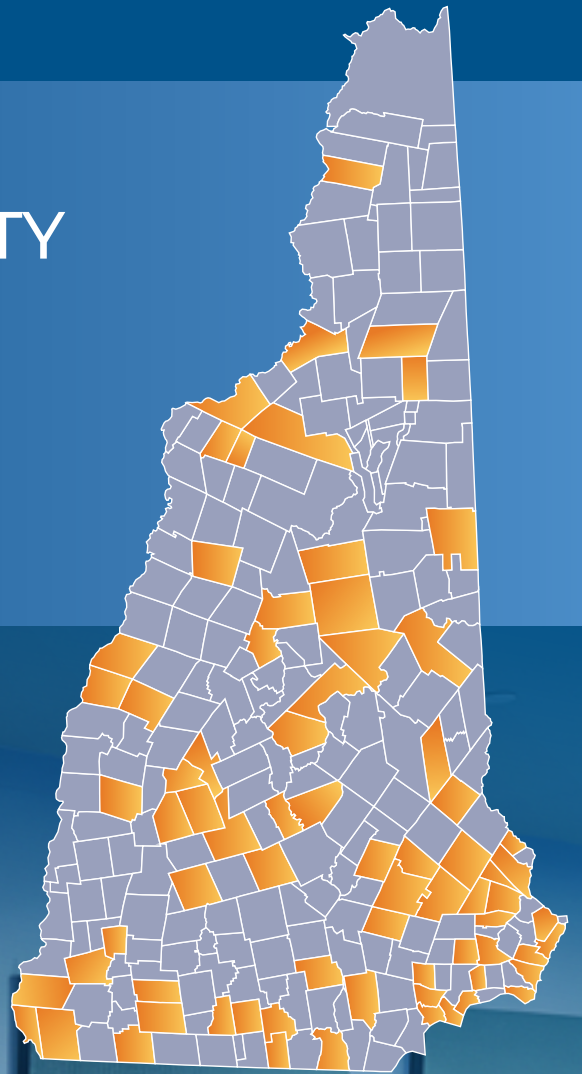


HOUSING OPPORTUNITY PLANNING GRANTS PROGRAM

SELECTED CASE STUDIES

JANUARY 2025



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BACKGROUND

98

HOP GRANTS HAVE BEEN AWARDED
TO DATE WITH AN ADDITIONAL ROUND
OF APPLICATIONS ON THE HORIZON

11

COMMUNITIES HIGHLIGHTED
IN THESE CASE STUDIES

647 – 23,047

POPULATION RANGE OF THE CASE STUDY COMMUNITIES

As part of Governor Sununu’s \$100 million InvestNH initiative, \$5 million was allocated to the Municipal Planning and Zoning Grants Program to help increase opportunities for housing development. The NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs contracted with New Hampshire Housing to administer this program.

In August 2022, New Hampshire Housing, in partnership with Plan NH and UNH Cooperative Extension, launched the Community Housing Navigator and Housing Opportunity Planning (HOP) Grants programs. The Community Housing Navigator program awarded grants to five municipalities and regional planning commissions to hire staff dedicated to facilitating community conversations about housing. The HOP grant program provided funding to municipalities to study zoning or other regulatory barriers to affordable housing, identify potential changes to local land use regulations, and update those regulations based on their findings.

The response to the program was significant, leading to the initial allocation being fully utilized within the first ten months. In Spring 2024, an additional \$2.9 million was allocated to the program for a total of \$7.9 million. In total, 98 HOP grants have been awarded to date. These case studies showcase just a small portion of the remarkable work achieved by communities throughout the state. The eleven communities highlighted in these case studies—Berlin, Bethlehem, Canterbury, Gorham, Keene, Lancaster, Newmarket, Plymouth, Sandwich, Sugar Hill, and Wilmot—span six of New Hampshire’s ten counties and five of the nine regional planning commission regions. The populations of the case study communities range from Sugar Hill, with 647 residents, to Keene, with 23,047 residents. Each of the case study communities tackled the housing crisis in their own way with solutions including amending the community’s accessory dwelling unit ordinance, implementing a form-based code, and embracing “missing middle” housing typologies. The housing policies and community engagement tools outlined in the following case studies should serve as a useful example for communities across the state and beyond.

The InvestNH initiative was funded through the State’s allocation of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF), making \$100 million available to accelerate the approval and construction of affordable workforce housing in New Hampshire. The Municipal Planning and Zoning Grants Program was administered with the support of a steering committee made up of individuals from the Office of Planning and Development at the Department of Business and Economic Affairs, the NH Municipal Association, the Community Development Finance Authority, Plan NH, and UNH Cooperative Extension.

HOUSING ACADEMY



Recognizing the value of strong community engagement and citizen participation in local zoning reform, these efforts were purposefully integrated into every aspect of the grant programs. Community engagement in this context means community members are informed, participating in, and influencing local decision-making.

NH Housing enlisted the support of UNH Cooperative Extension to create Housing Academy, a training program for grantees that explores community engagement tools and best practices. Housing Academy sessions were conducted in person, online, and within communities.

Housing Academy training sessions taught and demonstrated community engagement tools and techniques. During virtual sessions, participants used features such as chat and polls on Zoom, as well as other online tools like Jamboard and Poll Everywhere, to demonstrate some simple community engagement strategies. At in-person sessions, tables were lined with butcher paper and markers, and attendees participated in activities such as dot voting, sticky notes, and other forms of “thin” engagement. These methods are inexpensive or free and relatively easy to implement in a variety of settings. Other tools, like key informant interviews, focus groups, and best practices for community forums, were also taught, and participants practiced these techniques with one another.

Most New Hampshire communities are small, with minimal or no municipal staff. Traditionally, much of the work in the Granite State is carried out by elected officials and other volunteers. Given this, it was important to invite volunteers to participate in Housing Academy and empower them to lead efforts in their communities. Grantees were invited to send local leaders, including volunteer members of land use boards, committees, commissions, local elected officials, and planning staff, to Housing Academy.

To date, four classes have completed Housing Academy, with over 200 individuals from more than 70 communities participating—representing nearly one third of NH’s 234 cities and towns and every region of the state. Participants are almost evenly split between municipal staff and volunteers or elected officials. While most volunteers come from planning boards, others represent housing, master plan, energy, recreation, agricultural, and historic committees; zoning boards of adjustment, select boards, and conservation or housing commissions. As a result of volunteer participation, municipal staff are now supported by volunteers equipped with new skills, expertise, and confidence. This is an incredible win for communities with limited capacity that are relying on volunteer power.

In addition to creating an inclusive space for local leaders to learn from one another, Housing Academy fosters opportunities to bring people together within their broader communities. Many participants have brought the lessons learned in Housing Academy back to their towns and cities, further enhancing their local efforts.

