough affordable housing; and now the town's goal is to stay above the 10% state level requirement. Ms. Hackman further commented that keeping just above the 10% isn't as easy as one may believe. Ms. Hackman expressed that the town doesn't need to achieve a higher percentage of affordable housing units than is currently listed, however the focus should be more about specific housing needs. Ms. Hackman specifically spoke about the need for more senior housing to accommodate people who downsize from their single residence homes and noted that there is a lack of housing to accommodate female veterans. Ms. Hackman talked about misleading statements circulating, suggesting that affordable housing in multi-unit developments is the cause for over-enrollment of students in the school systems. She pointed out that several subdivisions have also been developed in town, including Freedom Estates that has 55 houses and produced many school aged children too. Ms. Hackman also mentioned that when developers are proposing housing, Planning informs the School Committee (through impact studies) what the estimated number of school aged children may be.

A resident asked what benefit there is to the town to have such a cushion (referring to the 16.9%) over the state 10% requirement.

Amy Lloyd mentioned that although 16.9% appears high, this number can fluctuate, and therefore it's important that the town doesn't lose sight and drop below 10% because it would put the town in a vulnerable position with developers. With the town retaining 10% or higher SHI it can have more control when reviewing housing developments being proposed.

Sandy Morvillo, 9 Bonair Avenue, stated that she doesn't believe there is one magical number that would cover the need for affordable housing units in town, but that at this point she believes the community is worried about the town's future and wants to know that someone is watching out for it.

Jeffrey Cohen commented that the documentation in front of the Board is carefully drafted for the town's Master Plan and that the town boards and committees are watching out for the community.

Jaci Edwards voiced that the Planning Board works hard on behalf of the town when working with developers, and that the numbers they are talking about are real. The town needs to have control over 40B's; however, it still needs to move forward with other affordable housing units. Ms. Edwards said that the laws of the Commonwealth need to change and not the Planning Board; and added that the situation at the Bedford Plaza Hotel is brought on by the State and not the town or its boards.

Shawn Hanegan thanked residents for their interest and then commented that the Planning Board closely reviews the number of potential school aged children when reviewing developments. Shawn shared his experience living in Billerica and how determinations in that community were made when reviewing developments because their SHI was less than 10%. Mr. Hanegan

mentioned it was good that Bedford is in the position to review developments and have the ability to assess its needs and not be obligated to approve 40B developments. Mr. Hanegan also noted that Bedford will continue to review its condition and reassess.

A resident spoke about Bedford's population in regards to housing needs of current seniors, young adults, families, etc.; and then asked what a comfortable range is for affordable housing units.

Jeffrey Cohen pointed out that all this information is discussed in the drafted plan element.

Amy Lloyd suggested that people take a close look at the proposed plan and that it may answer a lot of their questions.

It was suggested that goal #7 (page 4) should be more specific.

Lisa Mustapich spoke about the different types of affordable housing units, and said that cottage style houses would be good for young couples. Ms. Mustapich mentioned that affordable housing doesn't always mean subsidized housing; it also includes units for people who are unable to do maintenance. Ms. Mustapich conveyed that the town thoughtfully reviews its housing needs and continuously examines its status.

Kevin Harrison, 76 Fletcher Road spoke about 100 Plank Street (part of the Village at Taylor Pond Mixed Use Development), where recent approvals were given to replace an approved office building with two buildings that will consist mostly of multifamily residential units because the developer had a hard time marketing office and retail space on that site. Mr. Harrison asked how "thoughtful" it was to approve more housing at this site.

Catherine Perry reported that in reviewing this development, the Planning Board had looked at the question of school aged children and had encouraged the developer to change the mix of housing unit sizes; the units approved were predominantly one bedroom units, together with some studio and 2-bedroom units. Ms. Perry pointed out that one bedroom and studio units usually do not encourage school aged children.

Jeffrey Cohen added that when the Board approved the additional housing at 100 Plank Street, they had in mind young professionals to live there, which met a current housing need in that area, plus met the need to complete the development.

Jean Patterson, 1 Hilltop Drive, shared her negative experience when trying to find available housing in Bedford for her elderly parents that were trying to downsize. Ms. Patterson said she is concerned with the overall number of affordable housing units; however, she also agrees that the town needs to move forward in obtaining a broader mix of affordable units to accommodate underserved housing demands, such as providing more housing for the elderly.

Kris Washington affirmed that he was curious why Bedford's total SHI percentage (in comparison to the state requirement) was much higher than surrounding towns whose percentages manage to stay closer to the state requirement of 10%. Mr. Washington commented that Bedford is already doing well and therefore the town should probably leave things as it stands.

