

Housing Commissions:

A new voice for housing in your community

Housing commissions are a new idea for municipalities that are interested in promoting increased understanding and awareness of the importance of a balanced and diverse supply of housing.

Your community must continually work to ensure that it is responding appropriately to affordable housing needs. Housing commissions would advocate for the development of affordable and workforce housing and serve as a resource to local agencies and boards on matters affecting housing resources. A commission can provide feedback on the progress of affordable housing efforts and recommend if changes should be made.



Municipalities are creations of the State and act only as authorized by state legislation. The New Hampshire Revised Statutes Annotated (RSA) are therefore the authority to consult on the powers of housing commissions. The legislation that allows for the creation of a municipal housing commission was signed into law on July 17, 2008 and becomes effective on September 15, 2008.

Why have a Housing Commission?

- So that a resource can exist to help local land use boards and governing bodies as they deliberate over housing needs.
- To have a voice for the community on affordable housing matters.
- To help a community better understand affordable and workforce housing concerns.

What does a Housing Commission do?

A housing commission advises other town boards and advocates for the interests and needs of affordable and workforce housing in the community. It has no regulatory or enforcement powers. Housing commission members work cooperatively with other town or city governing and land-use boards and commissions to ensure that affordable and workforce housing concerns and interests are better understood and considered in decision-making.

A housing commission may:

- Assist the planning board in the development and review of those sections of the master plan that address housing and local land use ordinances and regulations that have the potential to affect the cost or availability of housing.
- Advise local agencies and other local boards in their review of requests on matters affecting or potentially affecting housing resources.
- Hold meetings and hearings necessary to carry out its duties.
- Conduct a housing needs assessment, which as a starting point, may use the regional planning commissions housing needs assessment conducted under RSA 36:47, II.
- Publicize and report its activities.
- Hire consultants and contractors.

- Receive gifts of money and property, both real and personal, in the name of the city or town, to assist in carrying out the purpose of this section.
- Acquire and dispose of real property interests in the name of the town, subject to prior approval of the local governing body, for the purpose of maintaining or improving housing affordability.

Affordable Housing Fund

The act of establishing a housing commission also creates an affordable housing fund. While there is no requirement for the community to appropriate money to it, the fund allows the housing commission to act as the municipality's agent to receive funds and make expenditures on affordable housing. Fund monies can accumulate from year to year and do not lapse to the municipality's general fund. Unlike the conservation fund's use in permanently acquiring property, however, the housing fund should only serve the purpose of facilitating transactions relative to affordable housing.

Who benefits from a housing commission?

Planning boards and local governing bodies

- A housing commission can be requested to review zoning ordinances or research housing data
- Review housing development requests

Businesses

- Employers rely on a stable and diverse workforce
- A housing commission will safeguard the development of a balanced and diverse supply of housing to meet the workforce needs of local businesses

Residents

- The housing needs of residents in a community change over time as a result of many factors including income and age
- Housing commissions will promote balanced housing resources to meet the economic, social and physical needs of a diverse population

Who Can Serve?

Commissions rely on local volunteers and RSA 673:4-c outlines the basic criteria for housing commission membership. Usually selectmen or town or city councilors appoint members to a housing commission.

- A commission must have at least three but not more than seven members comprised of local residents. It can also have up to five alternates.
- One or more members of a housing commission may also serve on other municipal boards and commissions such as a conservation commission or historic district or agricultural commission.
- The statute allows one commission member to serve on the local governing body and one member to serve on the local planning board.

How is a Housing Commission established?

A housing commission may be created only by vote of the local legislative body (town meeting, city council or board of aldermen).

For more information contact:

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