MAP OF HOP COMMUNITIES + CASE STUDIES

HOP GRANT COMMUNITIES

1. Atkinson
2. Barrington
3. Bedford
4. Berlin
5. Bethlehem
6. Boscawen
7. Brentwood
8. Brookline
9. Campton
10. Candia
11. Canterbury
12. Chesterfield
13. Colebrook
14. Conway
15. Deerfield
16. Dover
17. Dublin
18. Durham
19. East Kingston
20. Enfield
21. Epsom
22. Exeter
23. Farmington
24. Fitzwilliam
25. Gorham
26. Hampstead
27. Hampton
28. Hanover
29. Hillsborough
30. Hinsdale
31. Hopkinton
32. Jaffrey
33. Keene
34. Lancaster
35. Lebanon
36. Lee
37. Lisbon
38. Little Boars Head
(a village district of
North Hampton)
39. Littleton
40. Londonderry
41. Madbury
42. Meredith
43. Milford
44. Moultonborough
45. Nashua
46. New Durham
47. New London
48. Newmarket
49. Newport
50. Newton
51. Northwood
52. Nottingham
53. Ossipee
54. Plaistow
55. Plymouth
56. Portsmouth
57. Rye
58. Sanbornton
59. Sandown
60. Sandwich
61. Seabrook
62. Somersworth
63. Sugar Hill
64. Sullivan
65. Sutton
66. Temple

67. Warner
68. Warren
69. Waterville Valley
70. Wilmot
71. Wilton
72. Winchester

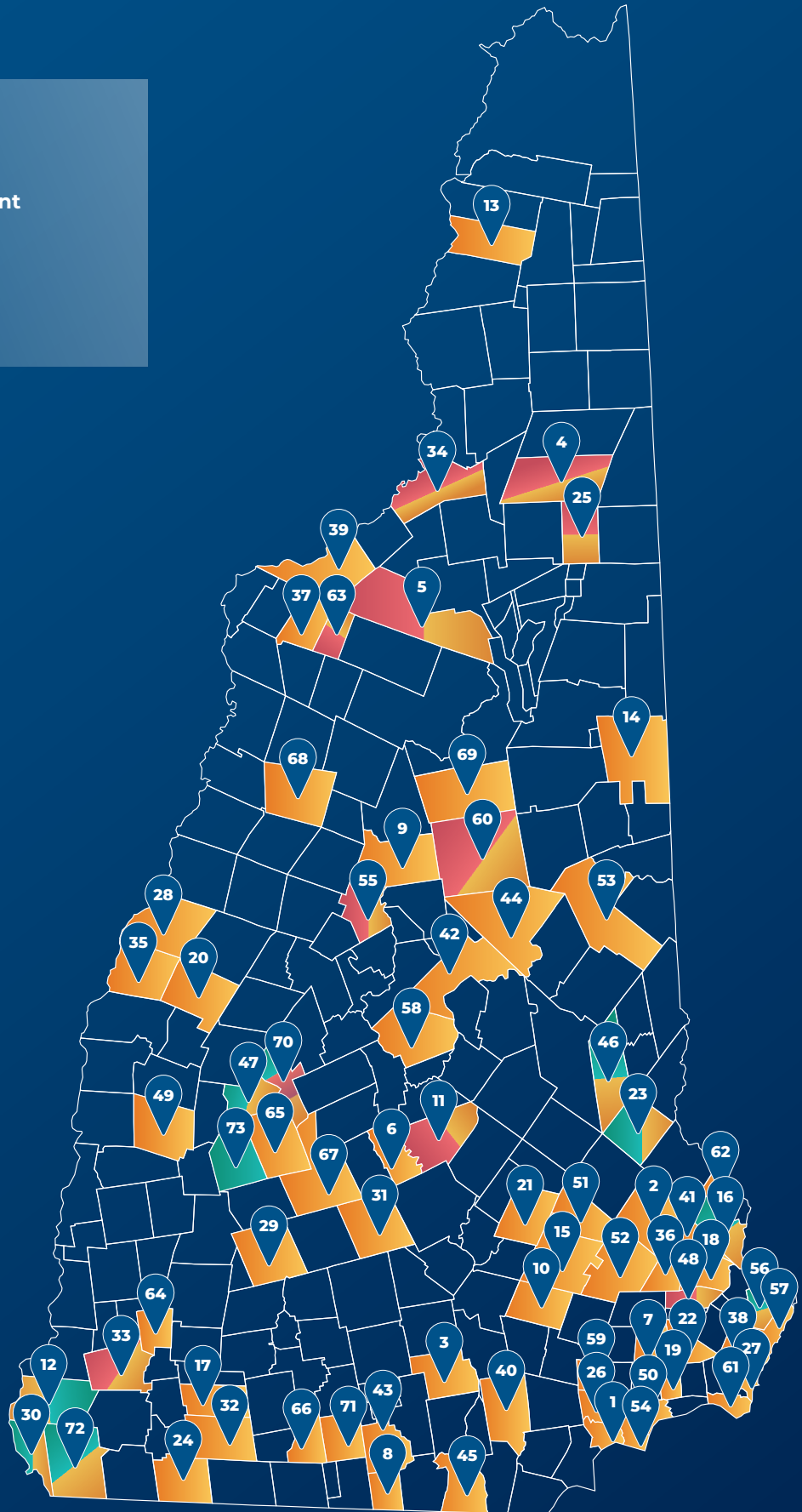
NAVIGATOR GRANT COMMUNITIES

12. Chesterfield
16. Dover
23. Farmington
30. Hinsdale
46. New Durham
47. New London
73. Newbury
56. Portsmouth
70. Wilmot
72. Winchester

CASE STUDY COMMUNITIES

4. Berlin
5. Bethlehem
11. Canterbury
25. Gorham
33. Keene
34. Lancaster
48. Newmarket
55. Plymouth
60. Sandwich
63. Sugar Hill
70. Wilmot

-  HOP Grant Communities
-  Navigator Grant Communities
-  Case Study Communities



TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

Consultants: North County Council, Tara Bamford



Located in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, Bethlehem is home to 2,484 Granite Staters. Bethlehem’s eclectic and vibrant village center is brimming with a strong sense of community.

The community is ripe with opportunities for gathering, from old-fashioned festivals to outdoor concerts, ongoing art shows, live musical performances, antique shopping, and local restaurants, breweries, and coffee shops. Town officials in Bethlehem saw the HOP grant program as a chance to build on the historic development pattern and improve housing choices in the town’s economic and civic center.

Bethlehem has a long history of tourism, seasonal residents, and vacation properties and has seen a large increase in short term rentals in recent years. Short-term rentals more than doubled between 2019 and 2022 according to data from AirDNA (a third party short-term rental tracking website). The full impact of short-term rentals is unknown, but North Country communities are increasingly concerned about the potential impact on housing supply and affordability.

Project Summary

Over the past couple of years, Bethlehem’s planning board has taken steps to update the town’s land use regulations, ensuring they are user-friendly and improving the review process for site plans and subdivisions.

Even before applying for a HOP grant, Bethlehem had been working on comprehensive revisions to its zoning ordinance to enhance clarity and usability. The HOP grant program enabled Bethlehem to build on this momentum.

When applying for the HOP grant, Bethlehem outlined the following goals:



ENGAGE with residents, employers, and other stakeholders to gather feedback and build support for zoning amendments.



AUDIT the current land use regulations to identify barriers to housing development.



AMEND the town’s land use regulations to increase opportunities for housing development.

Community Engagement

Bethlehem held several public meetings throughout the HOP grant process. The Bethlehem Planning Board hosted an initial kick-off meeting, two open houses where residents were invited to share their perspectives, and three focus groups, in addition to necessary work sessions and public hearings. Leaders in Bethlehem engaged with residents at community events such as Summerfest, an annual festival held at Gazebo Park.

The scope of Bethlehem’s outreach expanded with the support of community volunteers who attended local events to gather responses for the town’s housing survey. Town leaders found that residents, including existing homeowners, were struggling to keep up with the housing and maintenance costs. Renters expressed frustration that their rent, already high, did not include utilities. Many residents expressed interest in adding units to existing properties large enough to accommodate them. While residents were open to more development in the community, they emphasized the importance of maintaining the town’s character.



Outcomes

The results of Bethlehem's housing needs assessment indicate that residents are extremely concerned about the cost of housing in town. Renters are increasingly cost-burdened, and much of the town's housing stock is older. To address these challenges, the town must diversify its housing supply and consider options to encourage new development. Survey respondents generally expressed supportive for mixed-use development.

The regulatory audit, conducted as part of Bethlehem's HOP grant, identified several opportunities to better support future housing. Recommendations of particular interest to the community included updates related to accessory dwelling units, cottage cluster developments, and increasing density while removing barriers to multifamily dwellings in certain zones.

