

West Newbury HPP Open House*Thursday, January 20th, 2024**5:30 PM – 7:30 PM*

West Newbury Town Hall

Notes:

1) Attendees

- Approximately 25+ residents attending, along with Town Manager Angus Jennings, Town Planner Sue Brown, and Selectboard Member Wendy Reed

2) Housing Production Plan Presentation

- Questions
 - How does the demographic data affect changing demand for housing over time?
 - Several variables affect how population and age distribution projections change in a community, which can affect the type of housing that is needed in a town. As the town continues to grow and change, the housing needs of residents change as well. This is why it is helpful to update the Housing Production Plan every 5 years to reflect current and future housing needs.
 - How does the town's occupancy data compare to other communities?
 - When looking at the mismatch between the number of people living in a household and the number of bedrooms within a home, West Newbury is very similar to other small towns in the Merrimack Valley. Similar to other comparable communities, West Newbury has a large number of 1 or 2 person households while only a small number of homes have 1 or 2 bedrooms. This mismatch can create housing issues within a community. As an example, if a couple wanted to downsize from a larger home into a smaller unit, there are fewer units available as an option. On a town-wide level, if there is an increased demand for smaller units but not enough supply, home prices would continue to climb unless you increase the supply by building more housing.
 - Can the Housing Production Plan help the town become compliant with the new MBTA Communities law?
 - The Housing Production Plan will encapsulate several strategies to help increase the supply of housing in town. Complying with the MBTA Communities law is one tool in the toolbox that can help communities achieve their housing goals. The HPP is not the vehicle for achieving MBTA Communities compliance but rather complying with MBTA Communities achieves a goal of the HPP.

- Does the process for planning for new housing take into consideration the potential impacts to infrastructure?
 - Infrastructure constraints are one of several factors that are considered in the Housing Production Plan. The goal of the plan is to achieve sustainable growth, which may look different in each community depending on infrastructure capacity. Minimizing the impact on infrastructure is often at the forefront of conversations with developers when it comes to new housing projects.
- Comments from Town Manager Angus Jennings
 - The production requirements to meet the state's baseline would be high to achieve, however the town has to aim for these high numbers in order for the state to approve the plan. It is worthwhile to go through the process of creating a Housing Production Plan because it establishes housing goals for the town to work towards. Even if the town is unable to meet all the requirements and goals, it will be helpful to measure the town's progress towards achieving these goals. The final plan will be presented and voted on by both the Planning Board and Selectboard.
- Comments from Town Planner Sue Brown
 - The aim of this plan is to establish specific and accomplishable goals that can be achieved through real life strategies. While there are programs out there focused on building a lot of housing on a larger scale, the town is focused on crafting strategies that are focused on fitting the needs of a small town like West Newbury. These meaningful and actionable strategies will help the town address current housing needs and help plan for the future of housing development.
- Feedback from the strategies table
 - How can we bring more young people into our town? Desire to see more diversified housing options to make the community more welcoming for people of all ages and incomes.
 - Demographic data and age distribution projections were interesting and showed that the town is aging. Would like to see a more balanced community and help make the town accessible for all ages.
 - Concern with managing housing production and infrastructure capacity
 - There is an increased need for more affordable housing options in town
 - Several comments supporting Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) as a strategy to help increase additional housing options in town.
 - MBTA Communities zoning can help create opportunities for new housing that is much needed in town.
 - Would like to see the town partner with land trust to build more affordable housing. Preserve that portion of the land that should be conserved and use the developable portions of the land to build housing.