

# Dunstable HPP Public Meeting Results Summary



Town of Dunstable

## Housing Production Plan for 2023-27

The Dunstable Housing Production Plan took place at Town Hall on June 26, 2023. The meeting was part of a regular meeting of the Dunstable Affordable Housing Committee and was advertised via Nextdoor, Dunstable's Facebook page, and the *Neighbor to Neighbor* newsletter. 20 members of the public signed into the meeting, which was facilitated by Northern Middlesex Council of Governments staff.

**20+** Attendees  
June 26, 2023

### What's a Housing Production Plan?

The meeting started with a presentation that included an explanation of a Housing Production Plan, also known as an "HPP". An HPP that has been adopted by the Planning Board and Select Board and approved by the state has several benefits:

- If a town has an approved HPP and creates a certain number of subsidized affordable housing units in a 12-month period<sup>1</sup>, it has more control over Comprehensive Permit (40B) projects for one to two years
- A town with an approved HPP is given preference for certain state grant programs
- An HPP provides nonbinding guidance to municipal officials such as Select Board members and town staff on decisions related to Comprehensive Permit (40B) projects, investments from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund and Community Preservation Act, and other actions such as development of new zoning proposals for Town Meeting approval
- An HPP is an opportunity for a community to come together and create a proactive vision and specific strategies to meet housing needs as it grows and changes

An HPP consists of a comprehensive needs assessment that uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau and other sources plus public feedback to evaluate the evolving housing needs of a town; a goals section including quantitative (numerical) goals such as the number of units of subsidized affordable housing to produce per year and qualitative goals such as the type of housing; and strategy recommendations to achieve those goals, including specific public and private parcels that would be ideal for subsidized affordable housing. The locations identified in the HPP are not binding, but they do communicate sites of interest to landowners and nonprofit or for-profit developers. The HPP communicates the town might be interested in discussing the development potential of these sites of interest.

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<sup>1</sup> The Town of Dunstable's goal is anticipated to be updated to six units to grant a one-year period of additional control and twelve units to grant a two-year period of additional control.

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### Frequently Asked Questions

#### **Does Dunstable currently have an HPP?**

Housing Production Plans cover five-year periods. Dunstable's previous HPP covered 2016-2020, but it has no current HPP.

#### **Does the HPP get approved by a townwide vote?**

No, but the public may provide comment at an upcoming Planning Board hearing and a Select Board hearing. Those boards must adopt the HPP before it is sent to the state for approval.

#### **The survey had 79 responses – isn't that a small number? Was it publicized enough?**

The survey was publicized through Nextdoor, Dunstable's Facebook page, and the *Neighbor to Neighbor* newsletter, along with hard copies available at Town Hall, at the Library, and given out at the Special Fall Town Meeting. In addition, in NMCOG's experience, 79 is a fairly large number for a town the size of Dunstable for this type of survey. Assuming surveys typically are filled out one per household, 79 is roughly 7% of households.

#### **What teeth does the HPP have?**

If Dunstable has an approved HPP and produces at least six affordable units that qualify for the Subsidized Housing Inventory in a 12-month period, it has more control over Comprehensive Permit (40B) projects for one year.

It also provides support for grants to implement the activities it recommends and gives Dunstable preference for certain state grants.

The recommendations are not binding, but they can provide support for advocates encouraging the town to adopt its recommendations.

#### **Does the HPP impact any current development proposals?**

Data collected and public input received for HPPs can provide guidance to decision-makers such as the Zoning Board of Appeals and the Select Board, but they do not have any regulatory authority on their own. If Dunstable creates six subsidized affordable housing units in a 12-month period and has an approved HPP, it has more control over Comprehensive Permit (40B) projects if local decisions are appealed to the state. That said, no development proposals are currently near this stage as of June 30, 2023.

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### Feedback Received at the Meeting

After sharing information about the Area Median Income (AMI) and housing affordability levels, changes in Dunstable's median home sales price and rent against income, Dunstable's income distribution, area race and ethnicity, housing cost burden levels, and results from the December-January survey, participants joined breakout groups to discuss the proposed vision and goals. Specifically, participants discussed the following questions:

1. Did anything surprise you about the data? Is there anything else you wish you knew?
2. Do you agree with the vision statement? Is there anything you would add?
3. Do you agree with the goals? What should the town do to advance them?

Facilitators reported out the results of their discussions. Participants then had question and answers with the Affordable Housing Committee and NMCOC staff.

Common themes discussed included:

#### Data and Research – Additional Data to Include in the Housing Production Plan (HPP)

- Tax increases should be addressed in the HPP
- The HPP should draw connections between state grants and funding for services such as schools, police, and infrastructure and housing growth
- The HPP would ideally identify the types of desired housing options and number of residents that might want to downsize but stay in town
- The town should do its best to promote HPP input opportunities such as upcoming hearings as much as possible, including a clear explanation of the benefits of an HPP, and including promotion at Farmhouse Café, the Town Website, Schools, and a sign near town center

#### Vision

- The participants agreed that the proposed vision and goals seemed broadly correct
- The vision should include a focus on the growing senior population
- Starter homes were also supported as a critical part of the vision for young families and retention of younger generations

#### Goals 1-4: Produce and Maintain Affordable Homes and Help People Access Them

- The HPP should clarify what is necessary to monitor affordable homes and how Dunstable can achieve this with existing resources

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- Participants agreed there is a need for both home ownership and rental and discussed trade-offs between both
- The HPP should clarify what ladders to home ownership mean and how this can be achieved
- Participants discussed whether there should be a preference for Dunstable residents

### **Goals 5-7: Encourage Diverse Housing Types that Work for Diverse Households**

- There was support for creating a new zoning district that would apply to a portion of town that would allow parcels smaller than one acre for small single family homes or other types of housing and exploring the possibility of a maximum unit size for this type of district
- There is support for duplexes that could help different types of households afford to live in Dunstable
- Participants stated clear design standards are very important, especially for multifamily housing
- Participants noted continued upkeep of housing, including keeping homes to code, is very important, especially for multifamily housing

### **Goals 8-10: Ensure All Types of People Have Access to Housing**

- Participants stated that there is a need for housing that is affordable to seniors, but not all seniors want to live in senior-only communities and want to live in places that have all ages
- It was noted accessibility in these multigenerational households is important
- The HPP should clarify how Dunstable can monitor for discrimination with existing resources

### **Goals 11-14: Grow While Making Wise Use of Resources and Building Community**

- Participants noted continuous education and transparency is very important
- Transportation and transit, especially to Nashua, was cited as an important consideration
- Participants stated services such as education, police, and emergency medical response should be included in the infrastructure goal, in addition to considering water and septic
- Building a village concept with mixed housing types was supported and the Post Office and Lowell Street/Dumont sites were suggested