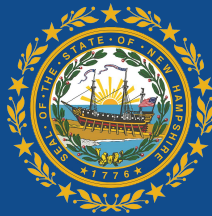


NH Council on Housing Stability Strategic Planning

Phase I

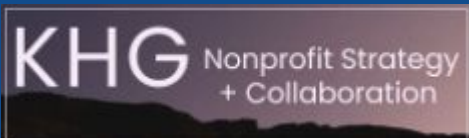
**From Reflection to Action:
Lessons Learned & Next Steps**

**A Summary Report for the
New Hampshire Council on Housing Stability**



March 3, 2025

Prepared on 2/26/25



From Reflection to Action: Lessons Learned & Next Steps

Executive Summary

As the NH Council on Housing Stability sets its sights on its next strategic plan, the Council took time to reflect on its learnings and accomplishments to date. Through a survey, document review, and interviews, we sought to understand where the Council has been and where it is going.

The report that follows summarizes findings in three key themes that emerged in this process: the role of the Council, work of the Council, and structure of the Council.

- **The Role:** Role clarity is essential for diverse groups to drive meaningful change. Most interview participants struggled to clearly define a shared understanding of the Council's role in addressing housing and homelessness. While advocacy was mentioned as a core strategy for affecting change broadly speaking, the Council's role as a convener and educator were cited as effective change strategies just as much if not more so than direct policy influence.
- **The Work:** The Council's impact has been shaped by the capacity and focus areas of its members, the unique challenges of launching a new initiative at the height of COVID-19, and the broad scope of its initial strategic plan. While its greatest strength has been fostering cross-sector learning and collaboration, its influence is constrained by New Hampshire's culture of local autonomy. Desired future focus areas mentioned also include data analysis and policy support.
- **The Structure:** The Council's structure balances full-group meetings with working groups, allowing flexibility but sometimes causing inefficiencies and miscommunication. While the right people are involved, power dynamics and the lack of paid staff present challenges, though scheduled meetings and evolving membership offer opportunities for improvement.

The Council will be well served by incorporating this feedback into its next strategic plan, specifically differentiating between the role and impact of the Council as complementary to but also distinct from the varied roles of its members, a continued focus on the full housing continuum, and considering creative strategies to bridge the divide between state and local experiences, needs, and impacts.



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Overview

Background: [Formed by executive order in 2020](#), the [New Hampshire Council on Housing Stability](#) recognizes shelter as a basic human need, and that health, social, educational, and economic challenges are closely linked to housing instability. To improve the lives of New Hampshire citizens, the Council is tasked with providing short- and long-term recommendations to support planning, policy, and resource allocation for statewide, regional, and local community-based efforts. The following summarizes findings and observations in three areas.

Looking back and looking forward

1) The Role	What role does the Council play? What role should it play?
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2) The Work	What does the Council do? What should it do?
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3) The Structure	How does the Council operate? How should it operate?
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Methodology

In preparation for developing the Council's next three-year strategic plan, we engaged in an appreciative inquiry process. Appreciative inquiry is a collaborative, strengths-based approach to stakeholder engagement. Inputs in this process included:

- 11 Semi-structured interviews
- 23 individual documents and reports provided by the Council
- 24 questionnaire responses from Council and working groups members

In interviews, we explored three dimensions of the Council's work to date –

1. Clarifying the role of the Council;
2. Looking back at lessons learned from its first three years; and
3. Looking forward to the challenges and opportunities that can inform its next strategic plan.



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Role of the Council

Role clarity is a prerequisite for groups of diverse individuals and institutions to affect change.

- Given its charge, the purview of the Council was abundantly clear: to positively impact persistent issues around housing and homelessness. Overall, it was agreed that both issues are significant and interconnected and are most effectively resolved when addressed together.
- That said, some interview participants emphasized that while they are connected issues, their causes and solutions are inherently unique. For example, housing advocates are most concerned with things like zoning and building codes whereas homelessness advocates want to focus more on the missing middle (housing options) and providing wrap-around support services. This is an example of a healthy tension that can lead to clarity and better performance.
- A majority of interview participants lacked confidence in clearly articulating the role of the Council. This was true for individuals who serve on the Council as well as those who do not. Survey responses further demonstrate this lack of role clarity.
- While 'Advocate' received the most votes it is interesting to note the supporting comments point toward advocacy in the form of providing information, educating the community, and raising awareness of issues. Reliable data and analysis were also noted as a key advocacy priority.

