

Westmoreland Planning Board
Work Session
Approved Minutes
April 17, 2025

Attending: Lauren Bressett (chair), Bruce Smith (co-chair), Tim Thompson, Liana Capra, Lisa Prince, Mark Terry (selectman rep.)

Excused: Alison Fissette, Larry Siegel, John Stronk

Lauren Bressett called the meeting to order at 5:45 pm.

Lauren Bressett said that the masterplan has requested to meet with the planning board. The board decided that May 13 at 6:00 pm would work best for everyone.

The board reviewed the letter that they agreed to write on behalf of the town's interests:

Dear Governor Ayotte,

This past week, the State House appeared poised to approve a series of bills intended to address the housing crisis in New Hampshire. We are writing to you with a strong sense of urgency to ask that, **should these bills arrive on your desk—including SB 84, SB 170, and SB 281—you veto them** in order to preserve the opportunity for true collaboration between the state and local governments.

The Planning Board of Westmoreland—and many other towns in our region—have spent a great deal of time and effort working to find practical, community-based responses to the housing crisis. However, what works in a large city like Manchester or Portsmouth cannot possibly be the same approach needed in a small rural town like ours. Yet that is exactly what SB 84, SB 170, and SB 281 would impose: a top-down, one-size-fits-all solution that disregards the differences between urban and rural communities.

We respectfully ask you to consider the following key points:

- **Urban and rural communities require different approaches** to housing policy.
- **Local control is a cornerstone of New Hampshire governance**—a nonpartisan, deeply rooted value.
- **Local planning boards are made up of residents who know their towns best**, and have worked thoughtfully and carefully to plan for sustainable development
- Development in well-functioning rural towns is managed **considering local geography and natural resources** as well as development needs.
- **Cheshire County has the second lowest median sales price** in the state, \$150,000 below the state median rate. (March Bankrate.com figures)

As a small town we are not opposed to doing our part to deal with the housing crisis. We more than meet the guidelines for affordable owned housing. We do have limited rental opportunities. As a result, Westmoreland approved Accessory Dwelling Units and allowed detached ADU's before the state required towns to do so. We are in the process of updating our Master Plan and our recent

survey gave us information on where we should be making zoning changes. The Planning Board is carefully considering what further changes we can do which keeps the character of the town, recognizes limitations from natural geography and natural resources while allowing for sensible, planned growth.

What is more effective is guidelines such as the affordable housing legislation that gives towns an ideal to aim for. The current proposed legislation has no ties to affordable housing. Nothing would stop a developer from continuing to build large homes that are well beyond the affordable rate even while enjoying increased housing density. Tying changes to a density allowance if all or a certain amount of new construction met affordability rates would have more impact on the housing crisis.

These concerns are not political in nature. In our town—and in many others—this conversation is not about partisanship, but about protecting a long-standing tradition of **local autonomy** and **respect for community identity**. The proposed legislation reflects an urban-centric viewpoint that, if enacted, would significantly alter the ability of small towns to manage growth responsibly, protect natural resources, and maintain the quality of life their residents' value.

Governor, we believe you have the opportunity to show real leadership—not just by stopping harmful legislation, but by **encouraging a statewide dialogue** that brings local voices to the table. Let us work together toward real, sustainable solutions that empower both state and municipal governments to address this crisis—**without sacrificing the principles that make New Hampshire strong and unique**.

Thank you for your service and your consideration.

Westmoreland NH Planning Board

Lauren Bressett, Chair

Bruce Smith, Vice Chair

CC. Representatives Paul Berch, Catherine Harvey, Nicholas Germana, Samantha Jacobs

Senator Donovan Fenton

Bruce Smith made a motion to send the letter as presented. Lisa Prince Seconded that motion. All voted in favor.

Tim Thompson made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Liana seconded that motion. All voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 5:49 pm. Recorded by Kristen Riley, Clerk. Approved.