



NH CAW Climate Summit  
May 21, 2026

# The Climate Case for Workforce Housing

---

**MAEVE NOLAN**

WORKFORCE HOUSING COALITION OF THE  
GREATER SEACOAST

# ABOUT WHC

**Our mission is** to educate and engage communities and municipalities to **advance diverse housing options** so that everyone who works in our region can afford to call it home.



## Our Pillars

---

### Education

We educate municipal staff, elected officials, local leaders, members of the business community, and the general public through presentations, conferences, webinars, charrettes & more.

### Technical Assistance

We equip policy makers, planners, and citizens with the tools they need to craft and revise local ordinances and regulations to remove barriers and encourage diverse housing options.

### Advocacy & Engagement

We work with community and business groups to empower advocates, bring new voices to the housing discussion, and promote beneficial solutions at the state and local level.

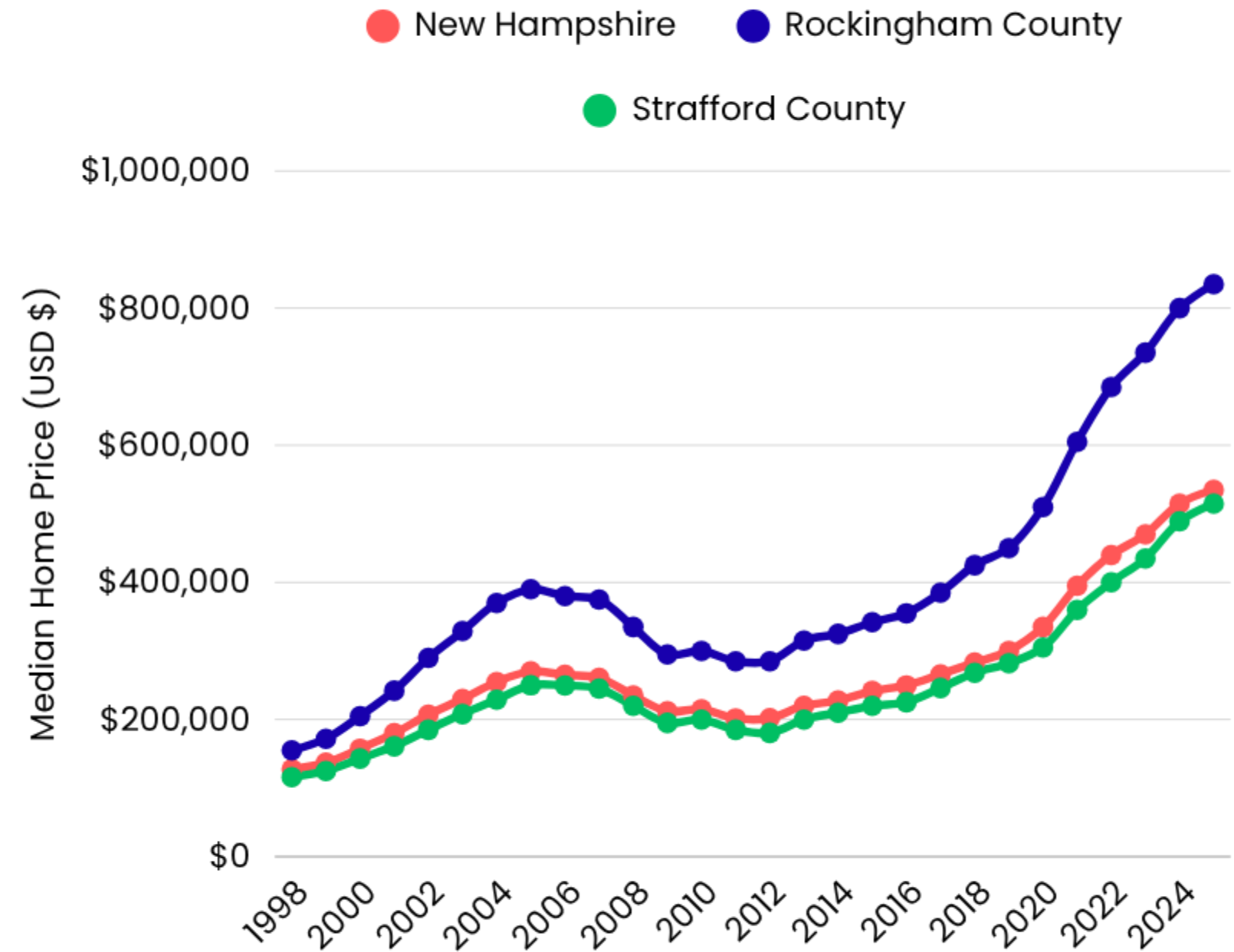
### Messaging

We seek to change the conversation about housing in order to create a future where there is widespread appreciation of the importance of affordable housing.

# DATA ON THE HOUSING CRISIS

- **Less than 20% of current homeowners** and **4% of renters** could afford a median priced home in New Hampshire today
- Roughly **half of all Seacoast renters** are housing cost burdened
- Rental vacancy rate has been **below 5% since 2016**

Median Home Prices from 1998-2025



Source: New Hampshire Association of Realtors

# IMPACTS OF THE HOUSING CRISIS

- **Workforce Shortages:** Essential workers are continuously priced out of the Seacoast, leading to longer commutes and favoring jobs closer to home.
- **Economic Uncertainty:** Without reliable staffing, the Seacoast's coastal, tourism-based economy is strained, with local business owners feeling it most.
- **Risk and Vulnerability:** The housing crisis exacerbates income inequality and most deeply impacts low- and moderate-income households. These populations historically live in areas with greater climate risk.



1 out of 7 mobile homes are in high flood risk census tracts...



...compared to 1 out of 10 for other housing types.

HEADWATERS ECONOMICS

"The longer people have to commute, the more they are incentivized to work someplace else."  
- Housing Advocate

