

On October 9, 2024 the Chesterfield Housing Working Group, along with consultants Ivy Vann and Carol Ogilvie, held a kick-off meeting for the next phase of the Housing Opportunity Planning grant work. The meeting was held at the Chesterfield Town Hall, and a light supper was served. Approximately 60 people participated.

Participants were seated at rectangular tables and each table had a dedicated scribe to write down all the responses to the five questions everyone was asked. Fran Shippee welcomed attendees at the beginning of the meeting and then turned the meeting over to Ivy Vann, who guided the group through a series of five questions.

The first question was why attendants thought it was important to come to this meeting. *(Responses are listed with most common first, with the number of times it appeared; subsequent responses were mentioned once.)*

Curious about what's up 9

Interested in senior housing zoning amendment 8

Where would we get land from? 8

Concerned about housing for the elderly 7

To protect what we have 5

Wanted to know who is behind this 4

Interested in ADUs: detached and secondary 3

Chesterfield is my town and housing is a problem here 2

Wanted to hear what other people have to say 2

There are not enough homes in Chesterfield 2

Older couples are looking for smaller houses/units in town 2

Interested in the possibility of housing in the Brownfield building

Housing is important, especially affordable housing

Statewide need for more workforce housing

Interested in tiny houses

Interested in a small home development

Need to be involved in the community

There are not enough homes in Chesterfield 2

Chesterfield is too costly to live in

Taxes might increase

Where would the houses go

Elderly housing would be agreeable

Interested in affordability and the flexibility of town boards to allow flexible housing ordinances

Want to know who new housing would be for: homeless, handicapped person, young families

Who would pay for construction?

I came to be a voice for change for what I feel we need

I came to be informed

Interested in smaller houses which are more affordable

I came because I wanted to know why we are doing this

How to maximize use of available land

Understand funding of process – grant or town meeting warrant?

Cost to taxpayers of adding housing
Is this a state mandate?
Concerned about outsiders
Good exposure to local government
Interested in ADUs
Want to know more about what is meant by affordable housing

Inferences from these responses: Many people came because they were curious, but more than half of these responses indicated support for more housing. Senior housing and smaller, more affordable units came up multiple times.

We also see many questions about the purpose of this project and how it's being funded. These are questions the consultants will continue to address throughout the entire process.

The second question asked participants to describe their current living situation and how well it works or doesn't work for them.

Our house is perfect 17
Our house is too big 11
Our house is too small 4
We love our location 4
I'm concerned about my ability to keep up with the cost of maintenance or needed improvements 2
Chesterfield over-regulates your own property 2
Bad traffic
No public transportation is a problem
We have an issue with invasive plants
Our house is too old
Why change the current system if it's working?

Inferences from these responses: These responses follow along from the first question, where people mentioned Chesterfield needing housing for the elderly and smaller units. Unsurprisingly, most people really like their house, but the high percentage of people mentioning that their house is too big for them tells us something about housing needs in town.

The third question asked participants to think 10 years in the future. Do the math: how old are you now? How well does your house work for you in 10 years time?

Will work for us 11
We'll have trouble keeping up with the house and property maintenance 8
Will need to downsize; it's too big 6
Price of electricity is too high 6
I'm concerned about property taxes with a fixed income 5
Too many stairs 4
If one of us dies the survivor will not be able to stay 3
It depends on how healthy and mobile we are 3
We will need more space 2

We'll need to move to one floor 2
We'll need to have our kids help with the property
Still too small
We're concerned about lack of transportation

Inferences from these responses: The responses underscore what we observed in the room; most of those present were close to retirement age or older.

The fourth question asked participants to look around the room and notice who's not present. Individuals and groups of people both. Who's not here and what kind of housing do they need?

Younger people 8
Younger parents 5
People needing affordable housing 3
My neighbors 3
Non-caucasian persons 2
Seniors needing affordable housing 2
Out of state homeowners 2
Business owners
Large landowners
Poor people in need of housing
Selectboard members
Small house advocates
Housing developers
People who use tax subsidized housing
Middle and high school students
Immigrant community
Entire families (parents and their children)
Town employees

They need:

A house, not a condo
A place for my kids without needing to subdivide
Upscale housing to keep Chesterfield nice
More affordable housing

Inferences from these responses: Our public outreach needs to include persons in these categories to the best of our abilities.

The fifth question asked people to describe the perfect village. What do you see? What does it have?

Coffee shop/Third place 10
International airport 7 (These responses were all from one table)

Village 5
Parks 5
General Store 4
Community gatherings 4 (Cookouts, corn roasts, talent contests)
Town common 3
Shared community spaces 2
Farmers' market 2
Senior center with activities 2
Sidewalks 2
Walking paths 2
Community center 2
Bike lanes 2
Sparsely settled 2
Library 2
No cars 2
No apartment buildings
Newfane VT
Restaurant
Not Brattleboro
Slow traffic
Gazebo
Beach
Should look like a Norman Rockwell painting
Covered bridges
Farms
No sidewalks
Neighbors
Things for younger people and children to do
Looking like a village, not suburban
Common gardens
Small houses
Daycare center

Inferences from these responses: These respondents wanted more there, there. Someplace that felt like a place, although the details may differ. Things to think about as we work on the vision statement for the master plan.

The participants were then asked what they wanted the committee and the consultants to know that had not been asked.

What are the town's intentions? 2
Will the voters get their say? 2
NH doesn't have a housing problem, it has an accessibility problem because of its roads.

People would like to see examples of good housing
How does a citizens' petition work?
This is not what the town wants
The town must comply with the state; workforce statute is an example
Chesterfield does not have water and sewer
The planning board is working on a more comprehensive map of wells in Chesterfield
What/who is driving this discussion?
There is not enough land in Chesterfield
People with money get around the rules
How much will this cost us?
Would the town force us into public water or sewer?
What is the end means?
Why are all towns being addressed?
What is the state's role in this?
What is the government's role in this?
Where is the money coming from?
Which town regulations prevent smaller houses from being built?
Who will build these houses?
My town in California did these same exercises and it was a disaster; the state forced us to allow more housing.

Inferences from these comments: We answered as many of these questions as possible on October 9 but continuing to explain the purpose and intention of this process will be crucial. If the town has a system for sending newsletters or information electronically to residents an explanation sheet addressing these questions and comments would be well worth producing. Many of these issues were raised again at the October 23 Housing Camp.

In conclusion:

Participants at this event expressed interest in the project going forward, and wanted to be sure that all materials would be easily accessible on the town website.