

Viewpoint- Monadnock Ledger Transcript
December 2019

In the summer of 2019, the Town of Peterborough asked for volunteers to form a Housing Task Force. The group is open to all Peterborough residents and business owners and provides community members the opportunity to engage in discussions regarding future housing policy in Peterborough. The hope is that the group will facilitate productive conversations throughout our community, leading to the writing and adoption of housing policies that are based on residents' comments, good for the future of Peterborough. The group has had two meetings so far, and we're encouraged both by the number of people who signed on, and by the variety of viewpoints represented by members of this Task Force group. It's been wonderful to meet people from our town that we might not otherwise have crossed paths with.

November's meeting of the Housing Task Force was an opportunity for all members of the group to meet, enjoy a potluck meal together, and share with each other our personal experiences in terms of where we grew up (urban, suburban, rural) and the types of housing we grew up in. We were provided time during the meeting to discuss in small groups how our personal experiences have influenced our outlooks. We also were asked to review some information from an AARP publication entitled "Housing in a Changing America."

Although we were aware that our nation is aging, and that many young people are not necessarily choosing to start families, seeing some of the statistical information related to these trends in print was a huge eye-opener for us:

- 28% of households are made up of one resident
- 25% of households are made up of couples with no children
- 20% of households are made up of adults sharing a living space (roommate situations)
- 20% of households are made up of nuclear families
- 7% of households are made up of single-parent families (one parent, children 21 or under).

So, 73% of households don't fit our assumptions about a "typical" household. Our impression of a typical household was a nuclear family with two adults plus three to five kids — and it was based totally on our own childhood experiences. We discussed that much of the old housing for sale and new housing being built does not really reflect or serve these contemporary norms.

The other statistic that was shared via the report is that while median incomes have remained stagnant, home prices and rents have continued to rise. This is not new information, but coupled with the above statistics about household makeup, it seems logical that we need to look at increasing housing options in Peterborough for people who are in households consisting of one or two individuals, because about 73% of the people looking for housing in Peterborough today don't need large homes, and can't necessarily afford to rent or purchase a larger home than they need.

We personally have no expertise or experience related to determining the best way to increase housing options for the 73%. Should we:

- Encourage the development of smaller housing units in Peterborough?
- Promote the idea of homeowners sharing their large homes with boarders or renters, and even reconfiguring their homes to include apartments?
- Do something else we haven't thought of yet?

That's what this Task Force is all about — considering all the options and angles, and discovering new ones.

We look forward to learning more at the next meeting of this Task Force on December 5 at 5:30 PM in Bass Hall. Everyone is welcome to join the discussion!

Cathy Lanigan and Danis Collett
Peterborough residents