Source: NH Housing

# THE FIVE L'S OF HOUSING PRODUCTION



**1. LABOR**  
Invest in workforce training and retention

**2. LAND**  
Identify buildable land with public infrastructure

**3. LENDING**  
Explore financing options through state and federal programs

**4. LUMBER**  
Identify most cost effective building materials

**5. LAWS**  
Reduce zoning barriers and streamline permitting processes

# THE FIVE L'S OF HOUSING PRODUCTION



**1. LABOR**  
Invest in workforce training and retention

**2. LAND**  
Identify buildable land with public infrastructure

**3. LENDING**  
Explore financing options through state and federal programs

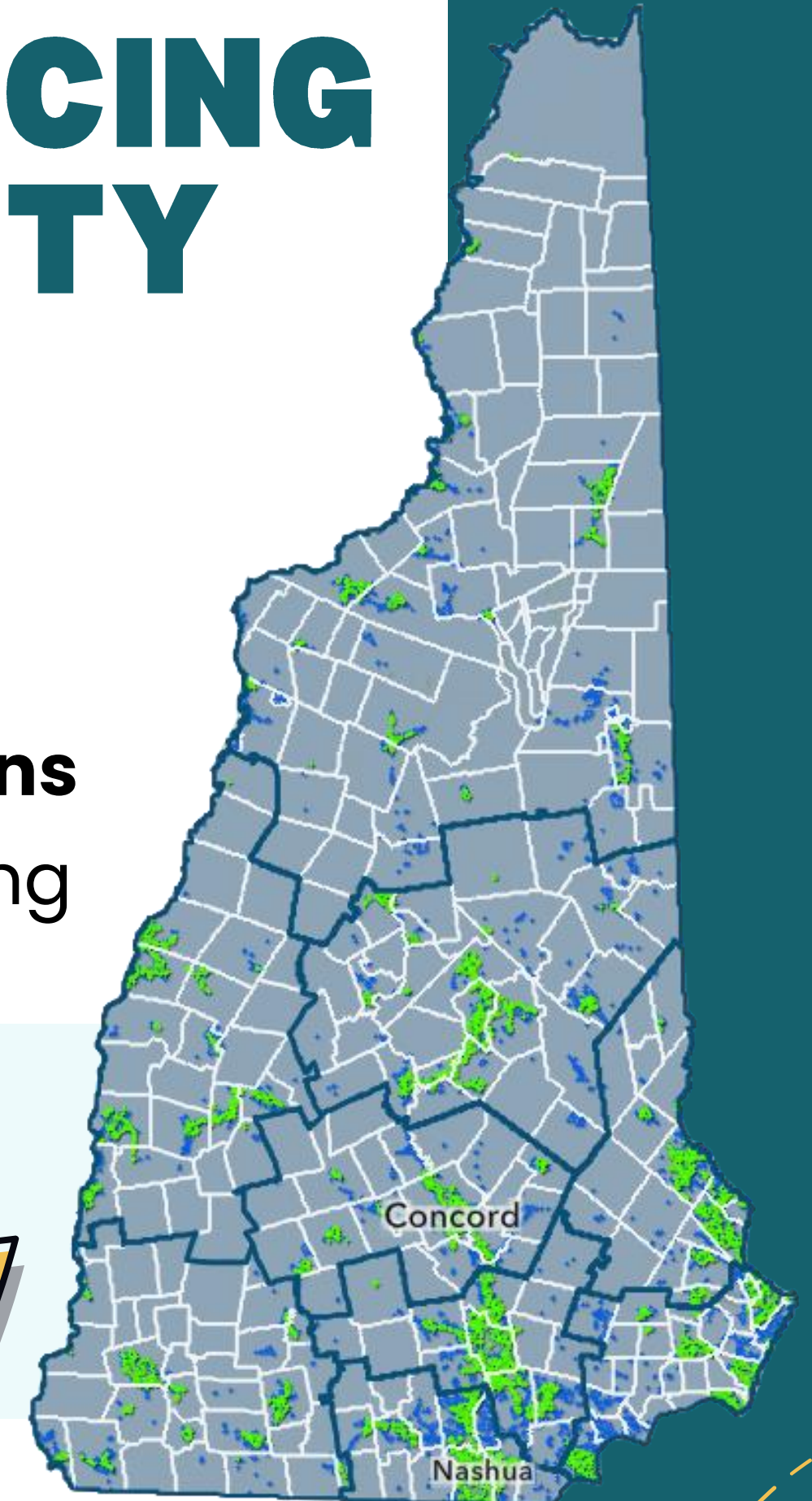
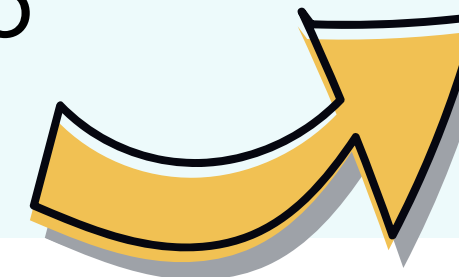
**4. LUMBER**  
Identify most cost effective building materials