Ultimately, Bethlehem's planning board sent eight warrant articles to Town Meeting in spring 2024; all were adopted by voters.

- **ARTICLE 2:** Reduces the parking requirement from 2 spaces to 1 for accessory dwelling units that are 1,000 square feet or smaller.
- **ARTICLE 3:** Allows single-family homes to have one detached accessory dwelling unit up to 1,000 square feet.
- **ARTICLE 4:** Defines "residential conversions" and allows "the conversion of existing residential structures and those structures previously used for nonresidential services to multi-family uses."
- **ARTICLE 5:** Allows dwelling units above first-floor businesses.
- **ARTICLE 6:** Allows cluster development in town, except the Main Street and Landfill District.
- **ARTICLE 7:** Adds definitions for short-term rentals, public accommodation, accessory building, campground, owner-occupied, and transient.
- **ARTICLE 8:** Removal of impact fees.
- **ARTICLE 9:** Add a definition of Gross Floor Area as "the sum of the horizontal area of all floors of a building, measured from the exterior faces of the walls but not including unfinished cellars, attics, porches, etc."

In 2025, Bethlehem plans to update the town's master plan. The housing needs assessment, completed as part of the HOP grant, helped local leaders to identify themes to include in the master plan, including the impact of short-term rentals, encouraging smaller homes, and reusing existing commercial spaces on Main Street.

CITY OF BERLIN

Consultant: Barrett Planning Group



Berlin, the northernmost city in New Hampshire and the only city in Coos County, has a population of 9,425.

It sits at the edge of the White Mountains, and its boundaries extend into the White Mountain National Forest. Berlin was once a manufacturing hub in the North Country, home to the Riverside Mill, Forest Fibre Company, and White Mountain Pulp & Paper Company. The closure of the pulp and paper mills significantly impacted the local economy.

The conversation about housing in Berlin spans decades. Berlin's economy took a major hit when its paper mill closed, resulting in job losses and the abandonment of many housing units. Much of Berlin's housing stock is old, dilapidated, and unsafe. In the 1990s, the city received a grant from NH Housing to assess the existing housing stock, which spurred a concerted effort to de-densify Berlin. Over time, the city demolished the worst of the housing stock. Today, however, Berlin faces a different set of housing challenges. Like many other communities in the state, the city is now struggling with low housing supply and rising prices.

Project Summary

In recent years, Berlin has experienced renewed energy and excitement from residents. Newcomers to the city have gotten involved in the community, and new small businesses have opened downtown. It became clear that the land use regulations in Berlin were outdated and did not support Berlin's vision of being a desirable place to live for all ages. The city applied for a HOP grant to ensure its land use regulations support the goals outlined in the master plan and support Berlin's vision of offering diverse housing options for both owners and renters.

Having recently updated the master plan, Berlin was well aware of the city's housing needs. Berlin's HOP grant application focused on conducting a regulatory audit to:



IDENTIFY barriers to housing



DEVELOPING new zoning regulations based on community feedback and the audit results



ENGAGING the community in meaningful conversations throughout the process

Community Engagement

Community engagement was not new to Berlin. In recent years, the city had some success engaging members of the public as the master plan was being revised. During the height of the coronavirus pandemic, the master plan steering committee developed creative ways to engage the public, including increasing Berlin’s online presence and better utilizing the city’s social media platforms.

Barrett Planning Group hosted small focus groups and conducted informational interviews with community members and key stakeholders, including employers and housing developers. Town officials distributed a housing survey to gather input from the broader community. The city advertised the survey through the local newspaper as well as the town website. Additionally, the planning board held open house events where community members could share their thoughts and ask questions. Berlin approached community engagement thoughtfully, making a conscious effort to hold most community-wide events outside of City Hall. This ensured residents felt comfortable attending and speaking opening about housing issues.



The results of the community housing survey indicated that people in Berlin are extremely concerned about the high cost of housing. Just over half (51.1%) of survey respondents indicated that they may have to leave the city within the next two years due to the prohibitive cost of housing. A large minority (35.8%) reported experiencing difficulty paying their rent or mortgage at least once in the past year. Many residents also expressed concerns about the lack of options for aging in place and downsizing. Respondents broadly supported efforts to expand rental options and diversify Berlin's housing stock to meet the needs of a wider range of residents.

51.1%

OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS INDICATED THAT THEY MAY HAVE TO LEAVE THE CITY WITHIN THE NEXT TWO YEARS DUE TO THE PROHIBITIVE COST OF HOUSING

35.8%

REPORTED EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTY PAYING THEIR RENT OR MORTGAGE AT LEAST ONCE IN THE PAST YEAR

Outcomes

The regulatory audit identified several opportunities for Berlin to update its local ordinances to support housing development.

Recommendations included allowing attached accessory dwelling units (ADUs) by right in two-family, residential, and downtown zoning districts; allowing detached ADUs in zoning districts where attached ADUs are already permitted; and reducing the minimum lot size in the residential zoning district to 5,000 square feet for up to three units.

The regulatory audit identified dozens of other recommendations, including permitting two-family dwellings in certain zones; reducing minimum lot sizes and setbacks in certain zones; allowing residential developments to count public parking spaces toward parking minimums; creating design standards for multifamily and mixed-used developments; creating transfer of development rights (TDR) and inclusionary zoning ordinances; and expanding the existing 79-E district.

Given the breadth of recommendations, the city opted to overhaul the entire zoning ordinance in the coming year. City officials plan to utilize the above recommendations and community feedback to guide the development of new regulations.

TOWN OF CANTERBURY

Consultant: Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission



Canterbury is a small town in central New Hampshire with beautiful natural resources. The town is home to the Canterbury Shaker Village, a historic site and museum, and is a prime example of how communities like the Shakers approached density and land use within their villages. Canterbury has a beautiful downtown, and the town is a popular destination for visitors looking to fish, hunt, or simply enjoy the outdoors.

Project Summary

In recent years, most development in Canterbury has consisted of single-family homes, reducing the diversity of the town's housing stock. Recognizing this challenge, the Canterbury Planning Board has made new housing development a priority.

As part of this effort, the town applied for and received a HOP grant. Canterbury chose to collaborate with the Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission to explore the feasibility of cluster neighborhoods, expand access to accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and diversify Canterbury's housing options.

Canterbury utilized its HOP grant to plan community engagement events. The goal of these events was to solicit feedback from residents, learn about their concerns, and better understand which zoning amendments they might support. The Canterbury Planning Board used this information to develop new zoning regulations and build support for them ahead of Town Meeting.



Community Engagement

Town officials in Canterbury took a multi-pronged approach to community engagement. In addition to holding public hearings, they organized visioning sessions that provided community members with opportunities to express their views. Town officials also attended community events, including the Canterbury Fair and the town's Old Home Day, to connect with residents.

Early in the process, Canterbury held public meetings to discuss the master plan and the potential for increased housing development along Exits 17 and 18 and around NH Route 106. During these meetings, attendees expressed some trepidation about zoning changes. Many residents were concerned about how more housing development would impact the town. To address these concerns and build consensus, the planning board and other town officials held multiple sessions to engage with residents and respond to their feedback. These efforts successfully helped to build support for change.

A valuable lesson that Canterbury officials learned through this process was the importance of allowing residents to guide policy discussions. While it might be tempting for officials to propose their own ideas, they found it more effective to let the community members lead the way. During the community process, Canterbury residents expressed support for senior housing, workforce housing, and cluster developments that align with the town's rural character.

The planning board, along with the consultants, utilized this feedback to draft land use regulations that addressed residents' concerns.

