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COMMUNITY + STAKEHOLDER INPUT

# Interviews

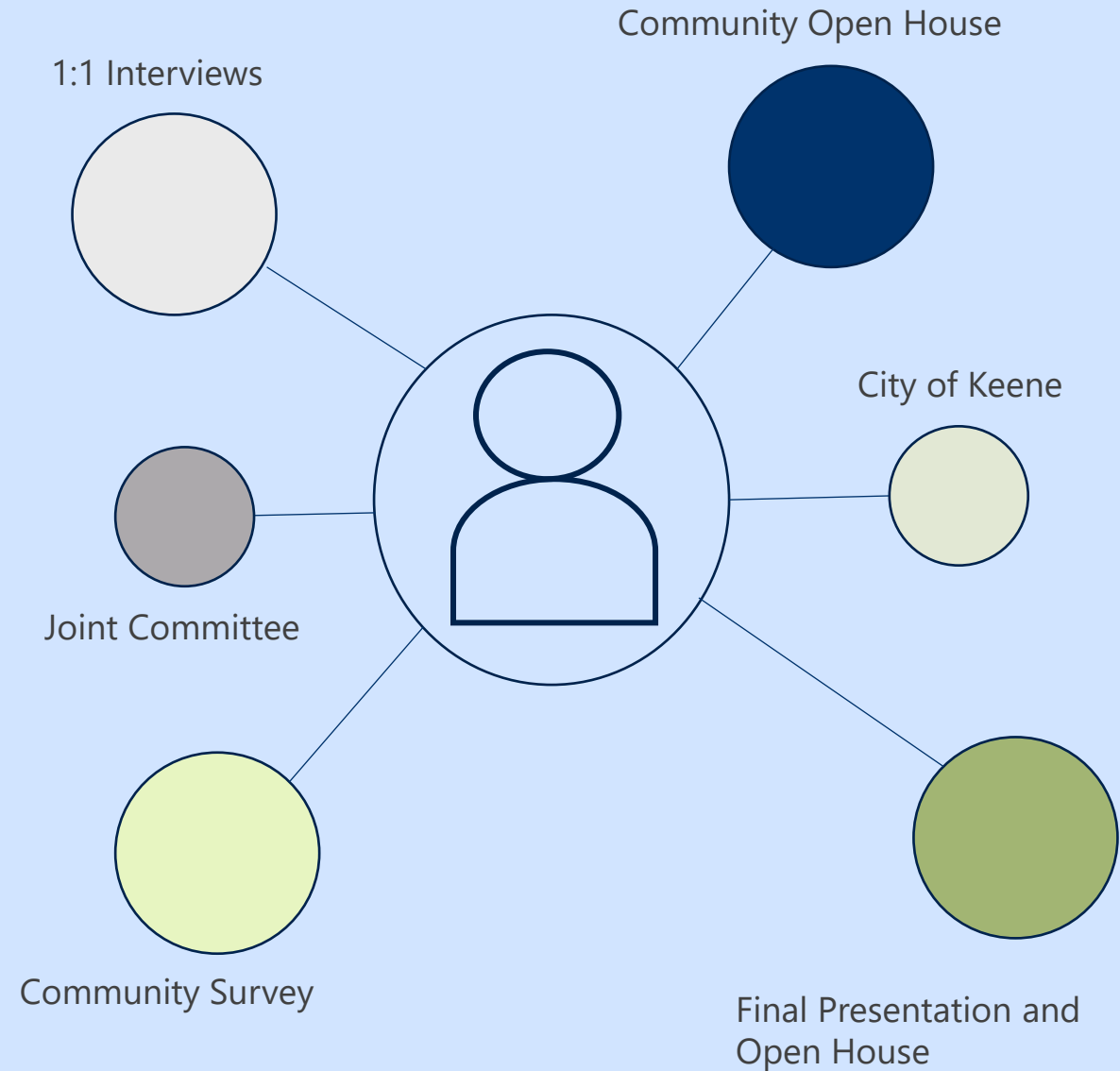
## Interviews: Overview and Methodology

Ten individual and small group interviews were conducted with key stakeholders for housing. Interviewees were identified by Keene and Camoin Associates as key stakeholders in understanding the landscape of housing in the City.

