Warner Housing Forum | Summary & Activities Transcription

The second Warner Housing Forum was held on September 30th, 2026 at Simonds Elementary School. In total, eight people attended, which was lower than expected due to cold/flu season and other ongoing issues in town occupying people's attention. Also in attendance was an NHPR reporter who did a story on the Forum for radio and online: https://www.nhpr.org/business/2026-10-05/nh-affordable-housing-warner-newhampshire

The Forum began with an opening activity (described below) and an introduction by Ian Rogers on the purpose of the Forum and the history of the housing conversation in Warner, along with Laura Hallahan discussing current housing trends. Matt Monahan from Central NH Regional Planning Commission described the three proposed zoning amendments, and John Christ from UNH Extension laid out ground rules and structure.

Those present then broke into two random groups of four participants each, along with members of the Housing Committee. Discussion in both groups was generally engaged, and while some participants expressed concerns and misconceptions related to housing toward the beginning of the evening, this talk had softened significantly by the end of the evening, with these participants expressing some ideas that they were in favor of. In this sense, the Forum served as a way of alleviating community concerns about potential housing one individual at a time.

Below are specific notes and takeaways from the Forum discussions:

[Opening Activity] Attendees were asked to write down the first word/phrase/notion that came to mind when prompted with the word ***'home'***. The following words were written down individually (by separate participants) in accordance with the activity:

- Comfortable
- Comfort
- Safe
- Grounded
- Belonging
- Security
- Beautiful
- A "Just Right" Space
- **Hand-drawn depiction of a house containing a heart within its walls**

[Blue/Green]
Multi-Family Housing:

- Rental affordably can be influenced by apartment owner activities
- Out of state influx pressure on rental housing costs
- Aesthetics are key. Apartments must blend in visually with Warner. Participants supported the idea of converting existing buildings (e.g., large Victorians) into multi family.
- Consider two (2) single family homes on one (1) lot
  → In addition to ADU

- Smaller lot sizes impact affordability. Incentive-based smaller lots (as well as smaller houses). For example, in a five-acre zone, lots could be subdivided as three-acre lots provided the homes were smaller and more affordable, including ranch housing for single floor living for seniors.
- More rural areas may not be ideal for smaller lot sizes
  → R1, R2 Zones may be the best for smaller lot sizes.
- A new zone, possibly an overlay, could address smaller lot sizes.

Zoning Change 1: Comply with changes to state law to allow multi-family housing in commercial zones

- Could provide some wiggle room for maximum number of units vs. what can be built by right
- Workforce housing – ensure that changes are consistent with workforce housing efforts (i.e. five units of multi family units in a structure can be counted as workforce housing)
- Adds more clarity to definitions in zoning
- Adding more units in older village buildings through re-use – this would update buildings and bring them to modern building code
- Focus on increasing affordability of already-existing homes
- Additional multi-family homes vs. rural character is a concern. Ensure that changes balance with community character, specifically rural character and historic/architectural character.
- Who are we building for?
- State requirements vs. clarifying Warner components. While state requirements will always control, it is important to clarify the existing ordinance to eliminate confusion.
- Need to ensure that the maximum number of building units per lot is consistent with the new law in allowing for multifamily to be built on a lot, as well as allow for duplexes and accessory dwelling units.
- Infrastructure needs to be defined particularly when it comes to apartments. For example, can roads, water, and sewer handle new density?
- Need to balance financial impacts of growth and development in a way that does not overburden the community.

Zoning Change 2: Revise Section IV.L of the Zoning Ordinance to exclude ADUs, duplexes, and apartments (section currently restricts the number of residential structures on a lot to one):

- Warner ADUs – currently allowed up to 1,000 Sq ft which is 'generous'
- This would eliminate potential confusion with state law, which controls. Similarly, this would help increase rental, duplex, and accessory dwelling unit stock.
- Buildings would still have to fit remaining zoning requirements such as setbacks, etc.

Zoning Change 3: Allow for greater density in some parts of Warner

- Grandfathering of current houses/neighborhoods
  → These buildings don't comply with current zoning
  → New construction wouldn't match neighbors
  → New zoning has added acreage/frontage

→ New zoning requirements have created "funky" lots, making it hard for some residents to make use of their land and subdivide, even when it would match character of the surrounding area.

- OC-1, OR-1 Zoning Districts
  → Have huge setback requirements (~ 50 ft) – (reduce, too restrictive)
- Requirements based on "buildable lot area" vs. whole site of lot can make new construction hard
- Cluster development in village would be beneficial to preserve open space in Warner
- Older/antique homes into multi-family would be beneficial
- Greater density in the parts of Warner that are already more dense, and less density in the more rural areas.