

City of Waterville Housing Committee: Final Report, October 2024

Committee Members:

Scott Beale (Resident, Ward 6)

Brett Brockway (Property Developer)

Flavia DeBrito (Councilor, Ward 2)

Rebecca Green (Housing Committee Chair, Councilor, Ward 4)

Aimee Mattera (Real Estate Agent, resident Ward 5)

Jaimie Pelkey (Waterville Tenants' Association, resident Ward 7)

Paula Raymond (South End Neighborhood Association, resident Ward 7)

Nancy Williams (Waterville Community Land Trust, resident Ward 6)

Committee Charge: the committee was established by the Waterville City Council in July 2021 to review existing housing policies and guidelines, including the city's comprehensive plan, housing study of 2002, as well as other housing data and projects under development to **identify issues of concern around housing availability**. The committee will recommend specific actions or initiatives to encourage/facilitate the following objectives:

- promote housing opportunities for all socio-economic groups
- support improvements in existing housing stock, both single and multi-family
- provide incentives for workforce housing; specialized housing; renovated homes; and new market rate homes
- encourage home ownership in the city by facilitating recreation areas and neighborhood businesses.

The Committee reviewed the following documents:

- Waterville Housing Assessment and Action Plan (prepared by Charles G. Roundy, 2002)
- Waterville Comprehensive Plan (2014)
- Market Analysis of Downtown Waterville (prepared by Zimmerman, 2020)

As well as policies and programs from other communities, including Sanford, Bangor, Lewiston, Augusta and others.

Top Issues identified by the Housing Committee based on Priorities listed in the 2002 housing study¹

1. Identify, Acquire and Redevelop Slum/Blight Areas and/or Large Vacant Buildings for redevelopment (13) **Estimated 77 vacant buildings in Waterville**
2. Address Substandard Housing (both single and multi-family homes) (7, 8, 19)

¹ Numbers in parentheses refer to the Priorities numbers listed on pages 6-9 of the Executive Summary of the 2002 Housing Study.

3. Enforce Codes Effectively (11)
4. Increase Home Ownership (22, 14, 17, 15, 16): **the current rate of home ownership in Waterville is 45.8% (US is 64.4%; ME is 72.9%)**
5. Establish better relationships with other agencies/Programs WHA, KVCAP etc. (4, 15, 7, 17, 9, 16)
6. Develop Public Awareness of Housing issues/understanding of City's role (1)

These priorities can be grouped into the following categories: **Education, Policy, Funding, Collaboration**. The committee also identified **Neighborhood Revitalization** as a critical component to improving the strength of quality of life for people living in Waterville. A higher number of owner occupied housing will help to create vital neighborhoods.

Summary of Actions Taken (by the City, the Housing Committee and other Partners), **and Recommendations to Waterville City Council**

A. EDUCATION

1. **Develop Public Awareness of Waterville's Housing Needs**

- a. Organized housing conference, December 2021, with keynote speaker Jeff Levine (74 participants; 13 speakers)

2. **Generate data on housing needs and upcoming projects**

- a. Housing Development Dashboard developed by Central Maine Growth Council in October 2023 to track housing projects; approximately 350 units under development at all levels
- b. List of vacant properties in the City (both residential and commercial) estimated conservatively at 77, representing another 100 potential units of housing. Vacant residential properties have been identified in all 7 wards of the City.

Recommendations for Education :

- I. Include information and resources on the city website for both tenants and landlords regarding housing standards and resources for home ownership
- II. Continue to update Housing Dashboard and create goals for different types of housing, including transitional, supportive, workforce, and middle to market rent.
- III. Hold a 2.0 Housing Summit engaging cross-sector stakeholders in Waterville (developers, non-profits, municipal, tenants, community members etc.).

B. POLICY

1. **Support Ongoing Code Dept. Enforcement of Property Maintenance Standards**

- a. Regular inspection process of multifamily properties at 3+ is helping to improve health and safety for renters
- b. Voluntary Rental Registration implemented, with cooperation of Central Maine Apartment Owners Association

2. **Identify, Acquire and Redevelop Vacant Commercial and Institutional Structures**
 - a. The committee explored a vacant building ordinance, but it was tabled indefinitely due to the difficulties of isolating large, abandoned, dangerous buildings from smaller projects that are waiting for funding etc.
 - b. Explored the idea of Waterville Landbank Authority, which was eventually deemed impractical due to the Tyler-Hennepin ruling; the newly formed state Landbank may be able to provide resources and TA to Waterville.
3. **Zoning Changes**
 - a. Recommended new C-C1 zone to allow for both commercial and residential use on College Ave.