**5. LAWS**  
Reduce zoning barriers and streamline permitting processes

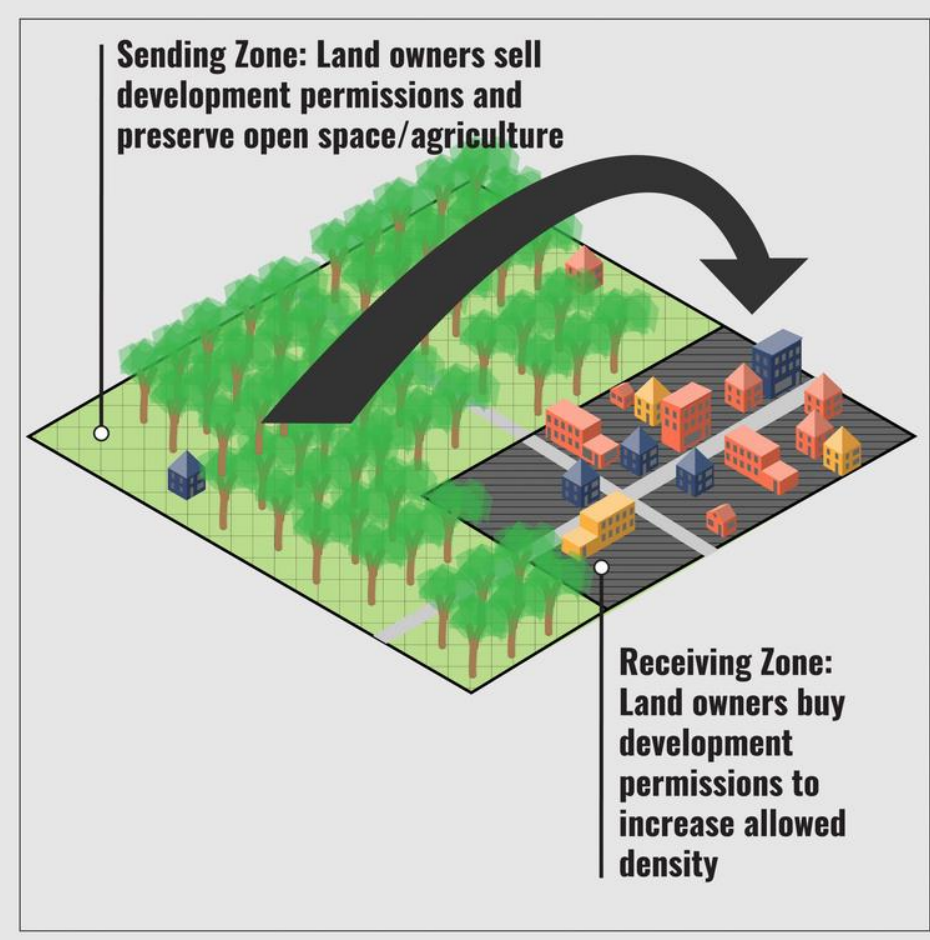
# STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCING SUPPLY & SUSTAINABILITY

## THE CASE FOR ALLOWING DENSITY:

- **Protects natural, previously undeveloped areas** from the impacts of sprawl
- Limits commute times and **decreases GHG emissions**
- **Protects against flood risk** as compared to sprawling development
- Utilizes existing **public infrastructure**
  - **Less than 6% of NH land** has access to both water and sewer infrastructure



# DOVER: Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)



Source: NH Housing Toolbox

- **What is TDR?**
  - TDR is “ a land use tool ... seeking to **concentrate housing in areas with existing infrastructure** and amenities while **permanently protecting land** with significant conservation value.” (City of Dover, NH)
- **How does it work?**
  - Landowners and/or developers looking to **exceed standard density allowances** in select parts of Dover can “**transfer**” that **density** from a less dense part of the city.
  - They can pay **fees that go into the Conservation Fund** or conserve the land themselves.
  - Additional density is awarded for projects with **permanently affordable units**.
- **What’s the result?**
  - Housing **development where it makes sense**, while eliminating the potential for sprawl into natural areas through **permanent conservation**

# DURHAM: Increasing Height Limits

How would you prefer to see this island developed?



