



NORTHBRIDGE PLANNING BOARD
MINUTES
TUESDAY, JUNE 27, 2023



Recognizing the presence of a quorum Rebecca Rushford, Chair called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM, with the following other members in attendance: Michael Baker, James Berkowitz, Abdul Kafal, and Michael Wilkes. R Gary Bechtholdt, Planning & Community Development Director and Barbara Kinney, Planning/Conservation Administrative Assistant were also in attendance. Andrew Howden, Associate Member, was absent.

Attendees of the Public: Bill Renaud; Muriel Emond; Brett Lambert; Robert Anderson; Cynthia Donati; Alan Donati; Kelly Bol; Brian Fitzgerald; Tony Brookhouse.

PLANNING BOARD PUBLIC FORUM -HOUSING PRODUCTION PLAN (HPP)

A. Welcome & Introductions

G. Bechtholdt welcomed everyone to the Public Forum and explained that this is the Second Public Forum being held seeking input from the community. The draft of the Housing Production Plan (HPP) can be found on the town's webpage.

G. Bechtholdt introduced Lori Tanner, Consultant, from Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC). PVPC has prepared the draft of the HPP. The HPP process was started around August/September last year and a survey was posted/distributed, and the results compiled and included in the HPP.

B. (HPP) Housing Production Plan Overview

L. Tanner explained that affordable housing is defined by specific guidelines determined by the federal government. Affordable housing are households with income at or below 80% of the area median income (AMI). Some criteria include determining that the housing is safe and that the housing is suitable for the size of the household living in it and is protected by a long-term deed restriction. The housing is also listed on the state's "Subsidized Housing Inventory." It should be noted that for these affordable housing units the state will not make up the difference in rent.

C. Objective of Tonight's Public Forum

The objective of this public forum is to learn more about affordable housing and why it is important to the community, to provide input on potential affordable housing strategies and locations within the community and to answer any questions regarding affordable housing.

D. Why is Northbridge preparing an HPP?

Northbridge is preparing a HPP to determine unmet housing needs in the community such as how many residents are struggling to afford rent or mortgage payments, to set goals for the development of new affordable housing to meet these needs, to possibly prevent unwanted Chapter 40B development through a

certified HPP and progress toward goals or by meeting the state mandate that 10% of housing units be affordable.

E. What does an HPP include?

The HPP includes data of the population and development trends and regional growth factors, any limitations of geographic and regulatory constraints, the goals for the annual numeric housing production target, specific site locations for housing production and strategic ways to achieve these goals.

F. Housing Needs Assessment

Northbridge is a growing diverse community with about two thirds of the housing owner occupied and one third rentals. There is an ongoing decline in school enrollment in Northbridge. The housing stock in Northbridge is older with only about 13.5% of the homes built in 2000 or later. This may present maintenance issues. There are a variety of housing types with the majority being one unit detached dwellings. About one third of the housing types are duplex or multi-family. Northbridge has a smaller percentage of single-family homes and more multi-family options than its neighbors. State-wide, the percentage of single-family homes is 76% of all housing units. It is increasingly more expensive to buy a home. Any family whose housing costs include rent or mortgage payments, property taxes, utilities, Home Owner Association fees and maintenance costs that total more than 30% of the household income are considered housing cost burdened. The HPP is trying to meet the needs of the housing cost burdened. The median monthly gross rent of a home in Northbridge was estimated to be \$1,060 in 2021. However, available rentals are in the \$1,600 to \$2,500 range. 23% of homeowners and 44% of renters fall into the category of housing cost burdened. The potential housing cost burdened individuals include young adults starting out. For example, a household of one (1) making a maximum salary of \$61,900. These include high school teachers, bank tellers, postal service mail carriers and emergency medical technicians. The potential housing cost burdened individuals also include a household of three (3) (a divorced parent of two [2] children with full custody or a married couple with one [1] stay at home parent) making a maximum salary of \$79,600. These include paramedics, clergy, graphic designers, police officers and art, drama, and music teachers. Another potential housing cost burdened individuals include young families looking for their first home (family of four [4]) making a maximum salary of \$88,400. These professions include pharmacy aide, preschool teacher, barber, restaurant cook, bank teller, security guard, hairdresser, and fitness instructor. The potential housing cost burdened individuals also include retired people on Social Security, those who become unemployed or underemployed for a period of time, and residents with disabilities.

G. Northbridge Housing Survey

The survey period was from September 28, 2022 to November 01, 2022 with 153 respondents. 73% own a single-family home and 60% are employed full-time. The results of the survey provided a wide range of characteristics including income, number of household members, length of time lived there, etc. Most people prefer single-family detached homes with most responding that there are not enough of them. Some qualities that they think are necessary for new homes are homes designed to fit the size, look, and feel of the existing homes in the neighborhood, homes adjacent to public or shared open space for parks and recreation, town water and sewer lines, and homes near grocery stores and shopping centers. The five (5) most important roles that the Town should play in ensuring housing for all, per the survey, are lower taxes

for owners/potential buyers, housing to support all socioeconomic levels, education of the public on housing issues, improve regulations and zoning bylaws, and buy existing buildings for public-owned housing. There are seven (7) residential developments under construction and ten (10) preliminary/conceptual build-out yield in Northbridge. None of these developments qualify for subsidized housing. There are several locations for new housing: the downtown/village centers for mixed uses, conversion of existing buildings, Winston Woods, and the property at 2040 Providence Road. There is also potential for new housing at Whitin Machine Works (the Shop), Aldrich School/Town Hall Annex, and the old Northbridge Elementary School. The schools are being considered for a variety of possible uses.

