

Chapter 10 – Housing Policies and Strategies

Introduction

The Comprehensive Plan's Housing Policies and Strategies describe goals, policies, standards and implementation strategies related to housing in Wells.

The Town of Wells housing stock has developed over the past 150 years. Consequently, there exists a rich variety of housing that includes historic homes, older villages, farmsteads, beach and waterfront cottage and homes and a small number of multifamily units. The Town's greatest density of housing occurs east of the Maine Turnpike and is quite rural west of the Turnpike. In coastal areas some of the homes, and the infrastructure that supports them, are at greater risk from coastal hazards and sea-level rise. Much of Wells' housing growth has been over the past 30 years with over 60% of the over 5000 structures being built after 1970. Another significant trend has been the conversion of seasonal units to year-round homes that has required the Town to respond with a commensurate level of municipal services.

Housing affordability continues to be a concern in Wells. Median rent has increased 64% in the past 10 years and 74% of renter households are unable to afford median rent for a 2-bedroom housing unit. Median home prices have increased 93% since 2014. As a result, the affordable housing gap has increased significantly. The housing mix in Wells is still predominantly single-family homes, although the percentage of multi-family homes has been slowly increasing. 83% of occupied housing in Wells are owner occupied, while the remaining 17% of units are renter occupied. Between 2004 and 2020, Wells also experienced an increase of 1,700 seasonal units, an increase of 36%, the bulk of which were cottages and campground spaces.

As Wells works to provide opportunities for a variety of housing units to be constructed, including more affordable workforce housing, it is important to understand the impact that lot size and infrastructure have on unit cost. Larger lots increase housing costs and consume open space. The cluster subdivision provision is an important tool for balancing the development of new homes and the protection of open space. Identifying places for higher density housing such as multi-family structures and mixed-use developments is also important. The privatization and cost of infrastructure (roads, fire ponds, etc.) required is also deserving of some evaluation and conversation in the years to come.

Goals

State Goal:

To encourage and promote affordable, decent housing opportunities for all Maine citizens. (Growth Management Act)

Regional Goal:

To encourage a diversity of affordable housing throughout the region.

Wells Goals:

1. ~~The Town attempts to close its current~~ Continue to address the housing supply and affordability gap, and works to ensure that at least 15-10 percent of its homes constructed in Wells future is/are affordable for low and moderate-income households, including both families with children and the elderly.
2. Ensure that the quality and location of new residential development provides a good living environment for all residents.
3. Promote the development of a range of housing unit types to meet the needs of all residents.
4. Allow mobile homes in areas that are zoned for single-family housing and in parks that are consistent with state laws and requirements.
- 4.5. Ensure that the infrastructure developed to support new housing units is managed in an efficient and sustainable way, does not deter the creation of affordable units, and does not interfere with the provision of emergency services.

Policies

To achieve these goals, it is the policy of the Town of Wells to:

1. Provide opportunities for the construction of a wide range of housing types at a variety of densities to allow for a diversity of people in the Town.
2. Consider a variety of techniques to ensure that there is a range of housing, at a range of densities, that is affordable to low and moderate-income households.
- 1.3. Continue to allow housing for the elderly, ~~in growth and transitional areas~~ and explore allowing higher densities than other types of housing through a density bonus program if a percentage of the units are designated as affordable where and the facility can be served by public water and sewer.
- 2.4. Continue ~~land use regulations~~ to allowing for the construction of eldercare facilities such as congregate housing and assisted living facilities at appropriate densities provided that the character of these facilities is appropriate to Wells.
3. ~~Consider a variety of techniques to ensure that there is a range of housing that is affordable to low and moderate-income households.~~
4. ~~Continue to exempt affordable family and senior housing in growth areas from the Town's Residential Growth Ordinance.~~

5. Encourage both non-profit and for-profit developers of affordable and special needs housing to pursue developments in Wells.

Additional Principles below from the State of Maine Checklist

6. Encourage and promote efforts to support the creation of adequate workforce housing that will support the community's and region's economic development.
7. Ensure that land use controls encourage the development of quality affordable housing, including rental housing.
- 6-8. Encourage and support the efforts of the regional housing coalitions in addressing affordable and workforce housing needs.

