

There is a lot going on in Manchester by the Sea these days. On the housing development front, there are proposals that have the attention of many town residents. The proposed housing development at Shingle Hill (the “40 B”) continues on a path of resident review and comment and Board of Selectman negotiation with the developer. The plan proposed to redevelop the Manchester Athletic Club area (the “40 R”) is being discussed among various town boards. Plans to update the zoning regulations are also ongoing and have brought about much discussion among friends and neighbors.

Against this backdrop, the Manchester Housing Authority (MHA) and the Manchester Affordable Housing Trust (MAHT) have been working on a plan to improve the existing 84 public housing units that have served the town well for over 50 years. As part of the plan, additional new units are being considered for the sites, to serve the town’s growing need for community affordable housing.

These MHA units are precious, as they make up most of the affordable housing in Manchester. Most of them are leased to seniors with fixed incomes. They are supposed to receive operating funds from the state, but little if any actual financial support is currently available. The cost of utilities, maintenance and management comes from the limited rents of the tenants, who pay 30% of their income. The staff of the Housing Authority does an excellent job of keeping the properties going, but it is an uphill struggle. The state Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) provides occasional grants to replace roofs or windows, but the apartment units are outdated with inefficient utility systems and appliances. Half the units are second floor walk-up apartments with no elevators to serve the elderly residents. And this is not unique to Manchester. The Commonwealth’s inventory of state subsidized public housing is in need of upgrades to meet resident needs but financing plans are lacking to address the challenges.

Manchester cannot afford to wait for the state government to take action. The residents at these properties deserve to have safe, comfortable and sustainable housing. As highlighted in both the town’s Master Plan and the recently approved Housing Production Plan, the need for more community affordable housing in town is critical, and the MHA sites appear suitable.

Last fall the MHA and the MAHT jointly hired a consultant team to analyze the public housing properties as well as the town- owned DPW site on Pleasant Street. The purpose of the study is to assess the existing units and opportunities for additional units and devise a plan to preserve and renovate them. In addition, the consultants were asked to determine the feasibility and present a viable development plan for the Pleasant Street site to support redevelopment of the MHA properties.

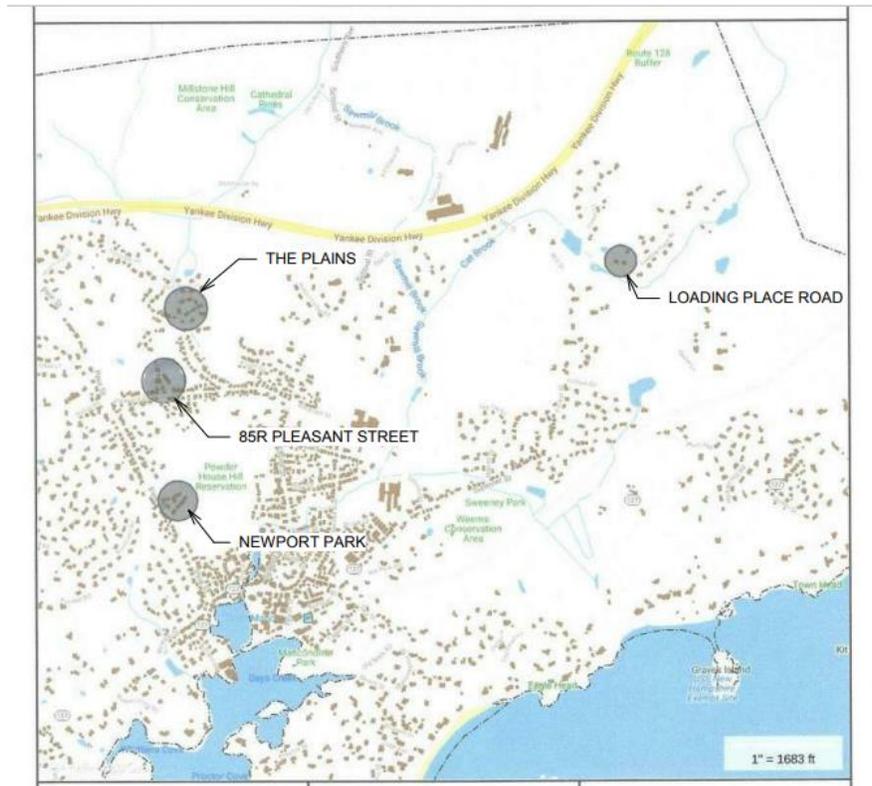
At a joint meeting of the Boards held on February 24, the consultant presented a draft plan for consideration. While the consultant will not be undertaking the design and development phases required for redevelopment, the following is a summary of the feasibility study’s findings and recommendations.

