



Envisioning a Path Forward

Over the past year, the Monadnock Housing Roundtable has been meeting virtually to discuss regional housing challenges, to share housing-related resources, and to open a space for dialogue about how to respond to our region's housing needs. While there could be value in continuing in this capacity, it's perhaps worth assessing the trajectory of the Roundtable and whether there would be value in creating a more well-defined mission and organizational structure. The thoughts below sketch out potential vision, goals/activities that the group could focus on, as well as several models that the group could use to organize itself. This sketch is intended to serve as a starting point for conversation, not a prescription for how the group should proceed.

Points for Consideration

The following points are intended to help inform discussion about potential goals and organizational models. Some of these points may resonate with you. You may have a differing perspective on others. We can have a conversation as a group about how much general agreement there is on these items. We can also talk about whether there are other factors that we should be considering while evaluating the best path forward for the Roundtable.

- In order to be effective, the Roundtable can't be all things to all people. Housing is a huge, multi-dimensional issue. Given limited capacity and resources, the Roundtable will likely need to focus on particular, well-defined aspects of our housing challenges in order to establish and work towards achievable goals.
- There are already other groups in the region who are working on housing issues. If the Roundtable is to narrow and more clearly define its focus, it should identify what other groups are already working on and where gaps exist.
- Sustaining the Roundtable on a purely volunteer basis would likely be difficult over the long-term. Some level of staff support is likely needed in order to keep the ball rolling. The extent of staffing needs could vary substantially, from several hours a month to a full-time employee.
- Our region's housing challenges aren't going to solve themselves. Organizing on a regional basis isn't easy, but it's worth pursuing, given the regional nature of housing issues and the far-reaching consequences of doing nothing.

Potential Vision

A vision statement can help a group clarify to itself the future it's seeking to create. It can also be helpful in communicating with others (e.g. prospective supporters) what the group aims to accomplish. A sample vision statement for the Roundtable could read as follows:

We envision a Monadnock Region with the housing options we need to support a thriving economy, an equitable community, and a sustainable future. This means creating increased housing opportunity for a wide variety of neighbors including: teachers, medical caregivers, small business owners, restaurant workers, tradespeople, young families, retirees, and others.

There are a few items to note about this vision statement. The first is that it seeks to emphasize that we as a region need to create more housing opportunity. Developing more housing options isn't "someone else's problem." The ability to attract and retain residents, workers, volunteers, entrepreneurs, etc. affects all of us. A second point is that the vision doesn't focus on a specific segment of the housing market, e.g. "affordable," or "low-income," or "workforce housing." There are a couple of reasons for this. One is that our region would benefit from an increased supply of a variety of housing types, not just those that meet conventional definitions of affordability. What these specific housing types may be bears further discussion. Another consideration is that there are already groups/organizations in the region focusing specifically on housing for lower-income individuals/families, but none currently taking a wider approach that includes market-rate housing, which is also in short supply.

What do you think of the draft vision statement? How does it resonate with or diverge from your ideal vision for the future?

Potential Goals and Priority Actions

The following are intended to provoke thoughts regarding goals and priorities moving forward.

1. Cultivate and support a regional network of housing champions. In practice, this could translate into a range of specific actions, including:
 - a) Recruiting individuals and groups to become official members of the Roundtable or what it may become. At a minimum, membership could entail agreeing to have one's name appear on the organization's website and to affirm support for its goals and mission. Membership could also eventually entail a small financial contribution.
 - b) Engaging specific sectors, e.g. local employers, to help them understand how they can become more actively engaged in discussions on housing-related issues.
 - c) Providing technical assistance to local housing champions on how to advocate for and implement housing-related reform.
2. Provide educational opportunities and resources on housing-related issues. Potential actions include:
 - a) Organizing local forums, events, and charrettes to help community members explore and understand housing challenges and potential solutions.
 - b) Organizing and facilitating regional workshops/trainings on specific housing-related issues, e.g. the fiscal impact of housing, creating financing mechanisms for housing development, the benefits of manufactured housing, state legislative activities.
 - c) Empowering community members to share their housing-related challenges in order to highlight the human ramifications of inadequate housing options. These housing related narratives could be documented and shared using a variety of media (audio, video, written articles).
3. Reduce regulatory barriers to developing more housing options. While local land use regulations aren't the only impediment to increased housing opportunity, they are a major factor and one that can be influenced at the local level. In addition to actions listed under items 1 and 2 above, other actions in support of this goal could include:

