

Kick-off Day Summary

On September 23, 2019, the Town of Foxborough invited the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to kick off the town's new Housing Production Plan process through a series of stakeholder conversations and a tour of the town. The Citizens Housing and Planning Agency (CHAPA), a Massachusetts nonprofit organization, also attended kick-off day events.¹

The kick-off day began MAPC's process of understanding housing issues from the perspective of various important constituencies. The day began with the first meeting of a newly formed Housing Production Plan Working Group. Town staff then led MAPC and CHAPA on a tour through Downtown Foxborough, Chestnut Green, residential neighborhoods off Main & North Streets, and along Route 1 & Patriot Place. The group then met with representatives of the Kraft Group to discuss the impact of Kraft developments on housing in Foxborough. After that discussion, the tour continued through various single-family and multi-family residential developments along the southern and eastern edges of town (particularly near the I-95 Exit 7 interchange). The project team proceeded to the Foxborough Senior Center, where they discussed housing in town with a group of seniors, who provided insight on their particular housing needs and desires. The day closed with a focus group of real estate professionals, many of whom are also Foxborough residents, that included developers, brokers, and land use attorneys. That session focused on the issues and opportunities related to housing development in Foxborough.

Overall, the day furnished insight into many concerns held by some members of the Foxborough community. These conversations surfaced anxieties held by many about the rising cost of housing, how rising costs impact the stability of the community, and desire for housing solutions that work with the existing physical and social fabric of the town. The conversations also revealed that opinions amongst community members are not uniform and that many housing-related topics warrant further discussion as part of the HPP process.

Working Group Meeting Summary

The Town assembled a seven-member Working Group (WG), representing a cross-section of the community, to guide the HPP planning process. WG members include:

- Kathy Brady, Resident
- Ron Bresse, Planning Board representative
- Steve Coote, Resident
- Jared Craig, Resident
- Leah Gibson, Board of Selectmen representative
- Gaby Jordan, Resident and Town Staff
- John McDonald, Resident
- Scott O'Donnell, Resident (joined December 2019)
- Linda Shea, Resident

MAPC staff first presented on the structure of this plan, Housing Production Plans generally, definitions of Affordable Housing, as well as basic facts about housing in Foxborough.

¹ CHAPA recently selected Foxborough for its Municipal Engagement Initiative, which assists residents interested in building coalitions of support for affordable housing production. That program, though also dealing with the subject of housing, is separate from the HPP engagement process. The HPP process has a start and end date, and will result in a planning document with policy recommendations (the HPP). The coalition supported by CHAPA, while it will likely offer input on the HPP, is not limited in focus to the HPP and will continue even after the HPP is complete.

WG members' conversation touched on numerous topics:

- Members expressed a general desire for housing affordability and lamented the increase in housing costs.
 - Some said that the high price of housing in Foxborough kept out family members and others with moderate and middle incomes.
 - One member described how she had left the town in order to find more inexpensive housing options but returned after a few years.
 - One member described renting a home for years because she couldn't find an appropriate ownership option within her budget.
 - One member felt new supply wasn't abating price growth.
 - Several members agreed older single family homes being torn down and replaced with larger, more expensive duplexes.
- Members discussed the role of rental units in the community.
 - Several members felt that certain rental developments (the Lodge and Hanover 40B apartment complexes) attract wealthy people who rent for a few months to a few years before purchasing a home in the region. They contrasted these developments with other properties they felt have longer term tenants and more affordable/sustainable rents.
 - Members stated that newer rental developments were just as expensive as homeownership options.
- Members noted an issue with duplex development.
 - They said currently inexpensive, older single-family homes (often ranches) in the R15 zoning district are being purchased, torn down, and replaced by duplexes, with each unit at a much higher price-point than the original home.
 - One member noted land cost as a major barrier to smaller, more affordable housing even if denser development is allowed.
- Members noted ongoing limitation of sewer availability in certain areas of town.
- Members discussed the coming of regular MBTA service. They noted limitations to transit-oriented development in town, including the most current Master Plan recommendations, impacts on surrounding neighborhoods, service quality on the train line itself, and community feelings about Kraft Group ownership.
- The group discussed context communities that will be used in the HPP analysis.
- Members discussed different opportunities for engagement, and ways to get more people involved in the process.
- One member described a dynamic related to downsizing. Previously, an older homeowner with a large home could sell that home, downsize to a less expensive home, and use the price difference to supplement their retirement income. Now smaller houses often cost as much as the large houses, they said, so those homeowners are not downsizing.
- WG members suggested the project team take a nuanced approach to the senior population. They drew distinctions between wealthy seniors looking to downsize but retain certain amenities and those seniors living on social security. They also drew distinctions between younger senior cohorts, who are relatively able bodied, and older senior cohorts.

