



Manchester-By-The-Sea Minutes of the Planning Board

Date: January 29, 2026

Time: 6:30 p.m.

Members Present: Sarah Creighton, Peter Morton, Gordon Brewster, Chris Olney, Brian Frey

Members Absent: Susan Philbrick, Sandy Bodmer-Turner

Staff Present: Marc Resnick, Director of Land Management

Call to Order

The Planning Board meeting was called to order by the Chair. Present members included Gordon Brewster, Chris Olney, Sarah Creighton, Peter Morton, and Brian Frey.

The Chair noted this meeting was rescheduled from a previous snow day on Monday. She clarified that the focus would solely be on the proposed senior housing bylaw, not downtown zoning, which would be addressed at their regularly scheduled meeting in a week and a half. She also mentioned an upcoming meeting with the Select Board on Monday to review town meeting proposals.

Public Forum on a Senior Housing Zoning By-Law

Chris Olney presented the proposed senior housing zoning bylaw, which he has been advocating for approximately five years. He explained that the bylaw aims to address the lack of appropriate housing options for Manchester's senior population.

Current Senior Housing Situation in Manchester

Mr. Olney presented data showing that Manchester has approximately 1,500 seniors, with about 250 being renters. Of those renters, roughly 80 live in existing public senior housing at The Plains and Newport Park (operated by Manchester Housing Authority). The remaining 1,000+ seniors primarily live in single-family homes. Mr. Olney noted that seniors who wish to downsize or need assistance with living currently must move out of town due to lack of appropriate housing options in Manchester.

He emphasized that Manchester is the only North Shore community without zoning provisions to allow senior housing.

Goals of the Proposed Bylaw

The proposed bylaw aims to:

- Encourage small age-restricted units for seniors
- Encourage conversion of existing buildings for senior housing
- Provide a range of housing opportunities and downsizing options
- Provide a variety of housing types

Definition and Types of Senior Housing

Mr. Olney defined senior housing as accommodations for occupants 55 years of age or older, which is an exception to fair housing laws. These would require deed restrictions to ensure age restrictions are maintained. He explained that senior housing is typically designed with the needs of older adults in mind, including single-level living, smaller units, and various services.

He outlined several types of senior housing:

- Independent senior housing (basic age-restricted units)
- Assisted living facilities (smaller units with meals, housekeeping, and healthcare services)
- Memory care facilities (specialized care for those with dementia)
- Continuing care facilities (range of options on one campus)

Proposed Zoning Framework

The proposal focuses on allowing two types of senior housing in Manchester:

- Independent Senior Housing:
 - Clustered townhomes, cottages, or apartments
 - Allowed in any zoning district with a Special Permit
 - Density of 10 units per acre (5 units on half-acre)
 - Maximum of 60 units per site
 - Compliance with existing setbacks, height restrictions, and lot coverage requirements
 - Appropriate parking requirements
- Assisted Living:
 - Similar zoning parameters as independent living
 - Not allowed in D1 or D2 districts
 - Allowed in downtown and G district

The bylaw would not initially include provisions for memory care units or continuing care communities.

Additional Provisions

- Size limitations: 2-bedroom units limited to 1,200 sq ft, 1-bedroom units to 900 sq ft, studios to 600 sq ft
- Local preference for current residents, former residents, relatives of residents, and former employees
- Affordability requirements: 1 affordable unit required for every 5 units produced

- Planning Board discretion to allow additional units if affordable

Mr. Olney explained that the proposed bylaw would replace the current vague zoning language regarding "charitable or philanthropic use hospital nursing care facility, or sanatorium."

Discussion and Questions

Gary Gilbert, 11 Magnolia Ave, offered several suggestions:

- Questioned the necessity of requiring special permits for all projects
- Suggested allowing memory care and continuing care communities in the LCD district with size limits
- Recommended having special permits only for projects exceeding the basic framework
- Noted that making units physically smaller can create more affordable options

John Round, 3 Greenbrier Road, asked about whether units would be for rent or for sale, with Olney clarifying they could be either. Round also inquired about the relationship to 40B projects, and Olney confirmed that senior 40B developments are possible, pointing to examples in nearby communities.

Chair Creighton emphasized that the special permit requirement was included because of concerns about higher density development in single-family districts and to give neighbors a voice in the process.

Marc Resnick clarified the distinction between site plan review (which addresses functionality) and special permits (which allow the board to reject inappropriate sites), noting that special permits generally don't deter developers if the underlying economics work.

Chair Creighton noted that examples from neighboring towns provided valuable lessons, with some communities setting unrealistically high minimum acreage requirements that prevented any development (Hamilton), while others set more practical requirements that resulted in successful projects (Wenham).

Adjourn

Chair Creighton reminded everyone that the draft bylaw is available on the Planning Board website along with frequently asked questions. She noted that the Board would be presenting to the Select Board the following Monday, and a formal public hearing would be scheduled later.

Chair Creighton mentioned the upcoming Select Board meeting would include discussion of all zoning articles and the joint approval of two associate member candidates.

Motion by Mr. Brewster to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Mr. Olney. Motion passed unanimously.