Standards

To achieve these policies, the following are Town of Wells' standards to guide development:

1. Amend Land Use Ordinance as needed.
- ~~2. Amend Residential Growth Ordinance as needed.~~
2. Partnerships with non-profit and for-profit developers of affordable and special needs housing.

Implementation Strategies

1. Adopt and follow the Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA) definitions of affordability for York County and continue to update affordability targets as new MSHA data are available.
2. Review existing land use regulations to determine if they ~~Continue to allow for adequate opportunities to create~~ housing for the senior population ~~in growth and transitional areas and allow higher densities for this age group than other types of housing through a density bonus program (with the bonus not to exceed clustering standards) where the facility can be served by public sewer and water, and for households needing access to affordable housing units.~~
- ~~3. Establish incentives such as those currently allowed for congregate housing to encourage the development of senior housing as long as the development is consistent with the goals and policies of this Comprehensive Plan.~~
- ~~4. Revise the mobile home regulations to ensure that they meet the State law for mobile home parks and mobile home park expansion. Such regulations must provide standards to minimize the impact on the Town's services, natural and cultural environment and be respectful of adjoining neighborhoods.~~
- ~~5. Review the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations to ensure that~~

housing density is consistent with the Land Use Plan resulting from this Comprehensive Plan, is directed to addresses the opportunity for multi-family and higher density residential developments in the identified Growth Areas of the community, and is consistent with the capacity of municipal services to ensure these new or redeveloped sites. See also Policies and Recommendations for Land Use.

3. Regularly Rreview town land use ordinances to determine if these regulations can be revised to encourage incentivize more affordable housing and if the price of the units created can be easily tracked.

6.4. Consider the development of an Inclusionary Housing Ordinance that would further incentivize the creation of affordable housing units, and could be used in combination with the Cluster provision.

7.5. Collaborate with York County Community Action, and/or other housing-related organizations in the region, to support efforts to provide diverse housing for all citizens, including affordable and workforce housing.

8.6. Work with other communities to create a regional non-profit housing organization to foster affordable housing programs for low-and moderate-income families. Such a group could:

- a. Ensure that local land use regulations do not present a barrier to the development of affordable housing.
- b. Work cooperatively with nonprofit organizations and private developers to provide opportunities for affordable housing.
- c. Seek loans and grants from the State of Maine;
- d. Work with area banks through the Community Reinvestment Act.
- e. Consider the use of Town-owned land for affordable housing programs.

9.7. Adopt or revise provisions in the land use and building codes to provide greater opportunities for the rehabilitation of low- and moderate-income properties including health, safety, and energy efficiency improvements.

10.8. Provide opportunities for multiple mixed uses of buildings, that including include housing, in commercial areas of the community.

~~11. Ensure that any revisions to the Growth Management Ordinance retain or expand the exemptions for affordable family and senior housing.~~

9. Work with York County Community College and the development community to pursue a student housing development in the vicinity of the college.

10. Refine and promote the use of the Cluster Subdivision provision as a regulatory strategy for rural portions of the community, reducing

development impact and infrastructure costs through density and open space protections, and reducing visual impact through vegetative buffering requirements along municipal roadways.

- 12.11. Host a work session and evaluation with land use boards, municipal staff, developers, and Home Ownership Associations to discuss how infrastructure is currently being constructed and managed in Wells

The following strategies are from the State of Maine Checklist

12. Maintain, enact or amend ordinances to allow the addition of at least one accessory apartment per dwelling unit in designated areas, subject to site suitability, and regulate the use of these as short-term rentals.
 13. Create or continue to support a community affordable/workforce housing committee and/or regional affordable housing coalition.
 14. Seek to achieve a level of at least 10% of new residential development built or placed during the next decade be affordable.
 15. Evaluate the impact and potential benefits of seasonal housing units and short-term rentals, and identify how to best regulate these uses in Wells.
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