There are a few guidelines or principles that need to be explained before considering the plan vision and potential development recommendations:

1. Any plan to take on the renovation of the Housing Authority will be complicated and time consuming, and must be undertaken in phases.
2. The residents of the public housing units have been informed of the study and will continue to be engaged in the actual planning and design of the renovation.
3. Town residents and neighbors will be asked to participate in the planning of these projects and their comments will be taken into account.
4. The number of existing housing units will be maintained, though some may be replaced with new units. While it is early in planning, it's important to note that if renovation occurs there may be the need for some temporary relocation of tenants as part of the renovation process. No one will be left out or asked to leave.
5. Although there is little funding for renovation of state-subsidized public housing, there are both state and federal funding sources specifically targeted for the creation of new affordable units. So, an important objective is to capitalize on these programs to develop new units of affordable and market rate housing that will provide cash flow to support the renovations needed for the public housing units. To put it simply, the Housing Authority is unable to obtain funds for renovating and improving the operations of the existing units without adding new units.
6. Undertaking this project will require forming a partnership with an organization that has the expertise, resources and experience to oversee the project. The MHA will be an active partner and will retain its management responsibility for the public housing units.
7. Once the MHA, DHCD and the Town have become comfortable with the goals of the plan, the MHA, with the support of the MAHT, will issue a formal Request for Proposals from potential development partners. After a careful selection process, an organization will be selected, a development agreement negotiated, and the details of the plan will be worked out with residents, neighbors, town boards and other stakeholders.
8. This process will take time and will require both patience and persistence. It is unlikely that the Request for Proposals will be ready to be issued before this summer. Furthermore, it will take at least a year after a partner is chosen for the plan to be finalized and funding committed. Actual design documents and legal details will have to be developed. The Town will need time to issue appropriate permits. It is possible that the plan will have to be endorsed at Town Meeting. The MHA and MAHT commit to working this through with all stakeholders in town.

The Vision:

There are three public housing sites in Manchester: Newport Park on Pine Street; The Plains off Old Essex Road and Loading Place on Loading Place Road. Each site has its own constraints and opportunities, and each requires its own specific development plan. As noted, there is also a possible site for new housing on town-owned land on Pleasant Street that could support redevelopment of the public housing sites. The following map shows their locations.



Newport Park- The property is a three-acre lot located in a residential district on the east side of Pine Street, backing up against Powder House Hill. It contains five brick residential buildings, dating from 1964 with a total of 32 one-bedroom units occupied by seniors. The developed area is relatively flat and has a single vehicular access from Pine Street with surface parking. The undeveloped area is about one acre of wooded land to the rear and is not easily viewed from the street. It has a relatively steep topography with slopes ranging from 7% to 18%. The site is divided from front to back by what is thought to be an intermittent stream, which may impact the location of new buildings and parking areas. The site is served by all utilities from Pine Street.

Development Potential: The vision for Newport Park is to maintain and renovate the existing brick buildings and add an additional building or buildings to the rear. These could be groups of single-story buildings, or perhaps a single three or even four-story building with elevator creating up to 18 new one and two-bedroom apartments. Additional parking will be required to serve these residents. As long as 32 units continue to be public housing reserved for seniors, it might be possible to move residents from their existing second floor units to a new accessible building and have the second story walk up apartments in the existing buildings available for –residents who are not troubled by stairs. All the units would have income and rent restrictions and would be listed on the State Subsidized Housing Inventory.

The Site Plan sketch below shows existing buildings in orange and a new three-story building in blue with six units on each floor. Again, this is a preliminary scheme that has been evaluated and that will be discussed with site and town residents.



Examples of three-story buildings

If a three-story building is not feasible, a single-story building or buildings could be located on the site.



Example of a single-story row house building.