Interviewees were asked a series of questions about Keene's housing market, costs, quality of product, risk factors, existing City efforts around housing, public policy, the housing landscape for workers and employers, and potential housing solutions.

## Interviewees:

- **Developers & land use consultants**
- **Southwestern Community Services**
- **Keene Housing**
- **Monadnock Interfaith Project**
- **Major employers**
  - Keene State College
  - C&S Wholesale Grocers
  - Cheshire Medical Center



# Interview Themes

**There is a mismatch between incomes and housing costs, and the issue is exacerbated by extremely low inventory.** Interviewees reported that the cost of housing in Keene, for both rentals and purchase, is higher than many residents can comfortably afford. And with vacancy rates below 1%, many are having to either live elsewhere, pay a significant portion of their income toward housing costs, or settle for less desirable housing than they would otherwise want. In addition to rents, property tax and utility costs are high in Keene, and energy costs toward heating and electricity were referenced as challenges in addition to rent/mortgage.

**The City is a key partner in solving housing challenges and needs to continue to invest, communicate, advocate around housing.** Multiple interviewees praised City staff for improving communication and streamlining housing permitting approvals processes in recent years, and working to help projects get to “yes”. City initiatives around increasing density and changing zoning were noted and appreciated by interviewees, however, there was discussion that the City still has room to improve articulating to the community overall why adding housing stock and density is important.

**There is minimal room for new development in Keene, but opportunities exist for renovation of older housing stock and repurposing of space.** Keene’s urban core is mostly built up, with limited opportunities for infill. Interviews indicated that the City should continue to look toward developing density downtown, finding other nodes in town where density might be possible, that the City and developers should look into creative uses for existing underutilized spaces, there should be efforts to find other areas where denser development is possible outside of downtown, and that efforts should be made to add more housing units in the rural district. Multiple interviewees discussed how Keene State College’s reduction in student population and emphasis on students living on campus in recent years may be opening up opportunities to redevelop properties formerly or presently used for student housing

**Lack of housing is negatively impacting employers and worker recruitment and retention.** Interviews with some of Keene’s largest employers revealed that housing is a significant factor in the ability of companies to recruit and retain talent. Multiple employers mentioned that they have had employees leave or not accept a job because of inability to find adequate housing. Younger professionals were listed as being particularly difficult to retain given Keene’s current housing landscape. Both seniors looking to downsize as well as younger workers looking to purchase their first homes are looking for smaller single-family homes and condos, which is driving up prices and limiting options for consumers.

**It is becoming increasingly difficult for housing projects to pencil out for developers in Keene, especially at price points that are affordable to most residents.** Land, infrastructure, and labor costs have all risen in recent years and made it more difficult for projects to pencil out for developers. Larger multifamily projects are more likely to be cost effective for developers, but finding appropriate land and location is a challenge. For smaller developments, higher end units are required to make the math work for developers to pursue projects. Development costs are somewhat lower in the communities surrounding Keene, which is pushing development to those municipalities.

# Community Survey - Key Findings

As part of this housing needs analysis, a community survey was conducted. Thanks to outreach efforts by the City and its partners engagement with the survey was robust, with 354 respondents, equivalent to about 1.5% of the population of Keene. Over half of respondents were aged 55+. Full survey results can be found in Appendix B.

Key findings are summarized below:

**The biggest housing challenges faced by survey respondents are cost-related.** When asked what they found most challenging about their current living situation, the top three issues listed by respondents were cost of property taxes (54%), cost of utilities (50%), and cost of rent/mortgage (23%). And 16% listed repairs they could not currently afford as their top challenge.

**Most respondents have housing that met their needs – but significant portion do not.** 80% of respondents reported that their current housing meets their needs at present. However, 37% of respondents reported that their housing would not meet their needs for the next 10 years, and 20% reported that their current housing is in need of major improvements or repairs to remain livable. 22% of respondents said that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their housing situation.

**Over half of survey respondents spend 30% or more of their household income on housing costs.** A majority of respondents (54%) meet the definition of cost-burdened, paying 30% or more of their household income on housing costs. This includes 16% of respondents who spend more than 50% of their household income on housing. Generally, renters are at a higher risk of being cost burdened than those who own a home.