Recommendations on Policy:

- I. Explore changes to citywide zoning policy to allow for more housing, including infill housing, modular homes, mixed-use neighborhoods, etc.
- II. Research Affordable Housing TIF for property owners in low-income areas that are in need of investment.
- III. Develop strategies for redeveloping large vacant commercial and institutional structures that are becoming dangerous buildings.
- IV. Incentivize owners of vacant residential buildings to develop housing in order to increase housing stock and protect the safety and value of neighboring homes.
- V. Support continued maintenance of Rental Registration for income properties and promote cooperation between rental property owners and the City.

C. FUNDING

1. **HOME Funds Consortium**
 - a. Initial discussion with local governments on forming a HOME funds consortium with contiguous communities in order to access more federal funds for housing. Would require considerable collaboration with contiguous communities and administrative costs; however, communities that have formed such a consortium have reported that the results were worthwhile.
2. **Piloted Home Repair Project (WCLT and Habitat)**
 - a. Funding for home repairs for low-income homeowners
3. **Introduced WEALTH Fund** (funded by ARPA) to encourage home ownership and improve existing housing stock for low-income home owners.

Recommendations for Funding:

- I. The City should be more proactive in securing state and federal funding, coordinating and prioritizing with local developers, and allocating city resources to address the housing issue.
- II. The lack of city infrastructure in the Rural Residential district is a significant barrier to building larger single family homes. Securing funding to expand water, sewer and roads

without burdening current tax payers would help increase housing supply and also expand Waterville’s tax base.

- III. Continue to seek regional solutions, such as the HOME funds consortium, and other partnerships with surrounding communities.

D. COLLABORATION

1. Construct a More Effective Working Relationship Between the City of Waterville and the Waterville Housing Authority (WHA)

- a. The housing committee brought together a number of non-profit housing organizations (eg KVCAP, Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter, Habitat for Humanity, Waterville Community Land Trust and Waterville Housing Authority)

Recommendations for Collaboration:

- I. These partners should continue to meet on a regular basis with City staff to collaborate on projects, issues, possible funding sources and other issues of concern.

In Conclusion, the Committee noted ongoing concerns with the following:

- 1. low level of home ownership compared to other communities;
- 2. high number of vacant properties and dangerous buildings in Waterville;
- 3. ongoing need for all types of housing in Waterville, in particular, housing for vulnerable populations, including supportive, transitional and recovery housing; and housing for seniors
- 4. need for updated housing data, particularly in relation to the changing demographics and projected growth of Waterville.

Final Recommendation: Strategic Housing Plan

In order to implement these recommendations (and others), the City should create a strategic workplan for housing that

- assembles the most recent data for the City’s current and future housing needs
- identifies key barriers to housing development
- sets goals for specific housing benchmarks, and
- collaborates with partners to increase the amount of housing across the following areas:

	0-30% AMI (homeless)	30-80% AMI (low-income)	80-120% AMI (workforce)	Market Rate (rental and ownership)	Special housing needs (Seniors, veterans, recovery, etc.)

Short					
Medium					
Long-term					

The Housing Committee thanks previous members of the committee:

Mina Amundsen, Matt Boulerice, Bob Hussey, David Johnson, Donna Jo Marsh, Patric Moore, and Peter Phair.

The following subject matter experts provided valuable input:

Gabe Gauvin, Garvan Donegan, Central Maine Growth Council

Monica Grady, David Pelton, KVCAP

Will Harper, former KVCOG planner (facilitated Housing Conference)

Ryan Poulin, CEO, New Dimensions

Amy Smith, Executive Director, Healthy Homeworks, Lewiston

Katie Spencer-White, Mid-Maine Homeless and Community Services

Robyn Stanicki, former KVCOG planner (helped write Landbank Legislation)

Jim Tischler, Development Director for the Michigan Land Bank Fast Track Authority

Special thanks to City Staff:

Ann Beverage, Dan Bradstreet, Michael Hall, Christina Therrien

Other Data Sources and Initiatives:

- [State of Maine Housing Production Needs Study](#),” and the accompanying [State of Maine Housing Data Portal](#),”
- Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future’s [“Housing Production Dashboard.”](#)
- KVCAP [Community Needs Assessment, 2021](#)
- Downtown Vision Plan, approved by council Nov. 2023
- Kennebec Valley United Way [Impact 2032](#)
- Waterville Comprehensive Plan, in progress

Other Housing Groups and Initiatives:

- Affordable Housing Task Force (convened by KVCAP for Kennebec County); meets first Wednesday of month
- Poverty Action Coalition (KVCAP), meets in Waterville first Thursday of month
- [Maine State Homeless Council](#)

Submitted by the City of Waterville Housing Committee, October 22, 2024