Lisa Mustapich offered the following suggestions to improve the draft plan:

- Maintenance/upkeep of existing affordable housing (add as a goal)
- Improve energy efficiency of affordable housing (add as goal)
- V.A. Housing; provide more female housing (action item)
- Improve industrial mixed use bylaw
- Provide education/training to break the cycle of homelessness
- If possible, quantify the number of accessory units we have in town

Ms. Mustapich spoke about the number of teardowns occurring, lessening the stock of smaller houses while creating larger ones. She noted that this is market driven, and commented that some of the older houses may be in poor condition and that the design of ranch houses may not suit today's seniors. Jaci Edwards disagreed with the latter point.

A brief discussion took place regarding whether it is possible or desirable to maintain the character of existing neighborhoods. In terms of available means of regulation, Director Garber spoke about the limitations on controlling house size through zoning. Catherine Perry noted that setback and height requirements can have some influence and can be reviewed. Neighborhood Conservation Districts are one idea mentioned in the plan. Ms. Mustapich said that the town needs to be careful how much they regulate what people do with their existing homes. Jeffrey Cohen shared changes his neighborhood has experienced over the recent years, including some additions and renovations to existing smaller houses and some tear-downs. Amy Lloyd recommended trying to avoid the worst excesses of changes to neighborhood scale.

Sandra Hackman questioned the last paragraph on page 8, which suggests wider use of inclusionary housing in the zoning bylaw, to help to maintain the town's SHI levels.

Catherine Perry clarified the statement that the current zoning bylaw doesn't require affordable units in the residential districts; the exceptions are the Residence D district (which currently only applies to the Hartwell Farm development) and PRDs (Planned Residential Development) where the bylaw requires a large parcel and allows a limited increase in density in exchange for conveying other land to the town or restricting development on it (for conservation/open space etc.) or for including 10-20% of affordable housing units with Planning Board approval.

The Board agreed that it would like the language referring to the adoption of a town wide inclusionary zoning bylaw removed.

Jean Patterson, One Hilltop Drive, returned to the Bedford Plaza Hotel topic and asked how the owner of the hotel was able to go into an agreement with the State to have this type of long-term housing without the town being able to have a say. Ms. Patterson said that this agreement should only be for an emergency stay and not long-term.

Director Garber replied; the state would like to do away with this program and is trying to find more suitable transitional housing for the homeless; however, this takes time and is expensive.

Amy Lloyd explained to residents that the situation at the Bedford Plaza Hotel is a private contract between the owner of the hotel and the state. The hotel use is allowed by right in the business zone; and therefore there is nothing the town can do under zoning. However, Christopher Laskey, Code Enforcement Director, mentioned that there could be a building code issue in the way that the hotel is currently being used. The hotel's current use now constitutes a new occupancy use group, Residence 2. By changing from Residence 1 to Residence 2 the owner of the hotel may be required to bring the building into compliance with higher building code requirements.

Sam Petrecca commented that the hotels and motels are licensed to operate, but not intended to have an impact on our schools or other town costs. Mr. Petrecca suggested that hotels and motels are not meant to be a means of a long-term stay.

Amy Lloyd commented that the town is trying to resolve the issue with the state. Director Garber reiterated that the state plans to eventually phase out this program; and therefore we should be cautious regarding how we react to the situation.

A resident stated that as a community we do want to do our share to serve others in need; however the issue at hand is about scale. The resident asked if there is a way the town could recoup its costs from the state as a result of the influx of students living in the hotel and attending Bedford schools or being transported to other schools. The reply was that the town is trying to recoup funds; however the state has not guaranteed when they will pay and how much.

Brian O'Donnell pointed out that the situation at hotel is not unique to Bedford. Many other communities (including communities near Bedford) are experiencing comparable issues because there is a lack of transitional housing stock for people in immediate need.

Shawn Hanegan (referring to page 7-first paragraph) asked how many SHI units have deed restrictions and when the various deed restrictions expire. He was referred to the Housing Partnership for a full answer, but the number of units actually operated as affordable is 488 and the number of term-limited units in Bedford Village at 12 Dunster Road is 96.

Amy Lloyd questioned the emphasis on new development in the vision statement. The Board agreed to adjust the wording to lessen the emphasis.

Steven Carluccio asked Planning Director Garber to briefly explain to the residents what the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is.