# of Responses	Role of the Council	Activity Example
10	Advocate	Training Library (https://endhomelessnessnh.org/)
9	Convener	2022 Summit Outcomes
8	Educator; Resource Hub	Policy recommendations
1	Bureaucracy; Connector; Collaborator; Funder	Council meetings



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Work of the Council

Outputs and outcomes attributable, in part or in whole, to the Council, are likely impacted by where its members choose to invest their time and energy.

- The first strategic plan was heavily influenced by the context in which it was created. The COVID-19 pandemic created disruptive levels of uncertainty and chaos as well as innovation and urgency. Without time for refinement and debate, the first strategic plan was inclusive of a broad range of ideas and strategies, compiled largely in isolation by a few hardworking champions of the Council in its earliest days.
- Determining the effectiveness of that plan is stymied by the sheer number of tactics and strategies it includes, and yet specific outcomes were cited as having been influenced by or directly resulting from the work of the Council. They include:
 - Shifts in public perception around the urgency of addressing housing and homelessness issues,
 - Provided direction on addressing encampments,
 - Endorsing a policy framework in January 2025.
- The work of the Council is deeply influenced by and impacted by culture and precedent. Known for its independence and unofficial motto “Live Free or Die” - interview participants explained that in New Hampshire, a statewide body like the Council can be viewed as interference by the state in local affairs, potentially limiting the Council’s influence.



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Work of the Council

Outputs and outcomes attributable, in part or in whole, to the Council, are likely impacted by where its members choose to invest their time and energy.

- Though not an explicit priority of the Council, interview participants most familiar with the Council's work were unanimous in expressing that the information sharing, perspective taking, and cross-pollination of ideas were perhaps the most impactful outcomes of the Council's first three years in existence. This idea of the Council as a place for learning was emphasized in numerous comments that can be summarized as individuals and agencies learning from each other allowed them to incorporate different perspectives that impact the work of their own agencies or organizations. For example, developers sharing stories of partnership with social services agencies added nuance and minimized assumptions and stereotypes.
- While not exclusively attributed to the work of the Council, interview participants identified a shift in public opinion - for example from homelessness as an individual failure to one of systemic and interconnected issues. That's not to say there is public consensus on the causes and solutions to homelessness but that the visibility of homelessness and the broader housing crisis has increased.
- Looking ahead, there was interest in the Council playing more of a role related to data—conducting relevant research, performing in-depth data analysis, and providing reports to inform policy makers.
- Several interview participants perceived a lack of awareness about the Council's work. It was unclear to what extent that is a barrier to accomplishing the Council's goals. If visibility is important, then it would be helpful to define who the Council's key audiences are.



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Structure of the Council

Collaborative efforts are most successful when participants understand how to navigate the “rules of engagement” and commit to a shared purpose above individual interest.

- The frequency and duration of Council meetings came up in interviews; specifically, short infrequent meetings with full agendas. While this reflects the importance and vastness of the work, it also presents challenges to making progress in any one meeting.
 - New this year, the Council has scheduled out all its meetings for the 2025 calendar year. This should help with attendance and hopefully with agenda/time management.
 - Agendas are often packed and while there is some time for generative discussion, most work is completed in the working groups. The work group structure allows for fluctuations in time and energy that any one Council member has to devote to the group at any given time. On the other hand, some interview participants cautioned that this could lead to wasted time and effort as Council members come and go.
- The Council started with a couple of work groups and since then work groups have shifted and evolved. It’s unclear how the priorities of the work groups are set and has led to some miscommunication.
- For those most familiar with the Council, there was unanimous agreement among interview participants that “the right people” are on the Council - which can be interpreted as those who are both knowledgeable as well as influential. As the Council enters its fifth year, some of those key people who helped start the Council have moved on for a variety of reasons, leaving gaps but also opportunities to recruit new voices.
- By definition, Council meetings come with inherent power dynamics which can lead to uncertainty in one’s ability to speak openly and honestly. This is a challenge inherent in diverse, collaborative work. Whereas the working group structure allows for honest dialogue and flexibility to adapt to a shifting political climate.
- Several participants mentioned the lack of paid staff as a barrier to implementing ideas or taking action on the research that is conducted.