**Most respondents living in older housing, but home quality is generally high.** 53% of survey respondents live in housing that is 60+ years old, and the largest single group of respondents were those living in housing over 100 years old (27%). Only 13% of respondents reported living in housing built within the last 25 years. Despite the age of the housing stock, however, 78% of respondents reported that their housing was in either good or excellent condition.

**Most respondents' homes have heating, fewer have cooling amenities.** Respondent housing tended to have features to help keep it warm, with 76% of respondents reporting their homes having wall or ceiling insulation and 70% with central heating. Relatively fewer have access to air conditioning, with 51% reporting window AC units and 19% with central air conditioning. Half of respondents reported having insulation or weatherization on their doors and windows.

**Most respondents' housing impacted by weather or aging-related issues.** The most common housing issues faced by respondents were weather-related damage (13%), deterioration of housing (11%), electrical issues (9%), and flooding (9%). Only 27% of respondents did not experience any of the issues listed in the survey.

**Necessary repairs the biggest single health and safety concern among respondents.** Over a quarter of respondents listed necessary repairs, aging housing, or infrastructure concerns as their biggest health and safety concern with their housing. 90% of respondents had repairs they would make to their housing if extra funds were available.

# Community Workshop

On February 7, 2023, Camoin Associates and the City of Keene held a community housing workshop to inform residents about the progress of housing needs analysis and collect community feedback on several aspects of housing in the City. Each concept was presented on a poster board with prompts where participants could indicate their feedback through stickers and sticky notes. The findings from each of the topics are provided below.

## 1. Housing needs

*Prompt:* Who does the City need housing for right now? What types of people do you know that are having trouble finding the kind of housing they would most like?

**Results:** The categories that received the greatest number of stickers from participants were lower income individuals/families, single professionals, and families with children. Participants contributed additional groups that should be considered including disabled households.

## 2. Housing challenges

*Prompt:* In your experience, what are the top issues facing Keene's housing? Indicate which challenges you think are the most pressing to Keene's housing market.

**Results:** The challenge that received the greatest number of stickers was "prices are not affordable for people to live and work." Other challenges that received a high number of votes includes high utility costs, a lack of quality rentals and lack of quality housing for sale.

## 3. Housing Needs

*Prompt:* Participants were asked to indicate their preference for several types of housing styles.

**Results:** Strong support was shown for small/cottage homes, traditional single family homes, duplexes, apartment buildings, senior apartments, accessory dwelling units and mixed-use development. Both manufactured homes and tiny homes received fewer "likes" and several "dislikes."



*Findings from a Community Workshop poster board in Keene.*

#### 4. Housing Solutions

*Prompt:* Participants were shown a range of actions that the City could pursue in collaboration with its partners. Participants were asked to use stickers to indicate which solutions they think are the most important for the City of Keene.

**Results:** The solutions that received the greatest amount of support include:

- Change zoning to allow housing more areas/allow greater housing density
- Programs to assist with the renovation/ improvement of existing units
- Make appropriate city properties available for housing development

#### 5. Living in the City

*Prompt:* Participants were asked to write a few thoughts about what they like most about living in Keene.

**Results:** Themes that came up in the responses include the natural landscape, the high level of community involvement, walkability, and living in close proximity to a range of amenities.

#### 6a. Short-Term Rentals: Positives

*Prompt:* What do you see as the most significant benefits or positives of short-term rentals in Keene? Participants were asked to select their top two options.

**Results:** The top two responses include:

- Provides extra income for local households
- Provides type of accommodations visitors want

