

Townsend Public Forum on Housing

December 14, 2015



Prepared by the
Montachusett Regional
Planning Commission
for
**THE TOWNSEND PLANNING BOARD
AND
THE TOWN OF TOWNSEND, MA**

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Introduction

In July 28, 2015, the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) executed a contract with the Town of Townsend to assist the Town to work on a Zoning Analysis to improve and expand Housing opportunities to be completed by December 30, 2015. MRPC technical assistance was provided under MRPC's District Local Technical Assistance Program funded by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts at no cost to the Town of Townsend. Public input was deemed a critical part of this project by the Town and MRPC assisted the Planning Board to conduct a Public Forum Session or "Charette" with Town Residents. The Townsend Public Forum was held on November 5th, 2015.

In September, the Townsend Planning Board, with assistance from MRPC, began the necessary preparations. The purpose of the Public Forum was to solicit public input concerning Housing.

The widely publicized Public Forum was open to the general public; everyone with an interest in Housing was highly encouraged to attend including citizens, local officials, business owners and others.

On November 5th at 6:00 PM interested parties met in the Great Hall within Memorial Hall at 272 Main Street. Open, uninhibited conversation and dialog was the order of the day.

The collective energy of the participants was used to weld together their opinions to encourage the seed ideas of potential components for zoning changes that would encourage more housing options within the Town.

This element of the report has been completed with the intention of respecting, reflecting, and documenting the day's events, methodology, and all of the recorded input provided by the participants to complement zoning changes that would encourage more housing options within the Town

Process and Methodology

The Charrette/ Public Forum was held on Thursday November 5th at about 6:00 PM and ended at approximately 8:30 PM. The forum opened with an introduction and overview by Lance McNally, Planning Board Chairman.

The Charrette was designed to gain public input, insight, and ideas concerning any future housing development within the Town of Townsend. The Charrette was open to all community residents and landlords interested in providing input and bringing ideas into this document to make it more comprehensive and complete.

The Townsend Planning Board and their staff, Land Use Coordinators Jeanne Hollows and Karen Chapman, handled community outreach for this event. Outreach included, but was not limited to cable television, a press release in the local newspaper, letters to stakeholders, including landlords of accessory apartments, and pre-existing, “grandfathered” two-family homes, along with postings throughout the community. Although not everyone signed in at registration (See Attachment A, Registration Sheet), over the course of the evening more additional people were known to have been involved.

The mood of the day was an open, active, and public process that brought interested parties together to work towards a common goal; to improve housing options for the Town of Townsend.

The Charrette Agenda was distributed as a handout. It indicated that the evening would start with introductory remarks, an outline of the process of the day, and breakout sessions into small discussion groups. This would all be followed by the reconvening into the initial large group with presentations by group reporters.

Lance McNally, provided a welcome to all, and added his comments and encouragement to the participants. He provided background statements and indicated that an objective of the Charrette was to identify those things that are most important to the residents of Townsend. He encouraged and stressed the importance of public input in order to provide guidance to the Board.

Chantell Fleck from MRPC provided a description of the Goals of the Charrette/Public Forum, and the Process that would be followed. It was indicated that we would be breaking out into four smaller groups. Each group would answer three questions.

Participants then divided themselves into four groups. There was one Planning Board Member or Town Staff acting as facilitator/recorder per group. Large pads of newsprint paper were also provided for the

Planning Board Member and Staff to record participant responses.

reporters. These comments and additions have been included in the responses.

Each group was instructed to select a reporter to present the group's work and results to the other Groups when they reconvened.

In the next part of the process, participants returned to reconvene in the large group for further discussion. A reporter from each group presented the responses to the participants. After each presentation there was an opportunity for open discussion and the participants could comment on each of the news-printed lists presented by the

Summary of Findings Based Upon Input

Comments made by the Charrette's participants have been documented and categorized by three (3) questions posed to the breakout groups – each breakout group was assigned one question. The questions are followed by the responses of each of the four individual groups. These responses were presented by a representative of each group when participants reconvened into the larger group. In addition, some overall comments made during discussion have been documented.

It should be noted that this report is based upon the input given to the facilitators of the Charrette/ Public Forum and should be used for planning purposes only.

QUESTION #1: Would you be open to zoning changes that would promote more housing options (below) within the community? Please speak to the pros and cons of each housing development. Should such developments be allowed or should they be restricted?

- a. Accessory Apartments (with or without the family member restriction)
- b. 55+ Developments
- c. Two-family homes
- d. Multi-family homes (3units or more)
- e. Condominiums (Detached, Attached)?
- d. Apartment Buildings
- e. Assisted Living Facilities
- f. Housing units above ground floor retail commercial space

Comments Received for Question #1 from the participating **Group s** are as follows:

Accessory Apartments:

Group 1: Accessory Apartments are too restrictive within the Zoning Bylaw. Space requirement should be expanded to 40% and family restriction should be lifted with no restriction on lot size.

Group 2: Allow without restrictions.

Group 3: Pros to having accessory apartments are that it provides economic boost to housing value, and meets a need for an aging population. Some Cons are: accessory apartments must be for a family member; the law as written is hard to enforce; the house can't be sold with the apartment; and there is a mortgage restriction. The bylaw should be changed to allow accessory apartments without the family member requirement, and a provision less restrictive than the Special Permit that is required now.

Group 4: Allow without restrictions.

55+ Developments

Group 1: Needs more defined regulations. Although there is a need for more housing for people age 60+. No mobile homes-keep character of the Town.

Group 2: Will address aging population. Should be affordable with consideration towards veterans. And have a community center within the development.

Group 3: Should not be restricted from the bylaws. Should be affordable and needed for an aging population.

