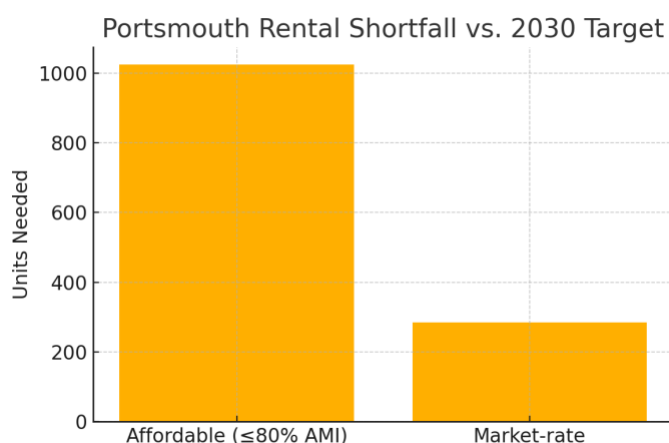


Before the Master Plan: Fast-Track Housing Potential

Prepared by citizen housing advocates for Council, Housing Committee, and Planning Board discussion.

Why Some Things Just Can't Wait

This brief takes zoning ideas identified by the Housing Committee—adds an innovative proven-concept from Dover—and demonstrates immediate potential for unlocking badly needed housing. Why the rush? In its 2022 Portsmouth Market Housing Study, RKG Associates projected a total need by 2030 of 2,879 rental units (market rate and permanently affordable). Our current housing trajectory falls well short of that mark—by over **1,000** permanently affordable rental units.



Good News: Low-Hanging Fruit to Harvest

Closing the pipeline gap will likely require every tool in the box: LIHTC deals, inclusionary zoning tweaks, public-land RFPs, and deeper local subsidies (trust-fund grants, fee waivers, tax relief). Fortunately however, there is low hanging fruit that can be fast-tracked and does not require two years of deliberation in the Master Plan process.

The Housing Committee has already identified the biggest barriers—parking minimums, non-conforming-lot rules and outdated district maps—are stalling projects today. The six amendments below can be adopted this calendar year, unlocking **$\approx 1,000$ new dwellings** ($\approx 30\%$ deed-restricted workforce) while saving months of variance, legal and carrying costs for builders and homeowners alike.

We can and should act now. This briefing explains how it can happen.

Again, Why The Hurry?

Every month that goes by deepens the crisis, makes solutions more expensive, and affects who gets to live in Portsmouth and who will be priced out.

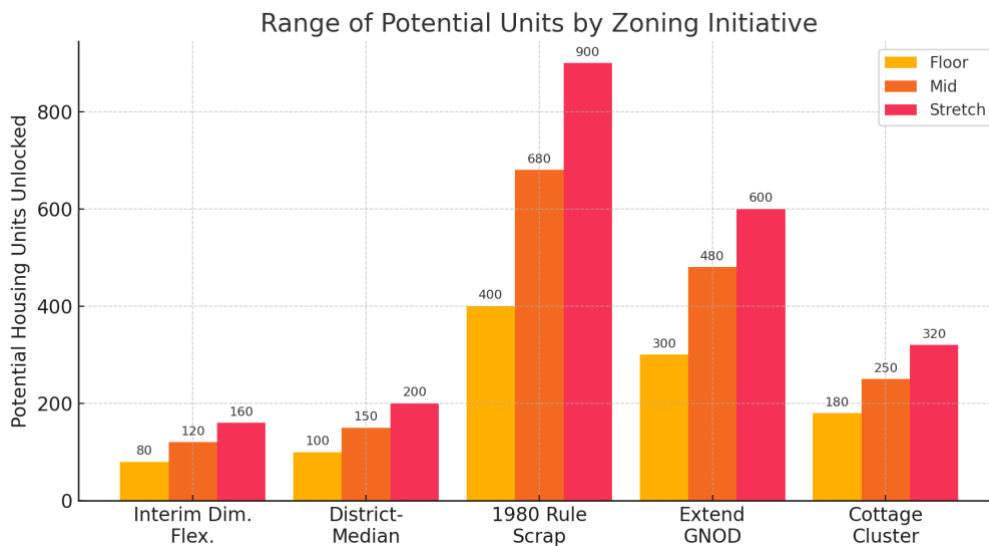
- **Cost of Delay:** Each year of status quo adds \pm \$7 million in rent and mortgage costs city-wide, driven by shortage-fuelled inflation (RKG modelling) (portsmouthnh.gov).