Outcomes

With extensive input from the public, Canterbury's planning board endorsed the following zoning amendments:

CLUSTER NEIGHBORHOODS: Canterbury's new cluster ordinance dealt with how and where to allow more cluster development. The amendment would provide more flexibility in the planning board review process and offer design incentives to protect the town's historic and rural character and to preserve open space. The amendment adds definitions for "designated open space," "residents," "common area," and "commercial common area." Finally, the amendment would require cluster neighborhoods apply for a conditional use permit, which gives members of the public an opportunity to weigh in on specific development projects.

FARMSTEAD DESIGN ALTERNATIVE: As part of the town's cluster ordinance, Canterbury adopted a tool called the Farmstead Design Alternative. This change allows existing structures to be converted into multiple housing units. New developments that utilize the Farmstead Design Alternative must meet certain standards: the buildings must closely resemble 18th and 19th century New England farm homes, and the buildings materials must be brick, stone, or wood, or other materials that match that appearance. The Farmstead Design Alternative enables the development of more housing units while maintaining Canterbury's rural character.

RESIDENTIAL USES: This warrant article on the ballot in March 2024 permits limited residential development in the town's commercial zone.

SHORT TERM RENTALS: This amendment clarifies that in zones where they are allowed, only one rental unit is permitted. Further, rental permits will expire after two years and inspections will be required.

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS: This amendment allows accessory dwelling units with a building permit, except for in the industrial zone. Detached units are allowed through a conditional use permit; however, detached units are not permitted in industrial and commercial zones.

Most importantly, the HOP grant project positioned Canterbury for long-term success. The town passed significant reforms to its zoning ordinance, and town officials are optimistic about the potential for further positive change. Canterbury's community engagement efforts brought many residents into the conversation and raised awareness about innovative solutions to the town's housing challenges. This engagement will play a critical role in ensuring the success of future zoning amendments. Members of the Canterbury Planning Board are looking to pursue future amendments to support the development of more housing.

TOWN OF GORHAM

Consultant: North Country Council, Tara Bamford

Nestled in the Androscoggin Valley and adjacent to the Presidential Mountains, Gorham is a small town in Coos County with a year-round population of just 2,698.

Gorham's mixed-use downtown and robust infrastructure once supported a thriving pulp and paper mill industry. Gorham offers an abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities, along with a vibrant downtown. The town has worked hard to reinvent its economy following the decline of manufacturing in the North Country. The declining population that followed the loss of these industries left underutilized housing stock in the town's downtown area, particularly over street-level businesses.

Project Summary

To accommodate growth, the Gorham Planning Board has been working over the last few years to bring the town's land use regulations up to date.

Prior to applying for a HOP grant, the town adopted zoning amendments to:



CREATE AND EXPAND the Commercial Compact Overlay District, enabling multifamily density and reducing setbacks in the downtown;



REZONE developable acreage from the Timber & Ag zone to the Residential zone; and



ENABLE shared or on-street parking.

The planning board's work has been well supported, and most proposed zoning amendments passed with a strong margin.

Gorham applied for a HOP grant to address limitations posed by parking requirements. The planning board has become increasingly aware of the limited parking available for people living downtown in privately-owned and public parking lots. Gorham's needs analysis and planning work under the HOP grant program confirmed that parking was a significant barrier to adding more housing units downtown.

Community Engagement

The Town engaged people in a variety of ways: posting in the newspaper, hosting public meetings, and assembling focus groups to discuss parking issues in Commercial Zone A.

Overall, the process was successful using formal and informal opportunities for engagement. There was a consensus that housing should be a priority and the community supported zoning changes and innovative parking solutions (for example, creating a new permitted parking area).



Outcomes

The regulatory audit identified the main barriers in the parking regulations as the bans on overnight parking to allow for snowplowing and the lack of a mechanism for issuing permits for dedicated parking for downtown residents. The consultant team recommended increasing the authority of the planning board to provide flexibility on parking.

The amendments proposed as a result of the HOP grant work addressed both of the main barriers. Specifically, the amendments removed the requirement that off-site parking be located within 400 feet and instead gave the planning board the discretion to determine a reasonable distance based on a parking plan that documents the need, the adequacy of the parking proposed to serve that need, the safety of users, and the safety of those using adjacent roadways. The article was passed by voters 189–68.

The effect of this change is already evident. On the border between Gorham and Berlin, AHEAD (Affordable Housing Education and Development) is proposing a multifamily housing development, called Tinker Brook. As a result of the amendments to the zoning ordinance, the developer will now be able to obtain permits for public parking. An unrelated developer who recently purchased a building downtown indicated they now plan to create additional residential units on the second floor as a result of the amendment.



CITY OF KEENE

Consultants: Camoin Associates, Greenberg Farrow Architecture Inc., Walker Consultants, Inc.

The largest of the case study communities, Keene is a small city in Cheshire County with a population of 22,700. Home to Keene State College, Keene has a young population, a thriving downtown, and a robust arts scene.

City officials noted in their application, “the city is experiencing significantly different demographic trends and socioeconomic circumstances than the decades following World War II, which is when many of the City’s residential zoning districts last underwent a comprehensive update.”

22,700

POPULATION

City officials expressed concern about the community’s aging population and its potential impact on their economic future. Keene explained in its HOP grant application, “[the city] faces considerable challenges including a rapidly aging population, slow economic recovery, loss of youth and young professionals, and increased competition in an increasingly globalized society.”

Keene’s HOP grant project included conducting a Housing Needs Assessment and regulatory development.



Community Engagement

City officials in Keene conducted informational interviews with housing professionals and major employers as part of the needs assessment.

Keene interviewed housing developers, as well as representatives from Southwestern Community Services, Keene Housing, Monadnock Interfaith Project, Keene State College, C&S Wholesale Grocers, and Cheshire Medical Center. The city distributed an online community housing survey, which received responses from 354 residents.

In addition, the planning board held in-person meetings, workshops, listening sessions, and focus groups. Members of the planning board attended community events to solicit feedback and distribute information about the housing challenges.

These outreach activities produced some clear and compelling findings:

- A household earning the median income cannot afford a home at median sale price in Keene. To afford a median-priced home, they would need an additional \$18,000 in income.
- Wages in Keene are not keeping up with the price of housing.
- Rental options are somewhat more affordable but remain cost prohibitive for many residents. To afford the median rental unit in Keene, a household would need to earn at least \$21 per hour.



Keene's analysis found that the city needs about 1,400 more housing units over the next decade. Through the community engagement process, city officials identified four major goals and some strategies to achieve them:

1	EXPAND the city's capacity to implement housing programs.
2	IMPROVE the resiliency of the housing stock.
3	INCREASE the diversity of the housing stock.
4	SUPPORT special populations in meeting their housing needs.

Some of the strategies Keene identified included exploring the creation of a housing trust fund, establishing a housing rehabilitation and resiliency program, identifying housing development and redevelopment opportunities, and supporting transitional housing.

Outcomes

In collaboration with the consultant team, Keene drafted a zoning amendment to create a Cottage Court Overlay District.

The amendment would promote infill development within the district, expand the range of housing choices in the area, and encourage compact, pedestrian-scaled development. Development proposals in the Cottage Court Overlay District will be approved through a conditional use permit. The amendment also simplified and streamlined the regulatory approval process. The zoning amendment underwent a public hearing on April 18, 2024, and was adopted by the City Council on May 16, 2024.

TOWN OF LANCASTER

Consultant: Resilience Planning & Design



The northern-most case study, the Town of Lancaster is in Coos County and has a population of approximately 3,200.

Lancaster is a very attractive place for people to visit and live with attractions such as Weeks State Park and home of the popular Lancaster Fair. Despite being far away from other population centers in New Hampshire, Lancaster has a vibrant community, and it is home to Mt. Cabot, as well as part of the White Mountain National Forest.

