

Group fights for work-force housing

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PORTSMOUTH — The committee charged with making recommendations to address the lack of housing for the city's work force is planning a multi-targeted attack to be presented this fall.

The Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Housing has spent the past few months brainstorming and will make a number of recommendations to the City Council and Planning Board later in the year.

The scope of the committee's work is very wide, according to councilor Chris Dwyer, who chairs the committee. Many of the issues will require some kind of zoning change to promote or allow things like house sharing, accessory apartments or other residential uses in districts where they are not currently allowed. The committee has also looked at regional approaches and development of city-owned land.

"I think one thing we all agree on is that the need is great, but there isn't going to be one big solution," said Dwyer. "It's going to come from many different places."

Dwyer said the committee is looking into challenges other municipalities have faced and hopes to learn from them.

Although the issue is a primary focus of local organizations like the Portsmouth Housing Authority and **The Housing Partnership**, the committee is the city's first organized group to look at regulatory changes. Members have been working with Rick Taintor, the city's zoning consultant, who is actively working on the city's zoning re-write.

"What we're trying to do is take it from a serious angle of what can we do to preserve housing that is affordable and what can we do to add to the housing stock," said Dwyer.

Part of the challenge, she said, remains overcoming public misconceptions and fears over the impact of work-force housing on neighborhoods.

Educating people is a long-term goal and probably the most daunting challenge, she said.

"It's just a tricky issue, but I'm convinced it is so serious for the area to have economic vitality," said Dwyer. "If we don't, we're just going to shrink and shrink."