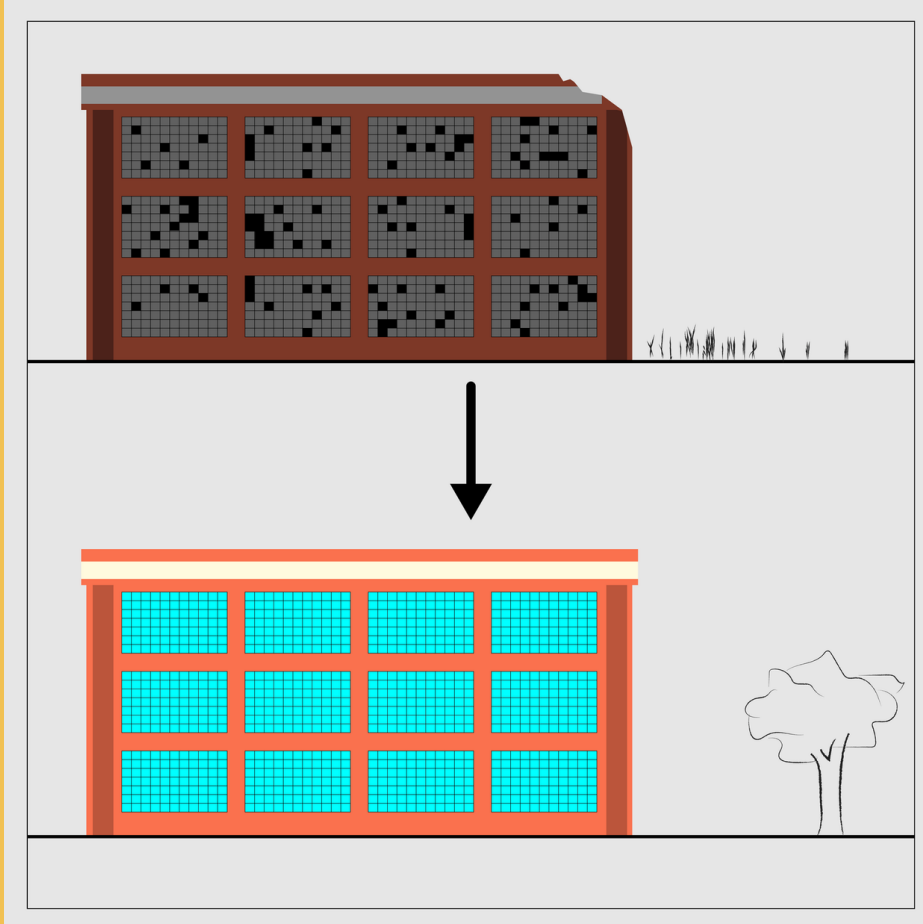
Then why not prefer apartments in your own town?

*Density saves nature.*

Source: Tomorrow.City

- **What happened in Durham?**
  - The Town of Durham recently approved a **zoning change**, raising the allowed height limit in the Downtown Core from **3 to 4 stories**.
- **Why is this a big deal?**
  - **Several buildings could not be redeveloped** to add housing and commercial space with the 3-story limit.
  - With this small change, Downtown Durham is **embracing housing and economic development** where it makes sense to develop.
- **What's the result?**
  - Durham is **"building up, not out,"** allowing for more density in the business district while protecting its outlying rural areas.
  - The Town is **making a difference at the local level** and doing their part in a regional problem.

# NEWMARKET: Adaptive Reuse



Source: NH Housing Toolbox

- **What is Adaptive Reuse?**
  - Adaptive reuse is “the practice of reusing old buildings for new purposes” (NH Housing Toolbox).
  - It has been used throughout New Hampshire to provide **innovative solutions to the housing supply shortage.**
- **What happened in Newmarket?**
  - The Town of Newmarket has undergone a transformation over the last ~20 years, especially with the **redvelopment of the Newmarket Mills.**
  - The developers utilized state tax credits for community revitalization and committed to **cleaning Brownfield sites** within the area.
- **What was the result?**
  - Adaptive reuse of the mills converted existing buildings without expanding into natural areas, built near existing infrastructure, and **boosted the town’s economy and tax base.**

# TAKEAWAYS AND WHAT YOU CAN DO

1

**It's a big problem requiring local solutions.**

Dover, Durham, and Newmarket are three neighboring towns with three different approaches. There is no one-size-fits-all model.

2

**To build housing, you have to allow it.**

Housing development relies first on the regulations that dictate what can (and can't) be built. Responsible zoning changes are key.

3

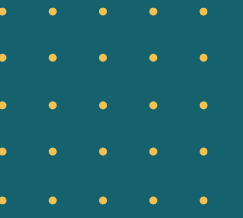
**Development and conservation can (and should) work together.**

Permitting, incentivizing, and welcoming density allows natural areas to stay natural, while boosting the tax base and the local economy.

4

**A little support goes a long way; show up!**

Municipal leadership depends on the greater community. The best to bolster housing supply is to show up, consistently and proudly.





# THANK YOU

Please reach out with any questions!

 Maeve Nolan, Communications &  
Engagement Coordinator

 [coordinator@seacoastwhc.org](mailto:coordinator@seacoastwhc.org)

 500 Market St, Portsmouth, NH

 [seacoastwhc.org](http://seacoastwhc.org)

 Sign up for our  
newsletter here!

