

Approved at 12-17-15 Meeting

**City of Rockland
Comprehensive Planning Commission
Minutes for November 19, 2015**

Board Present: Chair Valli Geiger, Adam Ackor, Tom Keedy, Ann Morris, Amy Files, Eileen Wilkinson, and Michelle Gifford. Mayor Louise MacLellan-Ruf, ex-officio member attended.

Staff Present: Kevin Beal, City Attorney and Kara Cushman, Recording Secretary

Guests: Eric Galant, Mid-Coast Regional Planning Commission, Larry Pritchett, Rockland City Council

Meeting called to order at 7:00 p.m.

Previous Meeting Minutes:

Ann Morris had a change to November 12, 2015 meeting minutes under "Old Business-In-Fill Residential Development." She said that it wasn't a proposal, but more of discussion of zoning ideas and a description of the conversation Ann Morris and Chair Geiger had. The Comps Commission agreed to eliminate the first sentence, "Ann Morris presented a proposal to abandon the current structure of residential zones" to read "The COMPS Commission had a general discussion on the on-going topic of residential zoning."

ACTION: The Comps Commission agreed to accept November 12, 2015 COMPS Commission minutes with changes. VOTE: 7-0-0

Eric Galant Presents the Housing Chapter Draft for the Comprehensive Plan

Eric Galant presented an overview of the draft Housing Chapter for the updated Comprehensive Plan. The State's criteria rule requirements are italicized throughout the chapter. This is a 10-year planning period that looks at housing trends and how population affects housing demands.

Overall, there has been a population decrease and housing decline. Rockland is projected to have only about 7,000 year-round residents and almost 300 more units by 2027.

In looking at housing affordability, home prices are lower than they used to be due to the depressed real estate market. The American Community Survey estimates about 520 Rockland households with mortgages that pay more than the recommended maximum of 30% of their monthly income on housing. The cost of housing includes taxes and all utilities. Thirty percent of income is generally considered unaffordable. There are 206 Rockland households without a mortgage that pay more than 30% of their monthly income on housing. This is attributable to fixed income households, retired people, and tax increases.

Rockland has a diverse housing stock with about 35% being multi-units. Rockland has a lower percentage of mobile homes. There are blanks in this section that will need to be filled in by the Code Office.

The Comps Commission discussed code and inspections of houses. Chair Geiger said there are multi-family houses that have existed for years, and objected to inspection at time of sale requirement.

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Michelle Gifford said there is difficulty bringing older homes up to code. Adam Ackor said the life safety code is based on sound evidence. He renovates older homes all the time and brings them up to code. It creates jobs in the area and makes the buildings safe. The CDBG Multi-Family program helped some property owners with that expense, and a description of that program can be added in the chapter under recommendations.

To determine the extent to which seasonal homes may be being converted to year-round use, or vice-versa, the Code Office will need to track the data. Coastal communities have higher vacancies due to seasonal residents. Galant said from 1990 to 2013 there have been changes in the vacancy rate. It is a 5-year average ending in 2013 and that is the most recent data we have, so there is a margin of error. This is due to smaller family size, homes being left empty, elderly moving to assisted living facilities, homes being used for storage, and foreclosures. Tom Keedy asked if data is available to include in the Chapter comparing Rockland to similar coastal communities. Eileen Wilkinson said she thinks Rockland has a lot in common with Belfast where they are also a vibrant community and the county seat. Eric Galant said that the State criteria rule requires only data from the immediate surrounding area, but that comparisons to other areas can be added.

There is a 60/40 split between owner- and renter-occupied housing in Rockland. Rockland has a higher percentage of older housing stock, with about 55.5% of total housing in Rockland having been built before 1939. Belfast has a similar housing stock. Waldo County poverty rates are greater, so we must recognize that their community has challenges as well.

Rockland's median income is lower than the county average and the gap is increasing. The reasons are the higher percentage of unemployed, retired people, fixed-income households, and smaller family sizes. Subsidized housing has decreased in Rockland, but Rockland still has the most in the County.

In the discussion of housing values, Eric Galant said that data for sales of homes includes foreclosures. It doesn't include sales that don't go through a broker. The COMPS Commission discussed ideas for more assistance programs in Rockland. Under the policies and strategies section, there are suggestions to augment that analysis.

The Commission discussed mobile homes in Rockland. Some communities designate locations for mobile homes and some don't want to assign that. City Attorney Beal said that mobile homes have to be allowed in more than one zone. Mr. Galant state that the state has a goal that at least 10% of new housing be affordable.

In looking at the timeframes for each strategy, Amy Files said we need to know the status of all the strategies listed in the current Comprehensive Plan. The goals are aspirational and are incorporated into plans. Communities applying for grants use their approved Comprehensive Plan for extra points. Eileen Wilkinson said that the Commission has discussed the shortage of nice apartments in Rockland. The strategies don't address sustainability. General discussion on co-housing and eco-housing ensued.

Eric Galant said he is continuing work on other Comprehensive Plan chapters that have less time sensitive data like Marine Resources, Economy, Water Resources, Natural Resources, and Forestry.

Councilor Larry Pritchett Presents Possible Alternate/Supplemental Standards for Short Term Rentals

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Councilor Larry Pritchett said there have been concerned property owners with mixed reviews for and against short-term rentals.

For a whole house to be rented for 3 or more nights, it must be owner occupied. "The house must be the primary residence of the person seeking the license for short term rental; or the primary residence of the person seeking the license for the short term rental must be in the City of Rockland; or a contract with a property management firm located in Rockland, or in an abutting municipality."

Amy Files said there needs to be a limit. Properties are being bought up and rented out seasonally Councilor Pritchett said that a permit would give accurate survey of what's in the city and we would get more clear data. Eileen Wilkinson asked if it could be a temporary ordinance to have the flexibility to make changes to the ordinance and to gather research. Ann Morris recommended as people apply for the permit, that their address gets put into a computer map program to track the number of permits given out and the areas. Chair Valli Geiger said many residents feel that Rockland is over regulating. City Attorney Beal said that one of the goals of the proposed ordinance is to assure that one class licensed business is treated the same as others.

Meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Next Meeting is tentatively scheduled for December 17, 2015 and January 14, 2016.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kara Cushman
Recording Secretary