#### 6b. Short-Term Rentals: Negatives

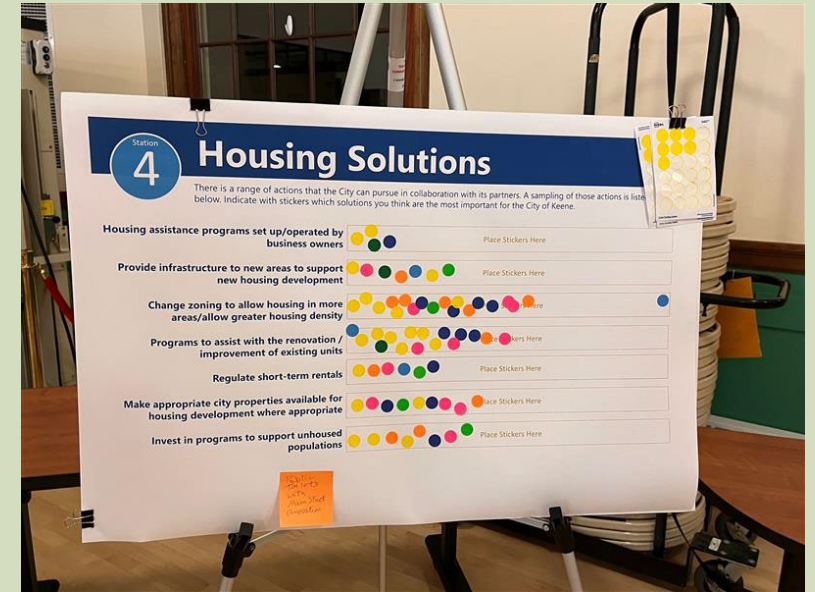
*Prompt:* What do you see as the most significant issues/negatives of short-term rentals? Participants were asked to select their top two options.

**Results:** The top two responses include:

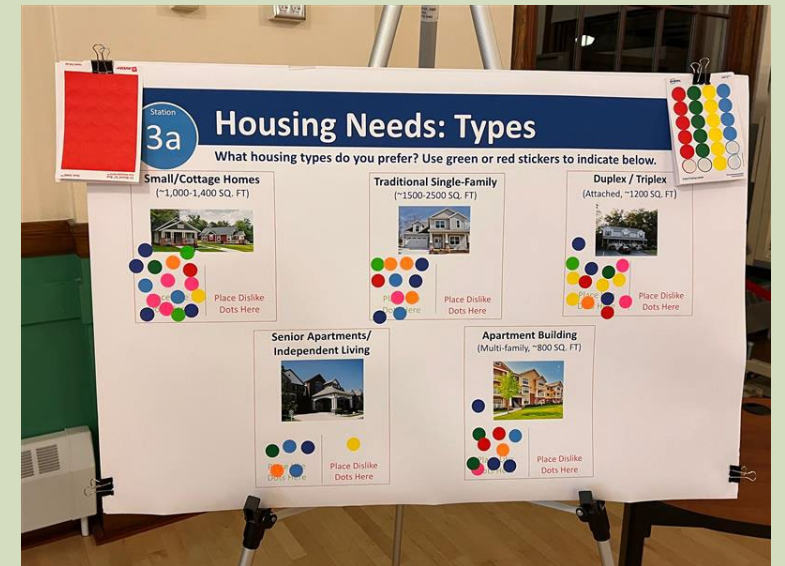
- Drives up housing prices
- Occupying housing needed for residents/workers

#### 7. Housing Stability Report

Participants at the workshop were asked to provide their thoughts on recommendations that had recently come out from the Housing Stability Report by Ad Hoc Housing Stability Committee. All the recommendations on the board received similar levels of support. The option that received the least amount of support was “invest in more outreach services for the unhoused population”.