- **Barriers Already Known:** Five of the six fixes mirror Housing Committee discussion; the lone new item (cottage clusters) is already proven next-door in Dover. (nhbr.com).
- **Sunset Clauses Buy Time:** Two proposals for dimensional flexibility would be temporary and expire once comprehensive Master Plan zoning-related vision kicks in.
- **Fast-Track Bundle Conveys Urgency:** Adopting bundle in **Q4 2025** delivers shovel-ready lots for spring 2026 starts, dovetailing with July 10 RKG incentive forum.

We include zoning changes that can be implemented quickly before the Master Plan gets underway. The alternative—waiting effectively two years for the city to adopt the new plan – is unacceptable in a time of housing crisis.

Six Ways to Quickly Unlock Housing Potential

By acting with a sense of urgency and purpose, Portsmouth can unlock at least 1,000 new housing units by 2030 by addressing six areas of zoning prior to the larger discussions of the two-year Master Plan process beginning soon.



1 Cap & Delegate Parking Requirements

- **Action:** Move the parking table to Site Plan Review regulations and cap all housing at **1 stall per unit** with fee-in-lieu.
- **Impact:** ↓ \$10-15 k construction cost per unit (based on \$21-30 k per structured stall) (homeguide.com); eliminates ~7 ZBA cases/yr.

2 Interim Dimensional Flexibility – Block Median

- **Action:** *Temporary* conformity for sub-standard lots meeting their **block-face median** frontage & area. This is an *interim* fix that ends the variance treadmill now and sunsets once the map rewrite based on new Master Plan is complete.
- **Impact:** Frees ~115 lots for ADUs/duplexes (≈ 140 units by 2027).

3 Interim Dimensional Flexibility – District Median

- **Action:** Parallel *temporary* conformity using **district-wide medians**
- **Rationale:** Gives relief in cul-de-sac areas where block medians undershoot parity

- **Impact:** Additional ~120 units; trims ≈ 30 ZBA cases/yr.

4 Scrap 1980-Only Conversion Rule

- **Action:** Strike the 1 Jan 1980 vintage clause so **any** single- or two-family house can convert to 2–4 units via CUP
- **Rationale:** Multi-unit conversions and loosened geographic limits—this clause removal is the cleanest path.
- **Impact:** ≈ 600-750 rentals by 2028; 20-30 % below new-build rents.

5 Extend the Gateway-Neighborhood Overlay (GNOD)

- **Action:** One-page map amendment adding ≈ **39 ac** along Constitution, Heritage & Banfield to the mixed-use 4- to 6-storey zone.
- **Impact:** ≈ 480 units, 40 % workforce; first filings Summer 2026.

6 Cottage Cluster Overlay & Green-Space Exchange

- **Action:** Pilot overlay enabling **10–12 cottages/acre** tied to conservation fee or TDR, modelled on Dover’s 44-unit Back River Road pocket-neighbourhood (nhbr.com).
- **Why Include:** Offers a visually tangible, example of “gentle density” — middle-income supply without tall downtown buildings.
- **Impact:** ≈ 250 affordable homes on likely sites; financing 60 ac of permanent open space.

Call to Action

1. **Bundle the six ordinances** into a single Council referral on **July 15** to lock in 2025 adoption.
2. **Request staff fiscal note** quantifying delay costs vs. accelerated timeline (RKG model).
3. **Direct RKG** to assume passage of these amendments in its incentive analysis, preventing “double study” syndrome.
4. **Next step:** Introduce ordinance red-line and parallel SPR rule on August agenda.

Bottom line: Failure to act now prolongs the very barriers the Housing Committee has already identified. Pass the quick wins—then let the Master Plan raise the ceiling further.

Sources Consulted (External)

1. City of Portsmouth press release on **RKG incentive study & July 10 forum** (May 2025)
2. **NH Business Review** – “Dream of Small, Affordable Homes Becomes Reality with Dover Cottages” (Apr 17 2023)
3. **HomeGuide.com** – National average costs to build structured parking (2025)
4. Housing Committee meeting transcripts May 2, May 16 2025.
5. City Council meeting transcript – Councilor Tabor housing remarks (Jun 24 2025)