

## **TOWN OF NORTH READING, MASSACHUSETTS HOUSING PRODUCTION PLAN**

### **Community Housing Forum June 22, 2017**

#### **Meeting Summary**

The North Reading Community Planning Commission sponsored a Community Housing Forum on June 22, 2017 at North Reading Town Offices to present key findings from a Housing Needs Assessment and obtain community input into the next phase of its work in preparing a Housing Production Plan. Following a brief introduction from Danielle McKnight, North Reading's Town Planner and Community Planning Administrator; the Consultant, Karen Sunnarborg, provided a PowerPoint presentation on the highlights of the Housing Needs Assessment and facilitated a brief question and comment period.

Participants were then provided with instructions on proceeding with Breakout Group Brainstorming, and asked to identify a Facilitator to keep the group on track in fulfilling the assigned tasks within allotted timeframes and to further identify a Recorder to document key comments from each group member. The purpose of the breakout groups was to obtain input from participants on their vision for community housing as well as priority actions for fulfilling this vision and addressing local housing needs.

*Responses noted in this document are the opinions and views of forum attendees and do not necessarily reflect the opinion or policies of the Town of North Reading.*

#### **Visioning**

Each group member was asked in turn to complete the following three questions, resulting in these comments:

*The Town's greatest challenge related to preserving and producing housing affordability and diversity is \_\_\_\_\_*

- Limited developable property
- Limited Town control over housing stock
- Limited available funding
- Zoning constraints
- Large lot zoning requirements which drive up costs
- Lack of sewer services
- High property tax rate relative to neighboring communities
- Lack of leadership
- Lack of political will
- Lack of community awareness, education and interest in the issue
- Limited public transportation
- High cost of land and housing
- Small community with limited resources, "can we accomplish much?"

- Public housing/Peabody Court needs to be redeveloped
- High financial burdens
- Affordable housing development is complicated with so many moving parts
- Historic district limitations in Town Center
- Town had growth spurt and now residents are older with nowhere to downsize and thus moving out of town; new parents are paying a lot for housing
- People do not like to live above shops unless close to transit

*An appropriate housing goal (something aspirational to strive for in the years ahead) for the Town to achieve is to \_\_\_\_\_?*

- Promote greater Town involvement in the issue of affordable housing
- Provide municipal sewer services
- Address the needs of the elderly first (we have neglected them and they have funded the town) but not to the exclusion of others
- Promote more opportunities for mixed uses
- Provide sufficient housing for veterans and people with disabilities
- Provide starter housing for families
- Focus primarily on providing housing for North Reading residents
- Provide intergenerational housing opportunities
- Meet housing needs of all residents, current and future
- Modify zoning to allow smaller lot development

*The best locations for new housing development include \_\_\_\_\_?*

- Parcel off Carpenter Drive
- Locations within walking distance of shopping and services
- Main Street/Route 28
- Community Center
- Town-owned properties (Swan Pond and town-owned property off Elm Street are isolated – not much Town-owned land that is centrally located)
- Chestnut Street area
- Around postal facility and Walmart
- Redevelop Peabody Court into a denser development

### **Prioritizing Actions and Voting**

Each member of the breakout groups was then asked in turn to identify the two most important actions or strategies for the Town to implement to address priority housing needs. They were then asked, also in turn, to identify their top three preferences based on the full list of proposed actions created by the group. The full group was then asked to select the top three actions that received the most support as well as the next three in order of priority importance and agreement.

Representatives from each group then presented the priority actions to all participants. Following these presentations, all participants voted on their preferred actions with five stickers which they could place on one item or spread among strategies. They also had one negative sticker that they could use to record opposition to a particular action.

This prioritizing and voting process produced the following actions and number of votes:

*Regulatory Strategies*

- Modify zoning to increase the availability of smaller affordable units (4 votes)
- Insure that there is no sunset clause on affordability (3 votes)
- Take the 97 Main Street property (former Stop & Shop) by eminent domain and redevelop for senior housing (1 vote)
- Take derelict properties by eminent domain or receivership (1 vote)

*Town Programs and Services*

- Allocate a percentage of the Berry property proceeds for affordable housing (9 votes)
- Collaborate with all Town boards and committees on the issue of affordable housing (8 votes)
- Preserve existing affordable housing (8 votes and 1 negative vote)
- Install sewer services on Main and Concord Streets (6 votes)
- Create a Master Plan Committee that involves all boards and committees (5 votes)
- Provide community education through a variety of venues (NORCAM, articles in the paper, website) (2 votes)

*Development Opportunities*

- Promote mixed-use development and a new downtown (13 votes)
- Pursue partnerships with non-profits (4 votes and 1 negative vote)
- Provide Town-owned property for potential swap or sale for affordable housing

Participants were informed that the Town will be working with the Consultant on the next sections of the Housing Production Plan that will include priority actions that were discussed during the public forum as well as annual production goals. After the draft is prepared, the North Reading Community Planning Commission will conduct another public meeting to present the highlights of the Plan for further input from local leaders, housing stakeholders and residents.