- The project team answered several clarifying questions on Affordable Housing and the HPP, and WG members suggested further research or clarifications of the data.

Senior Focus Group Summary

The project team conducted a focus group at the Foxborough Senior Center, with a goal of better understanding the unique needs of this large and growing constituency. Approximately 25 seniors attended. Participants began by answering questions about their own living situation by placing stickers on posters. Notably, most of the participants were homeowners.

The project team introduced the planning process, and then asked a series of questions about participants' feelings and desires related to housing. This led to a wide-ranging discussion.

- Participants noted the increasing costs of homeownership that occur as you age. As examples:
 - Paying to have your lawn mowed if you can no longer mow it yourself
 - Property taxes going up on unrealized value gains
 - Social security income going down after the passing of a partner, making housing payments harder to make
- Many participants said they would be interested in downsizing from their single-family residence if there were affordable options.
 - They said smaller houses/condominiums used to cost less than larger homes, but now they are the same price or more than their current housing.
 - Some said they had too much income for subsidized Affordable Housing, but not enough to afford market prices.
- Some participants said they would prefer staying in their home if possible.
 - One participant emphasized ways to keep seniors in their current homes, citing Village to Village in Providence, a program that matches seniors with services.
 - One participant noted the difficulties of a two-story house, saying even if they can move well now, they fear not being able to.
- Asked what a new house would need if they were to downsize, participants had various, and sometimes conflicting views.
 - Many participants agreed that a single-story, two-bedroom house was appealing. Some participants added a garage was necessary.
 - There was disagreement over whether a yard was appealing. Some participants felt it is necessary. Others didn't want a yard because of the maintenance it would require.
 - Most participants agreed a single-family house was necessary, but they also wanted to pay less for housing.
 - Most participants disliked the notion of apartment complexes.
 - The idea of senior-specific apartments received a mixed reaction. Some participants were amenable, but only if pets are permitted.
 - Cottage communities (small houses, with walking paths in between) received positive responses. Some qualified that a washer and dryer are necessary.
 - Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) received a positive response.

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- Some participants brought up Sunset Acres, a mobile home park on the Plainville-North Attleboro border, as a potential model for senior housing.
- One participant suggested seniors should not have to pay taxes that go to schools.
- Participants agreed retirement negatively impacted their ability to afford housing.
- Participants, who were mostly homeowners, said rising home values increase taxes but don't help with day-to-day finances. Participants noted some people are taking reverse mortgages.
- Participants were generally worried about being priced out of Foxborough, either by rising rents, taxes, or unaffordable downsizing options. They said many people move to Plainville.
- Participants do not like "high rise" apartments seen in Mansfield.
- Participants noted many of their children couldn't afford to move to Foxborough and had instead settled in North Attleboro.
- Participants felt young people and seniors have largely the same housing needs.
- Most participants did not want to see any development of smaller, closer together homes on their block. One participant emphasized: "not in my backyard."
- Participants said 80% AMI is an unrealistic affordability benchmark for people on social security.

