



Town of Woodstock Housing Committee

Housing Committee 2022 Report to Town Board January 24, 2023

To the Town Board:

This is the Housing Committee's fourth annual report to the Town. We hope this report will both capture the enormity of changes this small group has set in motion and lay out the urgency of continuing to move forward with speed and resources.

The Town has continued to lose full-time residents who work at local businesses. Our school enrollment continues to drop. Our population continues to age and a large percentage of those in the Village who are over 65 live on less than 200% of poverty level (that is, less than \$21,000) per year. According to the county's Housing Action Plan, 29% of Woodstock's renters spend one-third to one-half of their income on housing costs, costs which are not sustainable.

Homeowners are cost-burdened as well, a fact which may further erode both the population of full-time residents and the quality of housing stock. The Committee reflects the perception of many in our community that this drain must end -- and that ending it requires serious and sustained efforts. Towns all over the country that have been working at this longer than Woodstock, and with more resources, have proven that improvement is possible, even though the economic pressures of the real estate market, and now the increased cost of building, continue to negatively impact housing options.

Woodstock is catching up! HomeShare Woodstock has its first HomeShare Match and the Woodstock Housing Alliance, a 501c3 nonprofit to develop housing, has been launched. Revised zoning for housing is imminent and the county is fully behind our efforts. We thank the Supervisor and Board Members for ongoing support for our initiatives and greatly appreciate the vote of confidence in Family's HomeShare Woodstock implementation and for joining the County's Housing Smart Communities Initiative.

We look forward to action on the remaining two housing related American Rescue Plan fund requests early in 2023. We cannot stress this strongly enough as these will allow critical infrastructure development before the spring building season is upon us. The Woodstock Housing Alliance is currently discussing a collaboration with HomeShare Woodstock in which a portion of the loan funds requested would support selected homeowners whose homes need renovations to enable them to join HomeShare Woodstock as home providers. We promise to continue making the case for the actions we believe will bring this community toward the goals stated in the 2018 Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan continues to be the GuideStar for our work: “In order to achieve the Comprehensive Plan’s stated goals of creating community for all while supporting our values of economic and environmental sustainability, the Town will affirmatively promote and foster affordable housing in Woodstock”.

In support of this mission, the Housing Committee’s broad goals from the beginning have been to:

- **Create a permanent avenue to varied housing initiatives**
- **Facilitate creation of new and refurbished sustainable homes for rental and for purchase**
- **Increase impact and resources via Ulster County and other initiatives**

In 2022, the Housing Committee can point to our own activities as well as progress on the strategies our research and ideation have generated.

1. Create a permanent avenue to varied housing initiatives

- Woodstock Housing Alliance is that “permanent avenue to varied housing initiatives” noted in the broad goals above. It was incorporated in 2022 and has just launched its website and online fundraising efforts targeting the creation of 25 permanently affordable rentals in the next two years. The Alliance also stepped forward to create incentives for homeowners to build deed restricted affordable Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) using American Rescue Plan funds. Talks are underway to further increase the impact of this proposal by collaborating with HomeShare Woodstock. Funds could be used to effect adaptations to a home that would allow for participation in the home sharing program. This loan fund to assist homeowners wishing to help create long-term affordable rentals is awaiting approval by the Town Board.
- HomeShare Woodstock officially began at Family of Woodstock in March, 2022. It is another avenue to varied housing options. As of December 1, the program has its first signed Match Agreement. A local employee and artist has been returned to the community paying a modest rent and the elder Home Provider will benefit from various home tasks and ongoing transportation and shopping assistance.

2. Facilitate creation of new and refurbished sustainable homes for rental and for purchase

- The Housing Oversight Task Force is delivering its housing code revisions for adoption by the Town into the Town Zoning Law. The revisions support best practices, adapted for our particular community size and needs, that will support creation of new housing affordable for our seniors, artists, young families, community volunteers and local employees. This zoning update is essential for the Committee's second goal.
- The Committee's support and advocacy for the two construction-related ARP Fund Requests address this goal directly. Funds for the site development of Town Owned Property and for the ADU loan program and HomeShare adaptations, described above, would bring essential funding to begin the production of housing.
- In our first year the Committee explored the opportunities presented by “zombie” or abandoned properties. We found that few existed in Woodstock and that the barriers for their reclamation were high. The Committee will be revisiting the Inventory of properties in 2023 that might be

considered “zombie” or abandoned and explore what opportunities, if any, might exist.

3. Increase impact and resources, via Ulster County and other initiatives

- The third stated goal took a large step forward this Fall with the launch of the county's Housing Smart Communities Initiative (HSCI). The Town Board resolution to join this effort added Woodstock as the first rural community to join. Membership and activities supporting housing are rewarded with county resources including technical assistance and access to funding opportunities. Funding is a crucial issue for housing and the Committee has advocated for housing funds at the State level as well. While that work continues, Committee member research has led to the possible creation by the Town of a Housing Fund utilizing local fees. Further work on this item will take place in 2023.

The committee has continued to monitor these developments and advocate for their success, while working on other crucial actions to bring more clarity to the Town's needs and more resources to bear. These activities include:

- **Creation of messaging and outreach activities designed to help Woodstockers better understand housing solutions that the Committee supports.** Our winter Housing Survey was a major effort to understand current attitudes about housing as well as to test opinion about a few chosen housing strategies. The survey received 191 responses and the summary report is attached to this report. In person, we tabled with handouts at the Farm Festival, at ad hoc gatherings at local businesses, at Library Fair and the new Scarecrow Fest. We publish frequently on our social media pages and have circulated two Newsletters in 2022. The Committee's outreach efforts were limited by the loss of a member, the focus of two of our members on the work of the HOTF, and by not having a dedicated social media messaging team.

FOR 2023: Advocacy messaging will move to center stage as we help Woodstockers understand new zoning and other housing related opportunities including those offered through the Woodstock Housing Alliance and HomeShare Woodstock. We are pleased to learn that the Housing Oversight Task Force has incorporated the Housing Committee language into the draft zoning code-- specifically in the preamble to the Housing Chapter, purposes, definitions and data to explain and codify what housing that is affordable in Woodstock is and how it will be facilitated and regulated.

- **Development of a Town Housing Plan.** Creation of this Plan is a keystone of housing policy recommended in the Comprehensive Plan. An outline has been created but completion of the Housing Plan awaits a number of required elements, including the addition of the new Housing Zoning Code when it is adopted. The committee also identified significant gaps in data that will need to be addressed in the coming year. Very little data is gathered on rentals region-wide. Most local demographic data available is, at best, from the 2020 census and does not reflect our current reality due to the shifts caused by Covid. Data reflecting the impact of short-term rentals on long-term affordability is available only at the county level. We have received help in our data collection efforts from the Assessor's Office and the County Comptroller.

FOR 2023: The county's recent Housing Smart Communities Initiative (HSCI) promises to be a huge

help going forward. Incoming Committee Co-Chair Katherine Tegen has been taking the lead on the Housing Plan and she has begun working with County Planning Department liaison Kai Lord-Farmer on the next steps. Feedback on housing types and sizes desired by Woodstockers will be incorporated, and to this end the Survey provided valuable information from respondents.