The Plains: The property is a 3.2-acre lot located in a residential neighborhood with a narrow frontage on Old Essex Road. The site contains six residential buildings dating from 1975 with a total of 48 one-bedroom units for seniors and the disabled. There is also a community building and a small maintenance building. The developed area is relatively flat. The buildings face an oval shaped vehicular driveway that has surface parking around a central green space. There is a small, undeveloped area on the northeast end of the site, behind the community building. It is a wooded area of about one-half acre that has a sloping topography with slopes ranging from 3% to 13%. The site is served by all utilities from Old Essex Road.

Development Potential: The vision for the Plains is to maintain and renovate all the public housing units and replace the existing single story community building and office with a larger mixed-use structure that would include community room(s) and office spaces as well as up to 26 new one and two-bedroom units. The new building would include an elevator and would meet all required building and energy codes. It would extend into the sloping terrain with a partial first floor and larger floors on the upper levels. Additional parking would be included. As with Newport Park, it might be possible to allow the second-floor walkup units in the existing buildings to be occupied by residents. All units would have income and rent restrictions and would be listed on the State Inventory.



Site Plan showing a new three or four-story building in blue'



Examples of three and four-story buildings

Loading Place Road: The property is a 3.2-acre lot located in a residential neighborhood off Mill Street with extensive frontage along Loading Place Road. There is a single vehicular driveway



Example of a two-story duplex building

Pleasant Street DPW site: This is not part of the public housing properties but is town-owned. The DPW maintenance facility has been talked about for years; the recent town Master Plan process indicated support for promoting community housing on the site. The land is valuable and is located between a vibrant residential neighborhood and the Pleasant Grove cemetery. The site was included in the consultant's study to see if it could accommodate residential development and support redevelopment of the public housing properties.

The property is a 7-acre roughly rectangular lot with frontage on Pleasant Street. The southeast half of the site is occupied by the DPW and contains several structures that house DPW operations and equipment. This developed area is flat and has a single vehicular access from Pine Street and an extensive paved area used for vehicular circulation and parking. The undeveloped area is wooded with wetlands and consists of about three acres with one acre permanently protected. Part of this area also has steep slopes ranging from 14% to 50% making this portion of the site essentially unbuildable. Soil testing will be required to see if there is contamination from DPW operations. The site is served by utilities and has sanitary and storm water connections to mains on Pleasant Street.

Development Potential: The land can accommodate at least 30 attached townhouse units with new internal circulation and common green space without impinging on the area restricted by wetlands protections. The common green could be designed to provide uses suitable for both residents and perhaps a public play field. Required zoning setbacks do not limit development potential. The northwest part of the site that cannot be developed can be maintained as a natural resource and used for recreational purposes.

Depending on financial feasibility, the units could be market rate or restricted as affordable; targeted to seniors or small families, or any combination of these. They could be condos but would better serve town needs as rentals. It is unclear at this point what the selling price of the

land would be, and the town would like to realize some income to help pay for the replacement of the DPW facility at a new location as part of the deal. If this development project could be made part of the public housing renovation project, there is the potential for revenue generated by the development of the Peasant Street property to be directed to help with the cost of renovations to the public housing units at all three public housing sites.

There are a lot of moving parts to consider, but it is clear that moving the DPW to a more appropriate location would benefit the Pleasant Street neighborhood, and a small development of residential units would be a far better use for the site.



Site Plan showing new town home units in blue



Example of two-story townhome building

Conclusion: The MHA and MAHT urge everyone to read the draft report – it can be accessed at [Affordable Housing Trust](#) - and hope that it will result in a productive discussion and town-supported development plan. We will soon outline and publicize opportunities for public engagement at meetings sponsored jointly by MHA and MAHT. At this time, however, it is important to remember that the vision is meant to be broad at this stage and is an attempt to simplify what will be a complicated project. It will unfold in phases, with different funding sources and perhaps different development partners. As it moves forward, it will undoubtedly change and adapt to the realities of funding and legal constraints, environmental and site limitations, specific design concepts from architects and engineers, and input from public housing residents, neighbors, and town officials.

It is not an alternative to the 40 B proposal. The idea of creating a development plan for the public housing units was initiated as the Master Plan emerged more than two years ago. What it offers is a way to integrate community affordable housing into the neighborhood fabric with minimal impact on the town's fiscal condition. Its primary objective is to preserve and improve the public housing units that need attention and to support the important work of the MHA. This will be a long and careful process, and both the MHA and MAHT are looking forward to engaging with the town to make it happen.