

Housing Task Force
August 16, 2018 Meeting Minutes
City Council Chambers 5:15pm

Polly Nichol (Co-Chair)

Jo Ann Troiano (Montpelier Housing Authority)

Jack McCullough (City Council Rep)

Mary Hooper

Peter Kelman (Volunteered to take minutes)

Also present: Laura Gebhart (Executive Director, Montpelier Economic Development Corporation); Jessica Hyman (Education and Outreach Coordinator of the Fair Housing Project), and Mary Alice Bisbee (Montpelier resident interested in joining the Task Force.)

Meeting Called to Order at 5:15p.m.

Minutes from June 21, 2018 Meeting Approved

Minutes from July 19, 2018 Meeting not yet submitted.

No Public Comment

Agenda was approved by unanimous vote

General Announcements and Updates:

Jack McCullough passed out copies of a table showing numbers of rental units (occupied and vacant) in Montpelier and other Washington County towns. This data of Vermont Housing Stock is extracted from the American Community Survey done by the U.S. Census Bureau sometime during the years 2012-2016. Rounding off numbers from this table, Montpelier and Barre each had roughly 1750 total rental units (about 50% of the total of roughly 7000 in the county).

Peter Kelman reported that this fall he will be offering a two-part course on Aging in Place through the Montpelier Senior Activity Center, the second part of which will deal with housing. He will be contacting various members of the Task Force (and others) to share their expertise with the class and/or recommendations of others who might do so.

Report from Jessica Hyman on the Thriving Communities Campaign

Jessica described the Thriving Communities project in much the way it is described on its website <https://www.thrivingcommunitiesvt.org/> :

a comprehensive and multi-organizational statewide effort to promote affordability and inclusiveness as a mainstay of flourishing communities across Vermont and beyond. Communities thrive financially and socially when they are welcoming and affordable to a wide variety of residents, people with assorted skills and backgrounds. A diverse range of residents helps drive local economies and enliven

local business, arts and culture. Such communities build economic vitality and resilience and help fulfill the promise of equal housing opportunity for all.

Jessica described her outreach work with housing committees in towns throughout the state to learn from their experiences to date and to share what they learn with these committees. At her request, various members of our Task Force shared with her our thoughts about how and why the Montpelier Housing Task Force has had such a long and generally successful run (support by the City, including the Housing Trust Fund and consistent membership through the years) and what we saw as our major challenge: the need for more and more-consistent funding to be used for leverage in housing programs like The First Time Buyer's Program and projects like 1 Taylor Place and The French Block.

Report from Laura Gebhart of the Montpelier Economic Development Corporation

Laura explained that she was following up on the Planning Commission's August 13 of town committees to begin conversations with the Housing Task Force about ways that we and the MEDC can support each other in advocating for more housing overall and more-diverse housing in particular in Montpelier., as a way of creating an environment that is good for businesses, the people who work for these businesses, and the people who may be served by them.

The conversations with both of the above guests led to wide-ranging conversations about the myriad factors that have in the past and could continue to limit housing growth in Montpelier, particularly for mid-level affordable housing; factors mentioned included unfavorable cost/benefit proposition for developers compared with building in Chittenden Cty., limited building sites near downtown where both millennials and seniors may want to live, and NIMBY reactions to even modestly larger scale development.

Report from Polly Nichol on the Aug 13 Planning Commission meeting of city committees

Polly and Jen presented the Task Force's three housing aspirations. Jo and Mary also attended.

Polly reported that the Commission will develop the new (and newly named) "City Plan" rather differently from past Master Plans.

- The new City Plan will be organized by topic (e.g., Housing, Transportation, Energy) with chapters that correspond roughly to the various city committees, boards, and commissions that will ultimately be responsible for accomplishing the goals in each area.
- The Commission will seek input from these various town committees, etc. through a systematic and consistent process of developing interlocking aspirations, goals, and implementation plans.

- Because some topics (e.g., housing) may be addressed by more than one committee etc., the Planning Commission, as author of the City Plan, will be the final arbiter, ensuring that aspirations, goals, and implementation plans are completely consistent across chapters.
- Most of the work on the new City Plan will be posted on a website so that members of the various committees, etc. and other interested citizens and organizations may be informed about and involved in the development process.

Polly commented that, perhaps unsurprisingly, housing was listed in the goals of a number of the committees, etc., although some of the goals regarding housing were quite surprising, such as Sustainable Montpelier Coalition's call for 1000 new housing units over a very short period. Polly also commented on how encouraging it was to see so many relatively young and talented people involved in the various committees, etc.

Polly said that the Planning Commission will be in touch with the Task Force about helping us work on our implementation plans. Peter suggested that, in the meantime, we should work on goals that correspond to our three aspirations, as was called for by the Planning Commission in preparation for the Aug 13 meeting. Polly proposed that we put this on the agenda for our September meeting.

Report from the Subcommittee on Housing Trust Fund Guidelines revisions

This sub-committee, consisting of Polly, Mary, and Jo, met last week and came up with "Suggested Policy Changes, Additions, Deletions Guidelines for Montpelier Housing Trust Fund," which Polly emailed to the Task Force along with the original (2010) Guidelines.

After a brief discussion of the need for a substantial re-organization and revision of the original guidelines, it was unanimously agreed that the sub-committee had made a great start on the needed revision and should continue their efforts. In particular, the Task Force strongly endorsed the sub-committee's recommendations regarding "Management of the Housing Trust Fund" (namely that the Housing Task Force and Housing Trust Fund remain as two separate but inter-related committees) and greater flexibility in the "procedures, awards and use of the Housing Trust Fund's assets."

Review of draft outline for the September 12 Presentation to the City Council

After a brief review of the draft prepared and emailed to the Task Force by Jen Hollar, it was agreed that it was on the right track, but there was some concern that this was a lot to cover in what is likely to be a very short amount of time. Jack pointed out that if we submit a written document to the City Council sufficiently ahead of time, Council members will have read it in advance of the meeting. The implication of this seemed to be that we would not use our very limited and precious time before the Council in restating what they will have already read; instead we might want to emphasize our main point, which is that the Housing Trust Fund needs more and more-consistent funding to be used for leverage in housing programs like The First Time Buyer's Program and projects like 1 Taylor Place and The French Block.

In this connection, Polly asked whether we should make this point to the Council by reminding them of our December 19, 2017 proposal for funding the Housing Trust Fund, in which we suggested four possible sources of funding. Peter expressed his concern about suggestion 3 (Dedicate 25% of the Rooms and Meals Tax to the Trust Fund), which he felt lacked the clear and convincing rationale of the other 3 suggestions and thereby weakened them. Mary expressed her long-standing concern about “dedicated” funding measures like these, preferring more forthright support in general fund budgets— like the “One penny for housing” approved by voters in 2005. Peter and Jack concurred with Mary’s view theoretically, but wondered if it “would work.” Peter suggested that we might remind them of the rationale offered for providing larger and more consistent funding in our 12/19/17 proposal to the Council, but leave it up to them as to how they think this should be provided, whether by dedicated funds as we’d previously suggested or by direct support from general funds. There was further discussion of the amount that “one penny for housing,” would currently generate, what is needed and what amount should be requested of the Council. No conclusion was reached.

Minutes written by Peter Kelman