Kraft Group Meeting Summary

The project team met with representatives of the Kraft Group (KG) to discuss their long-term plans for the Kraft Group-owned property along Route 1, which involve primarily non-residential uses. KG said they were aware there is demand for housing in the area, given talks they've had with area employers, including employers at Patriot Place, and due to the MBTA bringing regular commuter rail trips to Foxboro station. However, they indicated that while they are not against housing in the area, they have no active plans to develop any.

Real Estate Industry Focus Group Summary

The project team conducted a focus group with real estate industry professionals who work and in many cases live in Foxborough. The team's goal was to better understand the dynamics of the real estate market in Foxborough from people who also had insight as residents. The Town of Foxborough assembled seven participants working in the industry. The group included four developers, one developer-broker, one permitting specialist, and two lawyers. The developers primarily worked in single-family residential development, though one developer had one multifamily project, and one worked mostly in commercial development.

- Participants said there was very little easily developable land.
 - Where there is land, infrastructure provision is expensive.
 - Participants noted how this situation led to more teardown projects.
- The project team asked what the reception to housing development was like.
 - Participants agreed most Town boards and commissions do not throw up unnecessary roadblocks. They said this dynamic lowers prices in Foxborough compared to what they would be if there were higher carrying costs.

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- One participant said there is no dedicated NIMBY group fighting all development in Foxborough, but there is still hyper-local NIMBY activism. There are very few people actively advocating for development, they said.
- Participants said 40B projects receive the most pushback. (One participant had a 40B project which permitted 20 units—versus the 1-2 units that would have been permitted under zoning.)
- The project team asked participants about the current market:
 - One participant said rents are way up, interest rates are low, and construction costs are high.
 - Participants felt the median price estimates (about \$415,000) the project team provided were low for *habitable and financeable* properties.
 - Participants said whether a property was a teardown or rehab mostly has to do with the price they can get it for, which was a function of property condition.
 - They noted many properties are sold before they hit the market, especially for tear-down properties.
 - Participants say inexperienced investors, fueled by the strong economy, are partly to blame for inflated prices, as they buy houses for too much (i.e. at an unprofitable price), which raises property comps, thus raising all prices.
 - A participant said most buyers were Dual-Income No Kids, or families with one child.
- Participants were asked about opportunities:
 - One participant said apartment development is difficult in Foxborough due to zoning. Another agreed, adding all land that can be developed has been.
 - The project team asked about developer interest in 4-5 units buildings vs. single-family development. One participant said that anything which lowers acquisition price per developed unit would generate interest.
 - The project team asked about gaps in the market. Participants said there is a desire to downsize, particularly if downsizing also means lower housing costs. They also felt smaller units would appear to younger buyers.
 - Participants said the only way to make downsizing affordable was to make greater densities work.
 - There was disagreement over voter appetite for density. Some participants felt the perception of density was so negative that it would kill denser projects. Others felt that there was enough demand for smaller, more affordable housing types to build support.
 - Some participants felt that any denser development would have to mimic single-family residential forms, with yards, distance (or perceptions of distance) from neighbors, and no attached walls. Though they felt exclusive use areas were necessary, maintenance would also need to be taken care of.
- The project team asked what would make projects easier/less expensive. Participants brought up the following:
 - Common driveway bylaw should be amended
 - Road length under subdivision rules should be amended
 - The Town purchasing land, release a request for proposals for denser development, which could then be lotteried off.

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- Changes to Conservation Commission rules
- Participants noted any rezoning would have to account for schools (pointing to experience of Mansfield).
- The project team asked the participants about their housing needs as residents.
 - Participants said they don't want to have the density of Mansfield.
 - One said they don't want their taxes to go up.
 - One said they didn't see a demand for hundreds of smaller homes.
 - One said the answer to downsizing might just be "tough."

Kick-off Day Conclusion

The kick-off day yielded numerous insights about housing needs, desires, potentially opportunities, and challenges to finding solutions. These insights were used when planning further engagement, when designing specific engagement activities at the first public forum, and they will be important when developing recommendations later in this planning process.