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Tensions

Tensions can illuminate the complexities inherent in collaborative initiatives. Neither good nor bad, tensions can be healthy opportunities for dialogue that lead to creative solutions. The following tensions are described here to generate discussion and help frame priorities for the upcoming strategic planning process.

The lack of clarity around the role and purpose of the Council

is an impediment to its effectiveness and also... creates a “big tent” effect, allowing for a more diverse set of stakeholders to engage in any and all work related to the issues.

The diversity of backgrounds and experiences on the Council

is a strength and also... makes it challenging to level-set and make effective use of everyone’s time

The Council is most effective as

a convener and educator - People come to the Council to learn and collaborate but any work or forward movement is led by the agencies/organizations themselves and also... an advocate and resource hub - The Council can have influence by taking action such as taking policy positions or providing tools and resources for dissemination



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Tensions continued. . .

The Council is effective because

of its ability to recruit and retain individuals in positions of power and influence, as well as those with deep knowledge and expertise of the systems and policies affecting housing and homelessness

and also...

it includes individuals with lived experience who may not have traditionally recognized power and influence but who can have significant impact on identifying solutions

Housing and homelessness

are intrinsically linked - the challenges of both are best addressed in tandem

and also...

are unique and distinct thus, requiring different approaches

The most effective tools for achieving housing stability are

policy changes and strict enforcement.

and also...

incentives, information, and shifting attitudes.

Regional/Local differences

are difficult to capture in statewide legislation.

and also...

must be acknowledged in statewide legislation in order to be adopted and enforced by local municipal authorities.



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Notes

- The first strategic plan helped to establish the Council's credibility, created space for shared learning, and deepened interagency communication and relationships.
- Interviewees expressed a desire for this next strategic plan to be more concise and collaborative while being flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances.
- Interviewees also emphasized the importance of continuing to use the Council as a space for shared learning, especially across differences, and coordination of efforts to alleviate New Hampshire's housing and homelessness crisis.

Next Steps

- Recruit a working group to oversee the process of drafting a strategic plan.
- Charge the strategic planning workgroup with defining a clear role for the Council, a more concise set of objectives, and specific activities in which the Council has knowledge and the ability to be influential.
- Create a strategic plan that addresses both how the Council operates and is governed, both internally as well as externally.
- Create opportunities for Council members to provide feedback that can strengthen the strategic plan, inclusive of the following:
 - Populations with lived experience
 - A dedicated paid staff person
 - Structured and defined workgroups
 - The tensions between housing production and homelessness services



Thank you!

With gratitude for your time, energy, and talent
Thank you to the team who helped provide guidance and material support throughout this process: Katy Easterly Martey, Kirsten Barton, and Caroline Conlin.

Thank you to the following Interview Participants

Name	Title	Organization
Eric Adams	Prevention Enforcement Treatment (PET) Officer	City of Laconia Police Department
Dick <u>Anagnost</u>	President	Anagnost Investments, Inc
Maria Devlin	President and Chief Executive Officer	Families in Transition
Melissa Hatfield	Bureau Chief	Bureau of Housing Supports
Ariel Hayes	Executive Director	Youth Success Project
Noah Hodgetts	Principal Planner	New Hampshire Department of Business & Economic Affairs
Harrison Kanzler	Executive Director	(AHEAD) Affordable Housing Education and Development, Inc.
Elissa Margolin	Former Executive Director	Housing Action New Hampshire
Matt <u>Mooshian</u>	Advocacy and Engagement Director	603 Forward
Ben Stebbins	Landlord	Condor Property Management
 Nick Taylor	Executive Director	Housing Action New Hampshire

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Other inputs and resources (not an exhaustive list)

- Questionnaire: 24 responses (Dec. 2024)
- ALL IN: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness (Dec. 2022)
- Council on Housing Stability Annual Reports (2022, 2023, 2024) and Year in Review (2024)
- Council on Housing Stability Strategic Plan 2021-2024
- New Hampshire Council on Housing Stability Initial Report and Action Plan (December 14, 2020)
- Creating and Sustaining State Interagency Councils on Homelessness (May 2024)

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