Lancaster is the second-most populous community in Coos County after Berlin. Like many towns in New Hampshire, Lancaster is struggling with a housing shortage and affordability crisis. Alleviating this crisis is a top priority for the town.

Project Summary

Lancaster applied for a HOP grant to address barriers to housing in town. In their application, town officials noted that community members are particularly concerned about the lack of rental options for the elderly and larger families.

Town officials in Lancaster believe that there is a need for attractive, multifamily housing options. Community members have also expressed concern about the lack of rental housing options for elderly residents and families.

Town officials also expressed optimism about certain types of housing development in Lancaster. Manufactured housing is permitted in town, and members of the public are supportive of more manufactured housing if it is designed to fit the town's rural character. Additionally, cluster development is a viable option in the town's agricultural district.

Leaders in Lancaster were interested in exploring:

- **INCENTIVES** for the development of more multi-bedroom housing units.
- **PROMOTING** the rehabilitation of historic homes.
- **DEVELOPING** design standards for manufactured housing to ensure new projects fit the town's rural character.
- **BETTER** utilizing existing development for residential use.
- **OFFERING** density bonuses for senior housing.
- **ADDRESSING** short-term rentals.

Lancaster's HOP grant project included conducting a housing needs assessment, a community survey, an audit of the town's existing land use regulations, and regulatory amendments to address barriers to housing.

Community Engagement

Lancaster’s public engagement push began well in advance of Town Meeting and was consistent throughout many months.

The town held three focus groups that yielded valuable feedback and insights from residents. Leading up to Town Meeting, town officials distributed informational fact sheets to raise awareness about the zoning amendments the voters would be asked to consider in 2024.

To gather feedback from the broader community, the town distributed a community survey. The survey was advertised on the town’s website as well as on social media channels. The Chamber of Commerce and Northern Forest Center helped to promote the survey and other public engagement opportunities.

Twenty-six percent of survey respondents indicated that they spend between 30–50% of their income on housing. 61% of respondents believe there is a need for more moderate-income housing in town. 50% believe that there is a need for additional senior housing, and 43% believe more rental opportunities are needed in Lancaster. Respondents also indicated that the cost and availability of housing are significant problems. Thirty-nine percent of respondents identified the cost of housing as a significant burden, and 31% reported that the lack of available housing in town is a major issue.

26%

OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS INDICATED THAT THEY SPEND BETWEEN 30–50% OF THEIR INCOME ON HOUSING

61%

OF RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THERE IS A NEED FOR MORE MODERATE-INCOME HOUSING IN TOWN

Critical to Lancaster’s success were “fact sheets” created by the consultant. Lancaster used these fact sheets to educate voters in advance of the Town Meeting. The fact sheets were very effective in dispelling misinformation and addressing the concerns of residents before the vote. They were also a helpful resource for voters unfamiliar with different types of housing, such as accessory dwelling units.

Outcomes

The Town of Lancaster worked with Resilience Planning & Design LLC to conduct a housing needs assessment, completed in June 2023. This assessment allowed town officials to identify significant housing challenges facing the community.

There is a significant shortage of available housing stock in Lancaster, and the price of homes and rents have increased significantly in recent years. Over the past 20 years, home values statewide have increased by 111%. These issues are exacerbated by stagnant wages and the town's aging population. There are limited downsizing opportunities for seniors in Lancaster.

The audit found that 19% of Lancaster homeowners spend at least 50% of their income on housing, while 27% of renters do the same. 50% of residents over the age of 65 are cost burdened.

The Town of Lancaster adopted five zoning amendments in 2024. These amendments include:

ADOPTING a new zoning ordinance regulating accessory dwelling units (ADUs). The ordinance specifies that ADUs may be approved by the planning board through a conditional use permit. The unit can be attached or detached, with one ADU allowed per dwelling.

ADOPTING new zoning regulations on short-term rentals, such as Airbnb and Vrbo. The amendment specifies that short-term rentals can only be rented for 30 consecutive days or less.

ADOPTING a new ordinance allowing recreational vehicles to be used as temporary dwellings for a period of up to one year. Under the new ordinance, recreational vehicles cannot be used as permanent dwellings.

AMENDING the manufactured housing ordinance to include definitions of tiny homes and cottages.

ADOPTING amendments to the zoning ordinance to define multi-unit housing. The amendment specifies that these units can contain three or more dwelling units, either attached or detached.

TOWN OF NEWMARKET

Consultants: Ivy Vann Town Planning, Strafford Regional Planning Commission



Located in Rockingham County, the Town of Newmarket has a population of 9,430. Nestled along the Lamprey River, the town's vibrant downtown draws people of all ages.

Due to its proximity to the University of New Hampshire, Newmarket is home to many students. The housing stock reflects the diversity of those who live in the town. With housing identified as a top priority for the town council and planning board, Newmarket noted that moderate-income owners are becoming "incrementally priced out of the local housing and rental markets."

Project Summary

The timing of the HOP grant program was optimal for Newmarket. The town's HOP grant project expands on work that began in 2019 when the town council recognized the need to create more opportunities for thoughtful residential development and hired a consultant to help identify areas where development opportunities could be leveraged.

Newmarket identified three sections of town, called the gateways. This work was unfortunately paused during the coronavirus pandemic. With a new planning director on board, the town council and planning board resumed their housing-related work by adopting revisions to the accessory dwelling unit ordinance in early 2023.

Finally, Newmarket was awarded a HOP grant to create a North Gateway zoning district along North Main Street and update the housing chapter of the master plan. The focus for the North Gateway — a district that would incorporate properties along North Main Street (Route 108) up to the Town of Durham boundary and those properties east from North Main Street along Dame Road and Bay Road until Gonet Road and Firelane A185 — would be a form-based code.

Town officials hoped that adopting a form-based code would be popular among residents. In the application, town officials wrote: "It is hypothesized by town staff that the residents of Newmarket are not opponents of a density increase, rather opponents against radically transforming their neighborhoods from a visual, design, and social perspective making a form-based code approach a perfect format to implement change, as good design practices can provide a better sense of place and foster positive community interactions."

The Town of Newmarket hired Ivy Vann Town Planning and Urban Design and the Strafford Regional Planning Commission (SRPC) to be its consultants.

Community Engagement

Community engagement was key to Newmarket's work.

Town officials collected approximately 400 responses to a community housing survey. This feedback helped to inform the town council and the planning board of residents' priorities concerning the future of housing development in Newmarket. Generally, people in Newmarket are very supportive of the idea of form-based code. Town officials did not receive significant pushback through the HOP grant process.

In spring 2024, Newmarket hosted a visioning session at the Jr/Sr High School related to the housing and open space chapters of the master plan, which were being updated simultaneously. This in-person event provided another avenue for Newmarket residents and other stakeholders to offer their perspectives on the future of housing. The visioning session, which took place on a Saturday morning, included a breakfast spread, presentations from SRPC and town staff, activities for children, and stations around the room where attendees could share what they love about Newmarket and where in town they feel comfortable with growth and where they would prefer to conserve. This event drew about 40 Newmarket residents.

To collect feedback from residents living in the North Gateway, the town hosted four neighborhood meetings at The Millspace, a volunteer-run community civic space in the historic mills. Facilitated by Ivy Vann, attendees at these neighborhood meetings were provided with playing cards featuring various housing types. They were asked to identify which kinds of housing felt appropriate for Newmarket and to place them on a map. This activity allowed residents to "design their own community" and helped to inform the form-based code.

Outcomes

While the zoning amendments have not yet been adopted by town council, Newmarket's proposed zoning districts will include:

A T-5 MAIN STREET DISTRICT

- Small apartment buildings, townhouses, duplexes, apartment houses, multi-tenant commercial buildings, apartment houses, and Main Street mixed-use developments are all permitted by right.
- Buildings have a 100-foot length limit, structures between Elm Street and Gerry Avenue have a 50-foot limit.
- No minimum parking requirements.