Group 4: Need more of this type of development. Units should be affordable.

Two-family homes

Group 1: Provisions currently too strict and should be allowed pending lot and septic compliance. Also, should be allowed in residential and commercial districts.

Group 2: Multi-owners of a two-family home can cause issues. Should be allowed although a lower priority than other types of housing.

Group 3: Some cons for two-family homes would be they would require more services from the Town, two-family homes are prohibited from the bylaw, and the homes will change the character of existing neighborhoods. A pro would be attracting a younger population to the community.

Group 4: None affordable.

Multi-family homes (3units or more)

Group 1: Consideration should be taken for the aquifer for this type of development. Lot requirements are excessive for Multi-family homes. Small neighborhood stores should be allowed. And under the OSRD bylaw, allow less than 10 units.

Group 2: Not a good fit for Town character. Additional housing needs can be addressed with accessory apartments.

Group 3: Should be allowed same as single family homes.

Group 4: Do not allow multi-families.

Condominiums (Detached, Attached)

Group 1: Should be allowed with not less than 4 units. Elderly units should be one level detached. And it should not matter if units are detached.

Group 2: No comments.

Group 3: No comments.

Group 4: Yes allow with affordable units.

Apartment Buildings

Group 1: Needed allow anywhere.

Group 2: Do not allow as does not fit Town character.

Group 3: No comments.

Group 4: Do not allow apartments.

Assisted Living Facilities

Group 1: Assisted Living is needed and there should be no residential restriction. A good place to construct assisted living would be where Atwood and Townsend Woods are located.

Group 2: No comments.

Group 3: No comments.

Group 4: Allow as there is a need for more senior housing.

Housing units above ground floor retail commercial space

Group 1: Should not need a special permit and anything “grandfathered” should remain as is.

Group 2: Is a good idea.

Group 3: No comments.

Group 4: Depends on where they are located. Do not want in the Center.

QUESTION #2: Currently, Residential Districts are regulated to the size of 2 two and 3 three acre lots. Considering the size of lots, should a reduction of lot sizes be allowed? And if so, would back lot or infill development be an amendable idea for the community?

Comments Received on this Question are as Follows:

Group 1: Consider impacts to the aquifer and possibly do a study. Allow for these types of options based on Town review. Some in the group thought flag lots a good idea with the possibility of reducing lot size to 4 one acre. It was commented as well that 200-foot frontage requirement was excessive. It was also suggested that the zoning districts be redefined and the dimensional standard be reassessed as one size does not fit all. Consider Village Zone (Districts). Leave scenic and historic areas in Town larger lots and allow for smaller lots in some. Small stores should be allowed near developments.

Group 2: The options in question 2 could be allowed by Special Permit., Nantucket has some good bylaws that would provide guidance in forming similar provisions with the Zoning Bylaw. Reducing the frontage may also be a good idea.

Group 3: Some cons are: currently back land not utilized at this time, and that doing so may increase services required by the Town. Pro is such development will increase the tax base. Open to lot reduction changing the two to three-acre lot requirement to one-acre in RB District and to two-acre lot in RA District. Hammer head lots okay as long as they are restricted.

Group 4: Back lot development okay with appropriate wetland distance. No common drives should be allowed as such a way could be accepted as a Town Road – no more than three houses.

QUESTION #3: What are your thoughts about 40B developments within Townsend? What do you think would be the most effective method of reaching the State's quota for affordable housing units? Currently, through the state statute of Chapter 40B, developers are allowed to by-pass all local Zoning Bylaws to build homes ~~the~~ throughout Massachusetts.

Comments Received on this Question are as Follows:

Group 1: Town should implement our own housing requirements to limit 40B developments. If the Town eases up on its restrictions it will help meet the quota for affordable housing.

Group 2: These types of developments are expensive for developers with a six-year process. Not a desirable type of development for the Town. Need to control the Town's destiny.

Group 3: Keep up planning efforts to mitigate this type of development.

Group 4: Avoid 40B developments unless the Town has to.

ATTACHMENT A: REGISTRATION LIST

SIGN-IN SHEET

MEETING: District Local Technical Assistance - Townsend Public Forum

DATE: November 5, 2015

| NAME | ADDRESS | EMAIL | Would you like notification of any zoning changes in regards to this project? Y/N |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|---|
| ELAINE MOORE | 22 WEST ELM ST | | |
| John Hume | 1427R MRPC Water St. Fitchburg | Jhume@mrpc.org | |
| NANCY RAPOZA | 6 STEARNS AVE | RAPOZANANCY1@gmail.com | |
| Mary-Flora Hale | 91 Wallace Hill Rd | teilaqnews@verizon.net | X |
| Jan Wesson | 3 Jonathan Ln | | |
| Renee Fossey | 314 Townsend Hill Rd | | |
| Sue Lisi | 28 Ash ST | smlisi@comcast.net | |
| Janet Cote | 40 Fitchburg Rd. | jan-cote@hotmail.com | |
| Len Abreu | 450 Main St. | abreulena@comcast.net | X |
| Carolyn Gustafson | 9 Brookline St | carolegus@gmail.com | |
| Nancy Sullivan | 484 Main St | GENASully@verizon.net | Y |
| GEORGE SULLIVAN | 484 MAIN ST | GENA Sully@verizon.net | Yes |
| NILES BUSLER | 30 Main St. | nilesbusler@gmail.com | Yes |
| Margaret Davidson | 402 Main St. | m.faulbank@verizon.net | see |
| Charles Sexton-Diwan | 8 South St | cjsexton@gmail.com | Y |

SIGN-IN SHEET

MEETING: District Local Technical Assistance - Townsend Public Forum

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[illegible]

ATTACHMENT B: PICTURES