H. HPP Action Items

Some action items to be addressed include identifying locations, possibly cleaning up the brownfield site at 2040 Providence Road, looking at existing zoning districts, and possibly creating new zoning districts. Winston Woods is a friendly Chapter 40B under a Local Initiative Program (LIP) and the large lot is not proposed to be built upon yet. The discussion on Providence Road was paused until the HPP was prepared first. It may make sense to re-zone the property on Providence Road. The HPP is a valuable resource to use towards future planning. A new bylaw could be crafted addressing a combination market and affordable housing. Accessory dwelling units that are income qualified and restricted may also be addressed in this bylaw.

I. General Discussion and Q & A

The general discussion centered around the thoughts of these sites for affordable housing or a mix of affordable and market rate housing, are there other locations that they think might be suitable for this type of housing, and are there specific locations that they do not want to see more housing.

The HPP is a document to address housing needs and once approved is good for five (5) years. Chapter 40B developments can ignore local zoning, environmental constraints, etc. and a HPP plan will keep the zoning control local. Chapter 40B is not a new state mandate and has been in existence since the 1970s. Northbridge is a Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) community, and our Residential Five (R-5) zoning district meets the density of the state mandate. Upton and Sutton do not have those densities but will be required to meet those densities. Grafton, Upton, and Sutton have Chapter 40B submittals now and they may not be in the best location. Putting roadway and infrastructure in place first is a good idea. A town needs to be actively providing for affordable housing once the plan is certified. One half a percent (½%) increase is 34 units per year and that is a lot for Northbridge.

The Linwood Mill is a good example of mixed use with affordable rental units. For new developments, a density bonus could be added to offset the affordable housing component. There are companies out there that do this type of work full time and work with the developers to meet/satisfy the affordable housing component. There are tax credits, etc. to make it feasible to the developers. Once a town has hit the 10% mark of affordable housing units, they are more competitive for certain grants.

A resident suggested adding an index to the HPP plan for the acronyms used in the HPP plan. Also, the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) needs to be changed to its new name of Executive Office of Housing & Livable Communities (EOHLC).

The qualifications for affordable housing were explained in more detail and there is a verification process to be followed. The bylaw may include guidelines regarding a waiting list, lottery basis, local residents first, etc. A developer cannot do many small developments just to bypass the HPP requirements.

J. Next Steps & Adjournment

The next steps are to finalize the goals and strategies. A review of the final draft HPP will be done. The Planning Board and Board of Selectmen will approve the document. Then the HPP will go to the Executive Office of Housing and Living Communities (formerly DHCD) for approval.

Having no additional business, the Planning Board adjourned its meeting of Tuesday, June 27, 2023 at or about 8:23 PM.

Mail

In addition to the mail listed (see attached), the Planning Board noted receipt of the following communications: Planning Board Agenda dated June 27, 2023; Draft Planning Board Agenda dated July 11, 2023; Housing Production Plan Public Forum on June 27, 2023 Flyer; Draft Housing Production Plan; Chapter 40B Housing Production Plan information from mass.gov; 2023 Planning Board Meeting Schedule.

Respectfully submitted,

Approved by the Planning Board:


Barbara A. Kinney
Planning Administrative Assistant

July 11, 2023

Cc: Town Clerk /File

June 27, 2023

Planning Board

FROM	DATE	SUBJECT
Graves Engineering	06/16/2023	Osterman Commerce Park Building #6 Site Plan Review
Phoenix Engineering Group	06/13/2023	Email regarding 600 Commerce Drive Water & Sewer Letter

ZBA

- Decision – Denied the Variance of Gregory Ebbeling at 201 Jefferson Avenue to alter the property lines with the abutting property at 187 Jefferson Avenue.
- Decision – Granted with Conditions the Variance of Joseph Leonardo at Highland Street for a new single-family dwelling from the required front yard setback.

Sutton

- Public Hearing Notice – Application of Thomas and Kathleen Palumbo for a retreat lot at 38 Southwick Road with a common driveway.
- Public Hearing Notice – Application of Matthew Kinne to remove 5-6 public shade trees adjacent to the driveway at 28 Manchaug Road as they impair sight distance.
- Decision – Granted with Conditions the Site Plan Approval, Route 146 Overlay District Special Permit and Groundwater Protection District Special Permit for Torrington Properties, Inc. to construct a 5,253 square foot urgent care clinic at 15 Pleasant Valley Road.

Uxbridge ZBA

- Public Hearing Notice – Application of Kimberly Tarasiak for a Special Permit to allow an accessory dwelling unit at 205 West Street; and Application of Heather Simpson for a Special Permit to operate a coffee roastery and light café at 207 North Main Street.