A T-4 NEIGHBORHOOD DISTRICT

- Small apartment buildings, townhouses, duplexes, and apartment houses are allowed by right.
- Structures have a 50-foot length limit.
- A minimum of one parking spot per dwelling is required. The spaces may be off-site.

Newmarket's updated housing chapter in the master plan focuses on five major areas:

VIBRANCY

- Create housing stock that supports "aging in place."
- Provide opportunities for access to both owner-occupied and rental housing stock.
- Continue improvements to Newmarket's downtown.

CONNECTIVITY

- Encourage development close to the town's amenities, such as downtown.

ACCESSIBILITY

- Promote development that adheres to the principles of universal design.

AFFORDABILITY

- Work to reduce the tax burden on Newmarket residents.
- Build partnerships with local and regional housing organizations.

RESILIENCY

- Integrate resilience principles into redevelopment and new housing projects.

TOWN OF PLYMOUTH

Consultant: Barrett Planning Group



Plymouth, with a population of 6,682, is located in Grafton County at the confluence of the Pemigewasset and Baker rivers and sits at the foot of the White Mountains.

Plymouth is a unique community with a highly active downtown area. At its heart is the Plymouth Common (also known as the Plymouth Green), a central gathering spot surrounded by shops, restaurants, and historic buildings. The Common hosts community events, concerts, and markets, enhancing the town's vibrant atmosphere.

Plymouth is also home to Plymouth State University and Speare Memorial Hospital, a critical access hospital. Despite its vibrancy, the town faces persistent housing challenges, including high housing costs, an inadequate supply of housing stock, and a lack of diversity in its housing stock.



Project Summary

In the town's grant application, Plymouth outlined several housing and economic development goals:

- **DEVELOP** and maintain affordable housing options for all ages.
- **ENSURE** an adequate supply of accessible units near downtown.
- **PROVIDE** density bonuses for the development of affordable housing.
- **ENCOURAGE** infill, redevelopment, and mixed-use development.
- **EXPAND** the single-family residential zone to include more easily developable areas.
- **RELAX** parking requirements.

At the beginning of the HOP grant process, the Town of Plymouth had some overarching goals in mind, including the creation of a Fairgrounds Road Residential Overlay District. Town officials incorporated community feedback when deciding on zoning amendments.

Plymouth hired Barrett Planning Group to be their consultant. Barrett Planning Group assisted the town in producing a housing needs analysis, conducting community engagement activities, and developing new regulations.

During the community engagement process, many residents expressed concern about changing Plymouth's rural character. Town officials, along with the consultant team, began considering adoption of form-based code. After carefully considering public input and the town's regulatory audit, the town drafted eight zoning amendments for residents to consider. The town held multiple public hearings on the amendments.

Community Engagement

Like many college towns, Plymouth experiences a considerable divide between the university community and its permanent residents. Many residents outside of the university community are concerned with maintaining the town's character. For this reason, community outreach is a critical component of building support for zoning amendments.

Town officials in Plymouth circulated a housing survey to gain a better understanding of the housing priorities of Plymouth residents. The survey reached 554 respondents and was promoted through the town's website and social media channels. In addition, Plymouth's Housing Committee hosted a survey assistance session at the Pease Public Library. When Plymouth completed the survey and the rest of the regulatory audit, the final report was advertised through fliers distributed at the Plymouth community yard sale) and to local press. The report was distributed through the town's electronic newsletter.



Plymouth held in-person public meetings and housing workshops to give residents an opportunity to express their views and ask questions about the future of housing in town. Additionally, the town interviewed realtors, developers, employers, and other housing stakeholders in the community. Finally, direct informational mailers were sent to approximately 300 residents who reside in the proposed Fairgrounds Road Residential Overlay District.

Outcomes

Plymouth drafted the following zoning amendments for the community to consider. In March, voters approved all of the following amendments.

- **AMENDMENT 1:** Adds a definition for “dwelling, single-family attached” units.
 - Changes the term “dwelling, multiple units,” to “dwelling, multifamily.”
- **AMENDMENT 2:** Remove the special exception requirement for multifamily dwellings in the multifamily residential district.
 - Allow townhouses in the multifamily residential, agricultural, institutional, and village commercial districts. Allow them by special exception use in the highway commercial, industrial, and commercial development districts.
 - Allow accessory dwelling units by right in all districts except the single-family residential district (where they will be allowed via a special exception).
- **AMENDMENT 3:** Reduce lot sizes in both the single-family residential district and the multi-family residential district.
 - Reduce minimum frontage in the single-family residential, multifamily residential, and commercial industrial districts.
 - Reduce minimum setbacks in the single-family residential and multifamily residential districts.
 - Reduce setback requirements for uncovered parking spaces.
- **AMENDMENT 4:** Reduce the number of required parking spaces for an accessory dwelling unit from two to one.
 - Require just 1 parking space for every 1-bedroom unit and 2 spaces for any unit with two or more bedrooms.
- **AMENDMENT 5:** Allow property owners to build multiple principal structures on a lot, if all setbacks, dimensional requirements, and safety standards are satisfied.
- **AMENDMENT 6:** Move Open-Space Residential Development regulations from the zoning ordinance to the subdivision regulations.
- **AMENDMENT 7:** Remove language that accessory dwelling units count towards Plymouth’s workforce housing.

TOWN OF SANDWICH

Consultant: Barrett Planning Group



MUSEUM
SANDWICH
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

Located in the Lakes Region, Sandwich, is one of the largest communities in the state by land area, with over 60,000 acres, or approximately 94 square miles. Over a quarter of the town's land lies within the White Mountain National Forest.

The town includes a total of 2,366 acres of open surface water, 5,767 acres of floodplains, and 3,200 acres of wetlands. An additional 2,430 acres are protected lands in community ownership, with another 3,240 in private ownership.

A significant portion of Sandwich's developed spaces is arranged linearly along the town's roads or within small village areas. The village center is lined with classic 18th- and 19th-century architecture, including white clapboard homes, historic inns, and a general store. However, only a small portion of the town center is serviced by the sewer district. Despite the town's size, the population in Sandwich is only 1,466 residents.

Because of its location, coupled with a lack of a large employment base, Sandwich has not experienced the growth seen in towns along highway corridors and in the southern tier of the state. While growth has been slow, Sandwich's amenity-rich location in the heart of New Hampshire's lakes and the mountains makes it a desirable place for retirees. Most of the housing stock in Sandwich consists of single-family homes.

1,466

RESIDENTS

Project Summary

The zoning ordinance in Sandwich includes provisions applicable to the rural/residential, historic village, and commercial zoning districts permitting multi-unit structures and cluster development. However, there have been no successfully executed cluster developments and only one age-restricted, ten-unit development to date.

Sandwich applied for a HOP grant to conduct a regulatory audit to identify barriers to housing development and create or amend regulations based on the audit's findings. Sandwich's Planning Board was committed to updating regulations related to housing to reasonably meet current and future housing demands while staying true to the community's vision. The vision statement, as outlined in Sandwich's master plan, includes ensuring Sandwich remains a desirable place to live and work and promoting housing opportunities for all age groups.

Community Engagement

A digital survey was created and distributed to solicit input from the community regarding housing challenges and priorities. The survey, which received over 200 responses, helped to identify priorities for the 2024 zoning ordinance amendments.

The top priorities identified by respondents included helping people stay in the community as they age, attracting younger residents with children, allowing and encouraging accessory dwelling units (ADUs), enabling a mix of housing options, and ensuring new housing is built sustainably. Respondents expressed concerns about preserving the town's rural character and shoreland, addressing short term rentals and the lack of employment base for workers. Finally, respondents noted that the lack of access to amenities, healthcare, and adequate transportation are equally important barriers to vibrant and diverse communities.