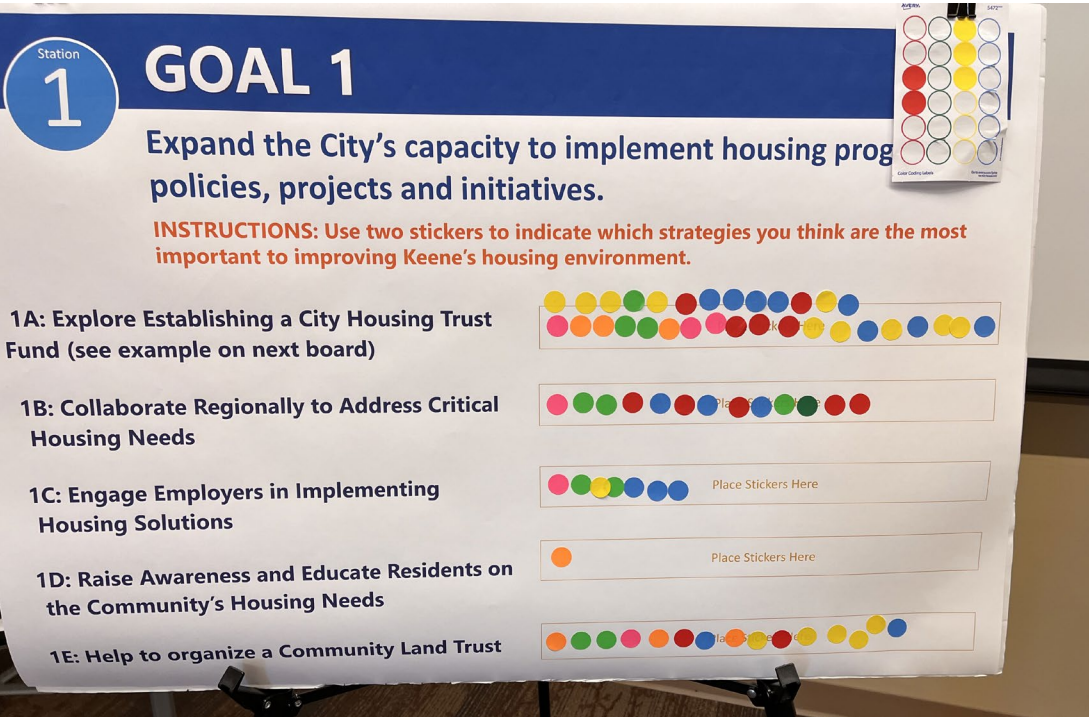
*Findings from a Community Workshop poster board in Keene.*



*Findings from a Community Workshop poster board in Keene.*

# Community Open House

On April 20, 2023, Camoin Associates and the City of Keene held a community housing open house to communicate the results and strategy recommendations of the housing needs analysis. The objective was to collect community feedback on strategy prioritization. Approximately 40 participants joined the open house over the course of the afternoon. Each of the goal areas and associated strategies were presented on poster boards with prompts where participants could indicate their feedback through stickers and sticky notes. The results of open house participant feedback are provided on the following two pages.



Participants indicate their priorities with stickers on Goal 1.



Participants discuss housing at the April 20th open house.