- a) Compiling and/or drafting model land use regulations that facilitate the creation of undersupplied housing types, e.g. “missing middle” housing, condominiums, rental apartments, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs).
 - b) Helping to mobilize housing advocates in support of proposed regulatory reforms.
4. Facilitate residential development patterns that support other community priorities, such as environmental conservation, economic development, public health, municipal fiscal health, and more. New housing development can be compatible with or critical to the realization of other community goals. In its educational and reform-oriented activities, the Roundtable should recognize these factors and provide guidance on how they can be brought into harmony with increased housing opportunity.
 5. Support the implementation of innovative housing initiatives. In some cases, taking an active role in the implementation of particular housing programs may be appropriate. Possible examples include homesharing programs, the formation of a community land trust, the creation of a housing investment fund, etc. The extent to which the Roundtable could play a role in program implementation would depend in large part on its ability to establish substantial organizational capacity.

What do you think of these draft goals and priority actions? Are there items that need clarification? Items that should be removed or are missing?

Potential Organizational Models

The following represents a non-exhaustive list of different organizational models that the Roundtable could adopt. How the Roundtable structures itself moving into the future will affect which goals and activities it can realistically achieve. In reviewing the following options, consider the pros and cons of each one, whether clarifying information is needed, and whether there are unlisted alternatives that are worth investigating.

Informal Forum (Status Quo)

One option is for the Roundtable to continue functioning as an informal forum that meets periodically to share housing-related resources and to provide a space for networking and peer learning. Under this scenario, roundtable activities might be limited to quarterly meetings, which could involve presentations by guest speakers, peer-education on housing-related topics, information sharing on housing resources, among other possible agenda items. In this limited capacity, SWRPC could likely continue to serve as meeting convener and facilitator. Another function of such a forum could be to help inform a planned update to the regional housing needs assessment, a document developed and maintained by SWRPC.

Coalition-Based Initiative

Under another scenario, the Roundtable could evolve to become a coalition-based initiative. Here, the term “coalition-based” is meant to describe an organizational model that builds support for its mission by recruiting members, as described under action 1.a, above. One advantage of this model is that it would help build regional consciousness about the variety and

number of individuals/organizations within the region that support increased housing opportunity.

In order to minimize administrative overhead, a coalition-based model could operate under the auspices of an established organization. A number of different organization types might serve as a fitting sponsor. For example, a business-oriented organization might be a good choice for playing this role, given the connections it would provide with employers, a key stakeholder group that could prove instrumental in shifting discussions around housing.

If a coalition-based initiative were to focus on a limited set of goals and actions, a part-time or contracted employee could be adequate to meet organizational needs.

Independent Non-Profit

The coalition-based model described above assumes that there is an existing organization in our region with the mission-alignment and capacity to serve as fiscal sponsor. This assumption has yet to be verified. If such an organization *does not* exist in our region, forming a new non-profit entity could offer an alternative approach.

A sponsored, coalition-based initiative and an independent non-profit would differ primarily in how they are administered and governed. A coalition-based initiative could operate under the auspices of the existing organization's board of directors, with an advisory committee/work group (along with any paid staff) taking on most of the responsibility for guiding initiative activities. A new non-profit, on the other hand, would require establishing a new board of directors, charter, bylaws, and other governing documents. This extra layer of administrative complexity could prove challenging for a fledgling organization and detract from its ability to focus on mission-related work.

This isn't to say that such a model would be impossible to implement. In fact, an independent non-profit may offer some advantages, such as independence to freely determine its own mission, activities, and leadership.

Potential Funding Sources

Whatever organizational model is selected, some level of staff support will likely be necessary. There may be other costs associated with organizational activities (e.g. printing, website hosting, etc.) Consequently, identifying potential sources of revenue becomes an important consideration. Some potential funding sources include:

- NH Housing
- NH Charitable Foundation
- Regional foundations
- Corporate sponsors
- Membership fees
- Fundraising events
- Project-specific program income and contract work

Potential Next Steps

- Refine vision, goals, and priority actions, incorporating group feedback.
- Assess to what extent consensus exists regarding a preferred organizational model.
- Continue outreach to additional stakeholders regarding the work of the Roundtable.