In addition to the survey, the planning board hosted two public forums to broaden community input and raise awareness of the planning board's housing efforts. Each forum was attended by approximately 45 people. The consultant, Barrett Planning Group, conducted small group discussions with stakeholders familiar with development in Sandwich, while the project steering committee conducted personal interviews with key stakeholders to paint a broad picture of the housing challenges and priorities in Sandwich.

Outcomes

The regulatory audit examined Sandwich's zoning ordinance, site plan review regulations, and subdivision regulations. The consultant focused on regulations that increase the costs for developers, slow or discourage development, or limit the types of housing that can be built. The recommendations derived from the audit were wide-ranging and included adjustments to minimum lot sizes, setback requirements, and regulations related to cluster housing, manufactured housing, and ADUs. Local leaders in Sandwich were tasked with refining the recommendations into top priorities.

Ultimately, the planning board sent 10 warrant articles related to housing to Town Meeting in March 2024. In total, 324 ballots were cast, and all 10 warrant articles passed. While four of the warrant articles only amended definitions in the zoning ordinance to improve clarity, another four allow two-family housing in three districts and on steep slope lots. The remaining two articles amended the ADU ordinance, including increasing the maximum size allowed. Today, duplexes are allowed in Sandwich's rural/residential district, village zoning district, and historic overlay district!



324

BALLOTS WERE CAST

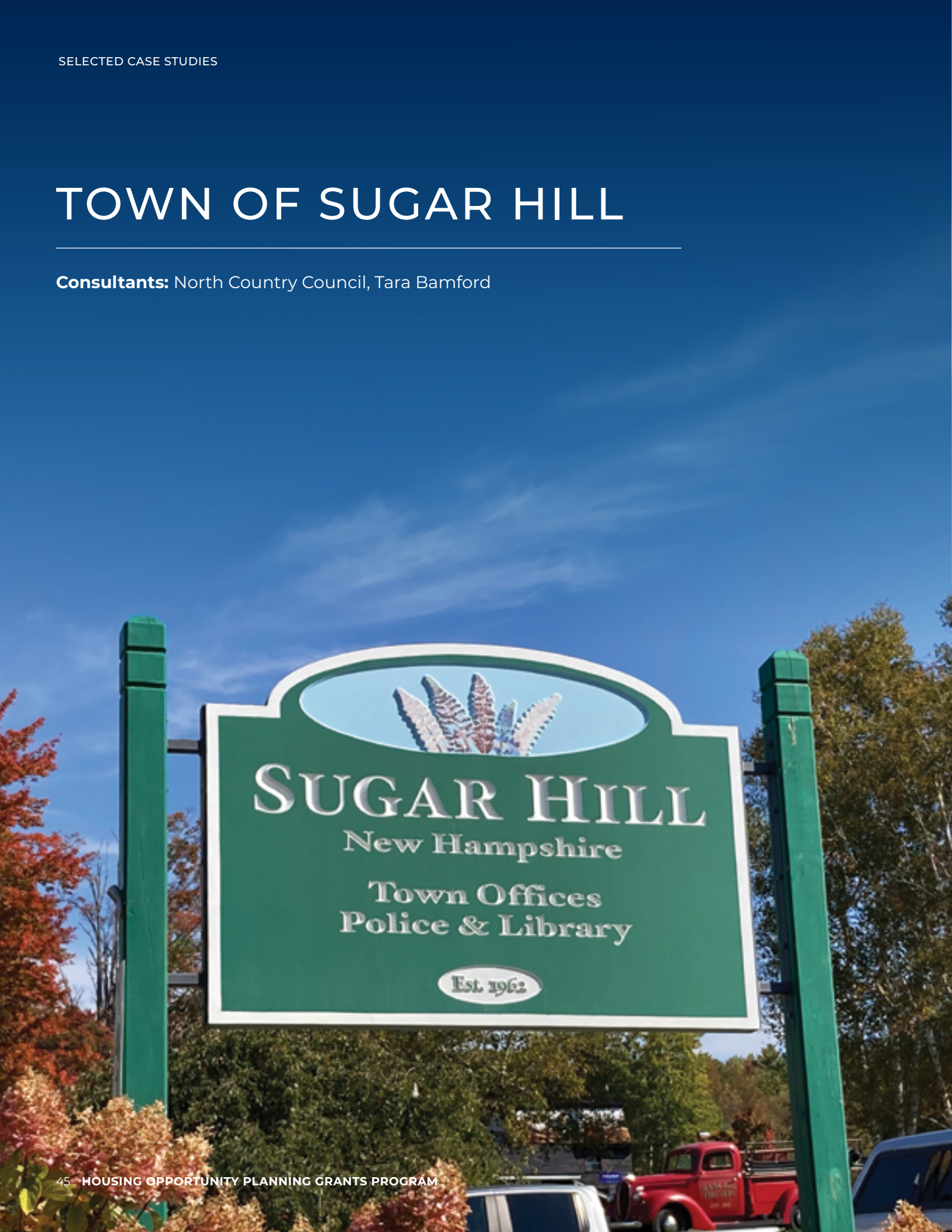
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WARRANT ARTICLES PASSED

Most importantly, the project fostered overwhelmingly supportive dialogue about housing. In the coming years, the planning board is planning to review the Master Plan, particularly the housing chapter, and make updates. Sandwich will implement many of the same engagement strategies to encourage public participation.

TOWN OF SUGAR HILL

Consultants: North Country Council, Tara Bamford



Sugar Hill, incorporated in 1962, is New Hampshire's newest town. Sugar Hill is a small, rural residential community with only 647 residents.

The town is in close proximity to employment opportunities in Littleton and adjacent to the small job centers in Franconia, Bethlehem, and Lisbon. Sugar Hill is most famous for the Sunset Hill House, the lupine blooms in June, and Polly's Pancake Parlor. Sugar Hill is partially situated in the White Mountain National Forest, with views of the Presidential, Franconia, Kinsman, and Dalton ranges.

Housing prices in Sugar Hill have risen beyond the reach of a household with two members working in any industry in the Littleton Labor Market Area at the average weekly wage. Prior to applying for a HOP grant, the Sugar Hill Planning Board began an update to the 2014 master plan, noting that with many new residents in town, priorities may have changed. Local leaders in Sugar Hill also noted that fewer younger families seemed to be moving to town; while the population had increased, school enrollment had not. The initial data-gathering phase of the master plan update revealed that housing costs in Sugar Hill may be one of the reasons behind this trend.

647

RESIDENTS

Project Summary

Sugar Hill applied for a HOP grant to enable a thorough, coordinated review of the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Regulations, and Site Plan Regulations. The goal was to identify opportunities to remove any unnecessary barriers to housing development and ensure the language is user-friendly and up to date. The timing of the HOP grant allowed Sugar Hill to enhance its community engagement efforts, already underway as part of the master plan update, by adding a focus on possible zoning changes into the community survey and public gatherings. The goal was to efficiently utilize the time and energy of the volunteers serving the town while advancing both projects. While the planning board hoped to put amendments before voters at the 2024 Town Meeting, the board was prepared to continue community engagement through the 2025 Town Meeting if more time was needed to build community consensus.

Community Engagement

In 2023, Sugar Hill launched a survey to gather input for the master plan update, the results of which also helped to inform the HOP grant work. The survey was available online, and postcards containing the survey link were mailed to every address with a Sugar Hill zip code and to every out-of-town owner's address. In total, 197 responses were received.

Respondents identified the need for more affordable housing, including housing for workers and to bring more young people to the town. When asked about potential solutions, respondents showed support for accessory dwelling units (ADUs), small and moderate-sized homes clustered together, and two-family homes such as duplexes or townhouses.