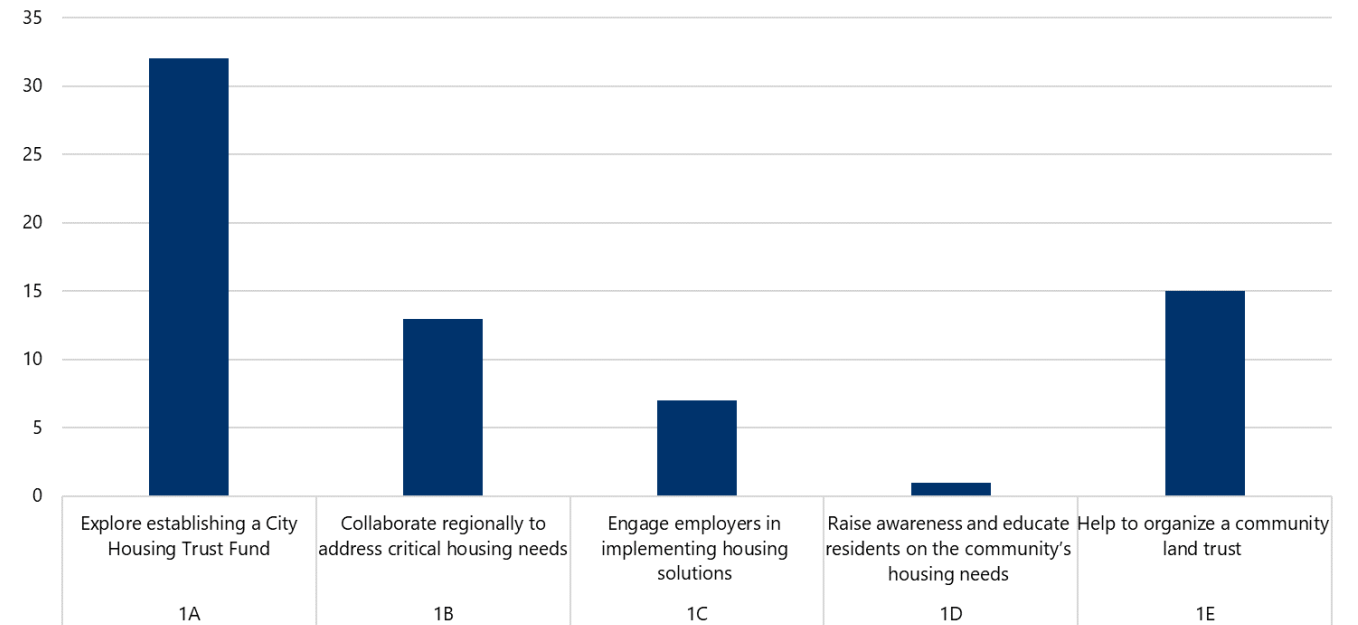


## Goal 1: Expand the City's Capacity to Implement Housing Programs, Policies, Projects, and Initiatives

*Prompt:* Indicate which strategies you think are the most important to improving Keene's housing environment.

**Results:** Exploring the establishment of a housing trust fund was the most highly prioritized strategy in goal area 1, followed by organizing a community land trust and collaborating regionally to address critical housing needs.

### GOAL 1: Expand the City's Capacity to Implement Housing Programs, Policies, Projects, and Initiatives

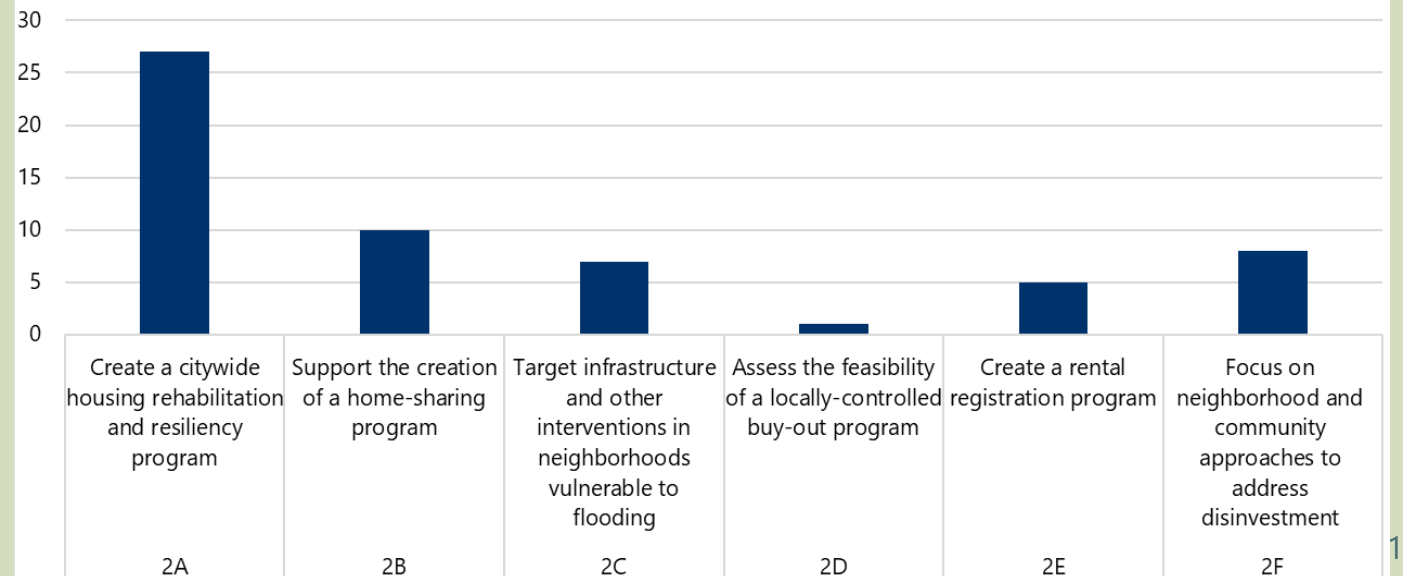


## Goal 2: Improve the Condition, Resiliency, and Utilization of the City's Housing Stock

*Prompt:* Indicate which strategies you think are the most important to improving Keene's housing environment.

