

Stowe Housing Task Force

Wednesday, January 29, 2025

Akeley Memorial Building
67 Main Street
Stowe, Vermont



Housing Task Force Members: MacKee Macdonald, Walter Frame, Sarah Henshaw, , Josi Kytile, Stefan Grundmann, Town Manager Charles Safford (Ex-officio), Mila Lonetto (Ex-officio)

Absent: Ken Braverman, Scott Coggins

Attendees: Planning & Zoning Director Sarah McShane, Jeff Sauser, Nels Nelson, Sarabrent McCoy, Jenn Goldson, Austin Smith, Heather Snyder

Call to Order

Chair Macdonald called the meeting to order at 9:00am.

Approve Agenda

Josi Kytile moved to approve the agenda. Walter Frame seconded. Motion carried (5-0).

Kickoff Meeting with Housing Consultant

Jeff Sauser discussed their approach to engagement with the team, including a bi-weekly coordination call with Charles and Sarah, periodic meetings with the team, and stakeholder interviews. They also plan to meet with the selectboard three times throughout the process. Jeff mentioned that they would be flexible with in-person and virtual meetings, depending on the group size and convenience. The team also discussed the importance of aligning with the community through a community workshop and reviewing draft strategies. They agreed to have several check-ins throughout the process, with Charles and Sarah deciding on the frequency of these meetings.

Jeff Sauser discussed the plan to conduct stakeholder interviews with various categories of people, including town staff, officials, realtors, developers, local businesses, and regional agencies. He mentioned that the interviews would be conducted over the next 4 to 6 weeks and that the sequence might depend on availability. The Task Force suggested that some interviews might be better suited for later in the process, after some conceptual analysis findings and action items have been established. The team agreed to save some interviews for later when they want reaction and feedback on the ideas. The Task Force also suggested adding some names to the list, including David White and Eric Hoekstra, and mentioned the need to monitor legislative changes related to Act 250 and CDBG funding.

The Task Force and consultants noted the importance of in-person meetings for effective communication and decision-making. They discussed the possibility of setting up a day or two in advance to invite people to roundtable focus groups. Jeff mentioned that they have been reviewing legislative changes and will reflect on current laws and the potential impacts of emerging legislation. Jenn introduced herself and discussed the community workshop plan, suggesting a day and a half in the spring, possibly aligning with a select board meeting. The team discussed the possibility of hosting a community meeting at 7:00pm, following a select board meeting at 5:30 PM. Akeley suggested having an open conversation with the community on the first day, which could then be summarized and presented to the select board. The team also discussed the need for a Zoom component for public engagement to accommodate parents with young children.

The Task Force and consultants discussed the approach to their project, focusing on public engagement and data collection. They agreed to separate the public meeting from the select board meeting to allow for more in-depth discussions and to incorporate public input into their recommendations. They also discussed the importance of quantitative data, with the Task Force suggesting the use of surveys to gauge support for their recommendations.

Jeff proposed refining their approach with a firm calendar for the project duration. The team also discussed the definition of a household, with Nels clarifying that it refers to an occupied housing unit, including rentals, but excluding seasonal units and short-term rentals.

The team discussed the housing situation in Stowe, focusing on the number of households and units being built over time. They also considered the income levels of these households and how they project forward. Jeff presented data from the State housing needs assessment, which suggested a need for 1,300 to 2,000 units over the next five years in Lamoille County. The team also discussed the challenges of tracking and understanding the nuances of housing stock, including the impact of short-term rentals and seasonal homes. They agreed on the need for a more nuanced approach to housing production targets, considering factors such as income levels, bedroom counts, and accessibility for aging seniors. The team also discussed the significant gap between the median home price and the median income, indicating a disconnect between the state of the market and the state of housing need in the community.

The Task Force raised concerns about the dissemination of powerful information to the community, suggesting the need for a more proactive approach rather than waiting until the last minute. Jeff suggested preparing an executive summary of the findings from the analysis, highlighting key observations and tying them to strategies and policies. He also proposed setting up a dashboard to present the information in a different way. The team agreed to consider these suggestions and continue the discussion in the next meeting.

Jeff discussed the affordability of housing in Stowe, noting that condos are more affordable than single-family homes. He also highlighted the importance of considering wages and household income together, and how this could inform housing production targets. Jeff suggested that housing could be targeted towards specific sectors of the workforce, such as teachers and law enforcement officers. The Task Force added that the challenge lies not in where development can happen, but in ensuring that it meets the needs of the community, particularly in terms of affordability. They suggested that the state needs to understand how to make this happen, and that the public sector may need to step in to ensure that development is profitable for developers while still meeting community needs. Jeff also mentioned the recent transportation plan and the issue of traffic and parking in Stowe, particularly during peak times.

Staff Report / Next Meeting Agenda

The Task Force canceled their February 5th meeting, but encouraged participation in the legislative breakfast.

Public to be Heard Non-Binding

No public comment.

Adjournment

Chair Macdonald adjourned the meeting at 10:30am.

Notes

Minutes submitted by Will Fricke.

The Stowe Housing Task Force meets on the first and third Wednesday of each month at 9:00am.

A recording of this public meeting is available at: <https://www.stowevt.gov/HTF>