Outcomes

Sugar Hill's audit included a review of the zoning, subdivision, and site plan regulations. The goal of the audit was to identify areas for possible changes that would increase the opportunity to build additional housing in town.

The focus was on making housing more affordable for those who work in the area, young families looking for starter homes or rentals, and seniors wishing to downsize or age in place. The recommendations addressed ADUs, multifamily housing development, and flexible lot sizes (using lot size averaging through cluster development).

The town put forward warrant articles, which:

CORRECT the terminology used in the zoning ordinance to differentiate between two-family dwellings and multifamily dwellings, eliminate the need for a two-family dwelling to have double the acreage of a single-family dwelling, and eliminate the requirement for a special exception from the zoning board of adjustment to convert an existing single-family dwelling to a two-family dwelling.

PROVIDE the opportunity for the owner of a two-family dwelling to apply for a Special Exception to add one accessory dwelling unit to a two-family dwelling, or for the owner of a single-family dwelling to add a second accessory dwelling unit under certain conditions.

INCREASE opportunities for homeowners to build ADUs by removing the owner occupancy requirement and allow a lot that does not meet the current minimum lot size to have an ADU in an existing accessory building if it is within the existing footprint and in compliance with setbacks.

To date, Sugar Hill is one of only a handful of communities in the state to allow two ADUs for a single-family home!

TOWN OF WILMOT

Consultant: Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission



The Town of Wilmot lies between Lebanon, Concord, and New London. This location makes Wilmot a very attractive place for people to live, as it is a beautiful town with views of Mount Kearsarge and the surrounding hills and close to several population centers and economic hubs in New Hampshire. The town has struggled to keep up with population growth, and Wilmot is experiencing a serious housing shortage.

This lack of housing stock makes it very difficult for people who want to remain in Wilmot and downsize. The population of Wilmot is aging in place with many people looking to downsize. A lack of appropriate and affordable home types, concerns about accessibility to medical appointments, physical limitations, and social isolation remain pertinent to the community.

1,407

RESIDENTS

Project Summary

Wilmot town officials stated that a major goal for them is to begin changing hearts and minds. Throughout the HOP grant process, some community members expressed concern that increased housing development could impact Wilmot's rural character. For this reason, town officials focused on community engagement, providing residents with opportunities to voice their concerns and have them addressed.

Before moving forward with zoning amendments, local leaders recognized the need to increase public support and work to dispel misunderstandings about affordable housing. Notably, Wilmot is the only case study community also participating in the Community Housing Navigator program. Town officials credited the Community Housing Navigator for significantly contributing to the success of the town's community engagement efforts.

Wilmot applied for a HOP grant to conduct a housing needs assessment and regulatory audit. The housing needs assessment incorporated the feedback the planning board received from community members, housing and demographic data, and an audit of the town's existing zoning regulations. Town officials used this information to identify barriers to housing development in Wilmot.

Community Engagement

With the support of the consultant and the Community Housing Navigator, Wilmot conducted informational interviews with housing stakeholders, including employers, developers, and community leaders. The Community Housing Navigator and members of the planning board made a concerted effort to get out into the community and meet people where they were.

They attended “Wilmotpalooza”, a popular town event featuring live music, family games, food, and craft vendors, and set up a table at the local transfer station. At these activities, town officials conducted a visual preference activity, where residents used sticky dots on a parcel map to indicate where they would support new housing development.

Wilmot’s Community Housing Navigator attended farmer’s markets over the summer and participated in the town’s Halloween walking tour. These innovative outreach opportunities further engaged residents who are not usually involved in municipal government the opportunity to share their perspectives. In particular, the Halloween walking tour provided an opportunity for town officials to hear from young parents who don’t have the time to attend public hearings and listening sessions.







Town officials in Wilmot found creative ways to make their community engagement activities interactive. During in-person listening sessions, the planning board provided a large map with parcels, allowing participants to use sticky notes to indicate the types of housing they would like to see on a given parcel. When attending town events, staff and volunteers brought informative housing data to enhance participation and help spark conversation.

Wilmot's community engagement campaign is a testament to the fact that when towns meet the community where they are, it yields a more diverse perspectives than traditional town meetings and public hearings, which are typically attended by people already active in municipal government.

Outcomes

Wilmot's housing needs assessment yielded some very important conclusions:

	Home costs have dramatically increased in recent years, and the town has not developed nearly enough housing over the past decade.
	Residents under 65 are disproportionately cost burdened in Wilmot.
	Wilmot's housing stock is aging. This underscores the need for new development.
	Future development could be limited by the town's lack of water and sewer limits.

While the Town of Wilmot's HOP grant did not include regulatory development, the town successfully amended its zoning ordinance to allow property owners to build two accessory dwelling units per single-family home. Wilmot intends to continue building on the work that began during the HOP grant project.

REFLECTIONS

“To succeed, ideas need to come from within the community. If you come in with specific ideas, people will think you have an agenda, and it can become harder to gain trust in the community.”

“To have a successful community engagement campaign, it’s important to go out to town events and meet people who are not already engaged in municipal government.”

1 Letting the Community Lead the Way was Critical to Success

Nearly every single community noted the importance of community engagement to its success. For some, this served as a reminder to local government officials that their role is to serve the people by engaging with and informing them. For others, it was about building trust within the community. Discussions around affordable housing can spur strong and passionate reactions, so it's essential to listen to concerns and not dismiss them.

Several case study communities remarked on the importance of letting the residents lead the process, noting that the vision for the community should come from its members, rather than being dictated by elected officials or consultants. Reaching people who aren't typically engaged in local government remains a challenge in every community. Several case study communities noted that hosting meetings outside of the town hall and going to places where people already gather was key. Meeting outside of public meetings allows for open discussion, supports relationship building, and can foster trust between residents and government.

Creative, interactive, and visual engagement methods were highlighted as especially effective. Housing Academy—supported by guidance from UNH Cooperative Extension—was a very important part of this grant program! One participant noted that small, rural communities often lack support or capacity, and Housing Academy provided a valuable forum to learn from peers across the state.

2 Increasing Capacity Made Progress Possible for Communities of All Sizes

Half of the HOP grant recipients were municipalities with populations under 5,000. The program was dominated by small, rural communities that tend to have limited capacity, often without full-time municipal planning staff. For nearly every grantee, success was only possible because of the funding and increased capacity made possible through this program.

Of the case study communities, Wilmot was the only community with both a HOP grant and a Community Housing Navigator. The town credited much of its success to this combination and increased capacity! The Navigator was a key part of the successful community engagement done in Wilmot.

Even in a larger city like Keene, staff capacity can be a limiting factor. Hiring a consultant allowed the city to accelerate progress on issues related to affordable housing.

Educating Voters Wards Off Misinformation

When asked what the key to their success was, representatives in Bethlehem said the community was ready! “Readiness” is a challenging metric to measure, but it can make a significant difference in a community’s success.

In addition to community engagement, several successful HOP grantees focused on voter education to build support. In Lancaster, the consultant prepared fact sheets explaining the issues voters were being asked to consider. These fact sheets were so successful that Resilience Planning and Design began using them in other communities. Lancaster distributed these fact sheets through the town’s website, social media, and directly to local employers. The City of Keene also distributed fact sheets explaining the proposed Cottage Court Overlay District in the lead-up to public hearings and city council vote. Proactively sharing accurate information helped ward off misinformation about the proposal.

3

Incremental Changes Should be Celebrated!

Many grantees began this work with ambitious plans, but housing advocates understand that meaningful change takes time. Successful grantees were able to scale down their scopes, recognizing that incremental change is still progress!

Small adjustments to a town’s zoning ordinance make an immediate impact while laying the groundwork for future changes. Incremental change often strikes a balance between addressing housing needs and preserving the community’s character, reducing fear and resistance to change.

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