Director Garber explained that the Comprehensive Plan is a “general policy” plan for the town and it looks at the full spectrum of Housing, Economics, Land Use/Zoning, Transportation, Natural/Cultural Resources and Services, Facilities and Recreation issues without great detail. The CP examines a broad array of issues; it identifies general goals and strategies with actions to explore and with implementation, including deciding who the implementation parties should be. Mr. Garber further explained that the CP is structured around a public participation process and ideally the plan is updated every 10 to 20 years. Mr. Garber reviewed the number of public participation workshops and individual meetings held with various town boards and committees, as well as the number of joint meetings the Planning Board had with the appointed CP Advisory AD Hoc Committee, all in efforts to gain public input and to have that input be reflected in the plan. Mr. Garber pointed out that the CP is being done mostly in-house using planning staff and then mentioned that there is a small consulting appropriation of \$24,900 to assist with the plan; however, other surrounding communities have allocated funding up to \$250K to complete their Master Plan. Mr. Garber informed everyone that there will be a total of six drafted plan elements available for public viewing via Planning’s website and other social media around the time of Special Fall Town Meeting on November 4, 2013.

HOUSING ACTION PLAN COMMENTS:

Sandra Hackman suggested said H#5 seems to be similar to H#1 and if so place it first.

Amy Lloyd asked if the Energy Task Force should be added to the implementers of outreach and needs studies. Suzy Enos advised that the Task Force is concentrating its efforts on Town buildings and operations but that the Transition Town group is working on being part of wider volunteer efforts and may be interested.

Shawn Hanegan shared that he was concerned how people would react to their implementation part in the process.

Amy Lloyd commented that Planning Board is just identifying parties at this point.

It was suggested to send out the completed draft CP document to all committees and boards so they would be aware of their proposed responsibilities and be prepared to discuss these responsibilities at a later workshop.

TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT—the following are some highlights from the Transportation Element and Transportation Action Plan discussion on the second round draft review:

Sandra Hackman commented that the element is a bit repetitious and needs some shortening. Ms. Hackman suggested combining some of the bullets under capital investments.

Amy Lloyd suggested (on page 5) changing “government complex” to “municipal complex” and add more regional transportation collaboration

Amy Lloyd would like information added about cut through traffic; how much of Bedford’s traffic is 1) vehicular traffic cutting through Bedford to get to an outside location; 2) vehicular trips from those who work in Bedford, but live elsewhere; 3) residents who work and live in Bedford; 4) residents making daily trips around town; 5) non-residence doing business or shopping in Bedford.

Tom Kinzer spoke about the advantages and disadvantages of Bedford having state routes 4 & 62. Mr. Kinzer pointed that these routes do factor into Bedford’s traffic situation and added that it is very difficult during a good part of the day and early evening to get from one side of town to the other.

Brian O’Donnell commented that Bedford’s residence population is 13,000; however it also has an Air force base, Community College, VA Hospital and MBTA routes and is part of a new and old business technology belt that also factors into the traffic situation. Mr. O’Donnell further commented that having these institutions can lead to higher incomes as well as other favorable things. Mr. O’Donnell shared that Bedford’s unique features, including having old motels, does affect how the town functions; and therefore we need to be careful not to label people (by referring to them as cut-through people or outsiders etc.) Mr. O’Donnell said these matters go well beyond the creation of the Comprehensive Plan.

Sandra Hackman was pleased that the element now emphasizes the health benefits of the pedestrian and bicycle. Ms. Hackman also suggested adding more words to goal #4.

Tom Kinzer suggested formalizing goal #3.

Terry Gleason (goal #3) shared that the town is working with private land owners to gain pedestrian easements that access shopping centers or other public facilities to continue promoting walkability and lessen short vehicular trips to these public destinations.

Director Garber said language about acquisition of potential easements can be included in the CP.

Kris Washington (referring to acquisitions) asked what forum is there for people to find out more about situations such as the vacant Coast Guard housing as well as regional concerns.

Sandra Hackman suggested speaking with groups such as MPO (Metropolitan Planning Organization) and MAGIC (Minuteman Advisory Group Inter-Local Coordination) to discuss the big picture and consult their websites

Brian O’Donnell commented that people have been placed into wrong situations, such as being housed in hotels that are not good for families with children; and that more work needs to be

done to address this issue at all levels; locally and regionally. Mr. O'Donnell reiterated that this is not unique to Bedford and is nothing the Comprehensive Plan can immediately address.

TRANSPORTATION ACTION PLAN COMMENTS:

Overall Board members were pleased with the presented Transportation Action Plan. Board members made some minor edits/comments to their individual Transportation Actions handouts and passed them along to Planning Staff to be incorporated into the plan.