
EXCLUSIVE**LOCAL**

Strafford County leaders eye land in Dover for affordable housing

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Key Points

- Strafford County commissioners are exploring using county-owned land to develop affordable housing.
- The plan involves identifying a suitable parcel from 300 acres of county land in Dover for the project.
- Commissioners intend to partner with a private or nonprofit developer rather than manage the housing themselves.
- The project is in its preliminary stages and would require approval from the county's state legislative delegation.

DOVER — Strafford County [commissioners](#) are looking to take action in response to the barriers preventing working people from being able to afford a place to live.

The commissioners agreed Aug. 6 to try to identify land for [affordable housing](#) to be built among the 300 acres owned by the county. The property is in Dover around and extending from the county complex on County Farm Road in Dover, where the jail, courthouse and Riverside Rest Home are located.

"We have been hearing about this for years, and the commissioners want to help," Commission Chair George Maglaras said. "We are losing the promise of the American dream, and that really bothers me. When I got out of high school, I got a job, an apartment in like, 10 minutes. That's not how it is now."

"Our communities need this," said Commissioner Leslie Feliciano. "We should look into doing this. I am 100% behind this because I think we need to do this for our constituents. I would love to spearhead this with you and get it done."

The ambitious plan is very preliminary, in the exploration stages. Maglaras said no specific parcel has been identified yet.

More local housing news: [Dover cottage home sales held up by city board. Here's why.](#)

"I hope to bring in a concept of the plan back to the commissioners in a few weeks," he said. "If we have government assets just sitting there like the county land, that asset should be used in the public interest, and right now that's affordable housing."

Strafford County would seek partner for housing project

Maglaras said once land is identified, the county could issue a request for proposals to gauge interest from developers.

"I think a private or nonprofit sector should run it, not us, but the housing crisis been going on for so long," Maglaras said. "I am talking about the average people who work in the service industry even some of our employees. I am going to speak to the housing authorities, to see if they will get on board."

Will Hyder Hospice reopen in Dover? [Strafford County, MGB in talks](#)

A majority of the county's delegation of representatives in the New Hampshire House would need to approve any proposal, according to Maglaras.

Maglaras said all political entities in New Hampshire should look at their land resources that might be available to create affordable housing.

"I know in Dover they have made some attempts, like getting rid of impact fees and Durham has done the same," Maglaras said. "Rochester is making efforts, and I hope we can work together. I can't blame people for wanting to get market rate for properties, but at this point we need some intervention from government."

Some Strafford County land is protected from development

Maglaras said that while the county has 300 acres, a lot of it is in conservation easements.

"About 25 years ago, we were under pressure to sell off county land," he said. "So, we decided to put a lot of land in conservation. We have a number of pieces that can be taken out of conservation, so right now we are looking at some not in the conservation zone, and others that can be taken out by special exception. Some would require an eminent domain process to take out of conservation."

Maglaras said the land chosen must have good infrastructure in order to make it affordable to develop.

"We are probably talking some form of multi-story building(s)," he said. "Today, the cost of construction is so high and infrastructure is one of the biggest costs, so we are looking to see where that infrastructure exists, things like access to water and sewer services."

Mayors want to help with county affordable housing project

Dover Mayor Dennis Shanahan said he would welcome a county affordable housing project.

"We have had discussions going back a few years, when the commissioners were trying to get a project to replace Riverside Rest Home," Shanahan said. "That project was blocked by the county delegation, but did include a housing component. I'd very much love to see the county come up with a plan and work with them for affordable housing."

"Simply doing the math in Dover, quarter acre lots for purchase are over \$200,000, and the cost for construction is \$200-\$300 per square foot. So if there is a different solution to

help ... we are for it."

Shanahan said the average sales price for a home in Dover is \$580,000, which he says is out of reach for someone coming out a four-year college, a trade school, and for service workers, including police and fire.

Shanahan said Dover is being pretty liberal in allowing accessory dwelling units, and the city is working on its zoning to allow more affordable housing.

Rochester Mayor Chuck Grassie said he would love to see what the city can do to help.

"Maybe it's mini-homes or something else," he said. "It might require some zoning seriously looking at how we can make it easier to that is what our people need."



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