



## **Woodstock Housing Committee 2024 Annual Report to the Town Board**

The Housing Committee worked on several initiatives in 2024 to address the need for affordable housing in Woodstock. The Committee focused on (1) learning more about how to better engage and communicate with the community, (2) ways to balance land conservation and development, and (3) learning how to build financially feasible housing projects. A major initiative to use Town-owned land for housing was put into motion with the hiring of an engineering and architectural firm to do engineering and environmental studies of six parcels and to create site concept plans for future housing projects.

In January 2024, the Housing Committee began working with HR&A Advisors, a consultant that specializes in advising communities about how to address housing challenges and to develop and implement effective housing policies, assess financial feasibility, and utilize many other planning tools. The consultant was paid for by a grant from Ulster County's Housing Smart Communities Initiative. In the six months that the Committee worked with HR&A, members learned effective community engagement strategies to increase community participation and proactively include diverse stakeholders so that Town leaders can hear a range of perspectives, build trust, and expand the spectrum of potential solutions.

With the help of the consultant, the Housing Committee hosted two listening sessions with community stakeholders in April to gather feedback on housing challenges, concerns, and opportunities. The consultant also worked with the Committee to release a community survey in May. Through the listening sessions and the survey, the Housing Committee heard from residents about the critical need to build more affordable homes while preserving the Town's rural character and limiting impacts to the environment. Residents also expressed interest in building new housing on Town-owned properties.

The Community Workshop on June 20, 2024, afforded residents the opportunity to hear from a panel of housing experts: Emily Hamilton from RUPCO, Christine LaValle from Ulster Habitat from Humanity, and Steve Rosenberg from the Hudson Valley Alliance for Housing and Conservation. The panel was moderated by Kai Lord-Farmer from the Ulster County Planning Department. Each panelist provided examples of housing projects and strategies that have been successful.

The second part of the workshop was made up of table discussions, which provided another opportunity to hear citizens' concerns about housing issues. An important theme that emerged was that addressing the housing affordability problem was necessary in order to preserve the

economic diversity of the town. And preserving this diversity was viewed as crucial if Woodstock is to maintain its cultural heritage as a home for artists, musicians, writers, families and seniors, among others. In addition, the table discussions focused on housing types that might work in Woodstock: ADUs, tiny homes/cottages, duplexes and triplexes, fourplexes, and low-rise apartment buildings. Participants expressed interest in the concept of infill development, which would increase density in the Town's center, or renovating aging properties and integrating new developments into the existing community fabric. Participants voiced the need for increased transparency, public education and engagement in housing issues, reflecting a desire for a more informed and involved community process. Discussions also focused on the issue of funding as a major challenge. The workshop was well attended by over 60 people, both residents of the Town and from neighboring towns where residents are looking to create more housing.

One of the major takeaways from the Committee's work with the consultant was that Woodstock can build more homes while maintaining its rural character. Thoughtfully designed inclusive housing can add to Woodstock's vibrancy without detracting from its natural beauty. While density can feel synonymous with urban settings, new homes do not need to be located in large apartment complexes. New homes can come in many shapes and sizes, from accessory dwelling units to townhomes to fourplexes. These smaller footprint projects are better aligned with Woodstock's average household size and relate to the Town's aesthetic.

The final piece of the Committee's work with HR&A Advisors consisted of a financial feasibility study of three different housing types: (1) infill development with a rental fourplex, (2) home ownership opportunities for small single-family homes in a subdevelopment that preserves open space, (3) a medium-size apartment complex that could be subsidized using tax credits. The financial models revealed that each housing type could potentially work in Woodstock given the low cost of land using Town-owned properties. The financial models show how different variables impact the viability of housing (costs, income generated, subsidies, grants, and tax credits). These financial models can be reused for future planning.

In June 2024, the Housing Committee recommended that the Town join the New York State Pro-Housing Communities program, which commits the Town to take positive steps to alleviate the housing crisis. The resolution to join the program was passed by the Town Board on June 11, 2024. Six years of permit data have been collected and the Committee is in the final stages of gathering and submitting the data the State requires for Woodstock to become certified, and thus to become eligible to apply for State grants.

On February 14, 2023, the Town Board passed a resolution for the use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to aid in the creation of affordable housing and \$199,000 was committed to engineering fees for a housing project on Town-owned property. To implement the resolution, the Housing Committee reviewed every Town-owned parcel to determine the feasibility of building housing on each. After eliminating parcels that were obviously unfeasible, the Housing Committee worked with Kai Lord-Farmer to focus on the remaining parcels. Various dimensions affecting the feasibility of building housing were discussed, including access to water and sewer,

proximity to public transportation and services, topography, and potential housing typologies. A select group of parcels was identified and a proposal to use the funds was presented to the Town Board on September 10, 2024. The proposal included three stages of study for the Town-owned parcels: (1) a preliminary overview of the parcels that will narrow down the properties to 2 or 3 sites; (2) Surveys and appropriate engineering and environmental studies for 2-3 sites; (3) Site concept plans for 1 or 2 parcels. The Town Board voted unanimously to approve the proposal and send out an RFP to engineering and architectural firms.

The parcels included in the study are:

- The Mountain View parking lot
- The Rock City Road parking lot
- Two parcels on Zena-Highwoods Road
- 31 acres in Zena
- 2441 Route 212

The RFP was issued on September 17 and two firms responded with proposals by the deadline of October 25, 2024. A task force composed of Town Board members Bennet Ratcliff and Anula Curtis, Housing Committee Co-chairs Katherine Tegen and John Huber, and Kai Lord-Farmer, met to review and score the proposals. The winning bidder was Fisher Associates located in Syracuse, NY. The parcel evaluations and site concept plans will be delivered by the end of 2025. The Town Board and the community will be informed at each stage of the process.

*Member updates:*

The Housing Committee welcomed five new members in January 2024: Sabina Barach, Rebekah Brooks, John Huber, Lisa Kirk, and Tanesha Skinner. Katherine Tegen became the Chair of the committee in January following Susan Goldman's retirement. John Huber became Co-Chair in October 2024. Tanesha Skinner resigned in September 2024 and the search for a new member has begun.

*Respectfully submitted,*

Katherine Tegen

Co-chair, Woodstock Housing Committee