**Results:** The highest priority among open house participants in goal area 2 was the creation of a citywide housing rehabilitation and resiliency program, while a home-sharing program, focusing on neighborhood and community approaches addressing disinvestment, infrastructure interventions, and creation of a rental registration program were clustered together as secondary priorities.

### GOAL 2: Improve the Condition, Resiliency, and Utilization of the City's Housing Stock



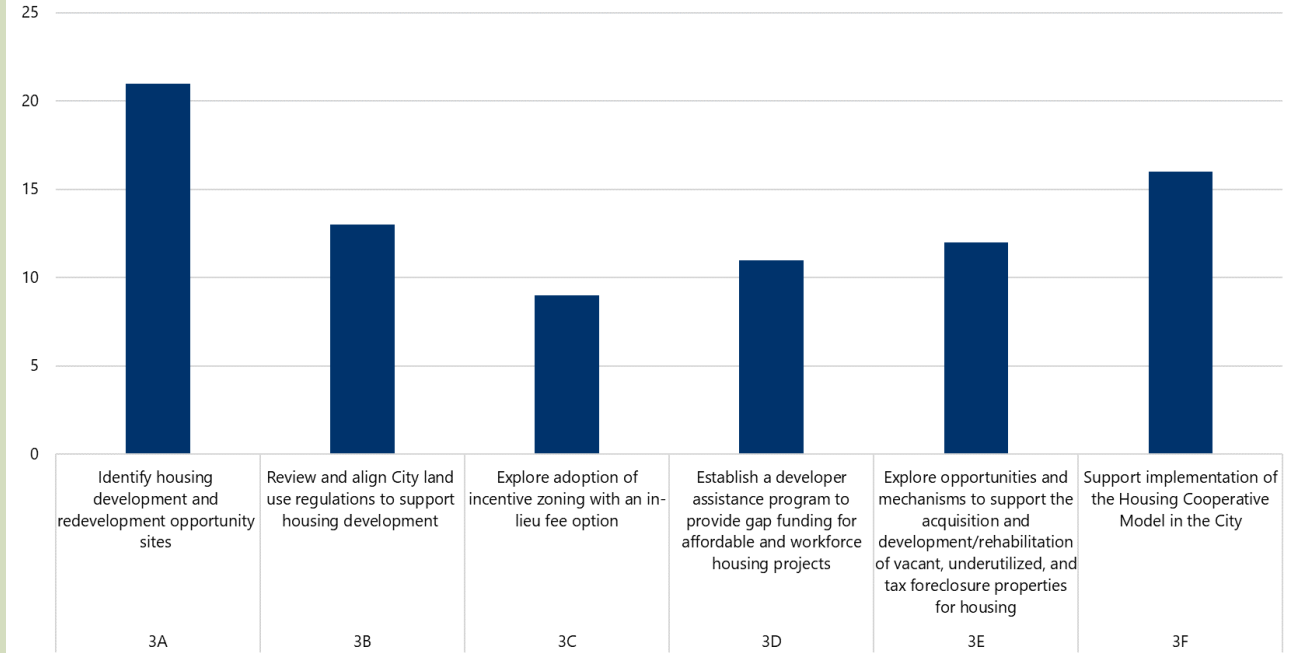


### Goal 3: Promote the Development of a Mix of Housing Types at a Variety of Price Points

*Prompt:* Indicate which strategies you think are the most important to improving Keene’s housing environment.

**Results:** The top priority identified within goal area 3 by open house participants was to identify housing development and redevelopment opportunity sites. Supporting implementation of a Housing Cooperative model received the second highest number of votes, while reviewing and aligning land use regulations to support housing development and exploring opportunities around acquiring, developing, and rehabilitating underutilized/vacant properties received similar numbers of votes.

Goal 3: Promote the Development of a Mix of Housing Types at a Variety of Price Points



### Goal 4: Support Residents and Special Population Groups in Meeting their Housing Needs

*Prompt:* Indicate which strategies you think are the most important to improving Keene’s housing environment.

**Results:** Supporting transitional housing to reduce homelessness was the most highly prioritized strategy in goal area 4, followed by encouraging the creation of options for downsizing empty nesters/active seniors.

GOAL 4: Support Residents and Special Population Groups in Meeting their Housing Needs

