

# Local Roundtables Help Volunteers Shape Housing Solutions Together

Citizen Planner Roundtables are creating space to connect, share, and take action.

Did you know that planning board members in most Monadnock Region towns are volunteers? These residents play a quiet but critical role in shaping our communities by learning complex state and local regulations, listening closely to neighbors, and making decisions that directly influence how and where people live.

Their work is especially important as towns face a growing need for affordable housing options and thoughtful development. But many of these volunteers are navigating these challenges without support staff, and until recently, without a consistent way to collaborate with peers in neighboring towns.

That's where the Monadnock Housing Collaborative (MHC) – formerly the Monadnock Resource Alliance – stepped in. A collaborative effort to address the housing crisis in our region, the MHC works to reduce housing insecurity and homelessness by tackling the systemic barriers that stand in the way. One of those barriers? Isolation among rural planning board members.



In partnership with the Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC), MHC launched a series of Citizen Planner Roundtables, bringing volunteers together in person to share challenges, exchange solutions, and strengthen their efforts. Throughout the year, these gatherings took place in four different rural towns. Each provided something planning board members previously lacked: a space to connect and converse.

"These roundtables are for the volunteers," said Chloe Gross, planner at SWRPC and a key coordinator of the effort. "They're meant to support rural municipalities and give planning board members space to talk, share, and learn from each other."

At each session, planning board members dove into big questions, from how to approach zoning changes and write effective warrant articles to the ins and outs of digitizing records. One recurring topic was accessory dwelling units (ADUs), which can offer affordable housing solutions without large-scale development. Attendees shared firsthand how their towns are approaching ADU ordinances, including what's worked, what hasn't, and what might be worth trying for other communities.

Planning board members are showing extraordinary commitment to these sessions—driving from the far corners of the region to attend. The very first roundtable saw members from Temple crossing the mountain to Gilsum, and that dedication continues with each gathering.

Members from Temple [crossed] the mountain to Gilsum, and that dedication continues with each gathering.



Chloe Gross, SWRPC planner

We weren't sure what the turnout or tone would be," Gross reflected, "but the conversations have been enthusiastic, energetic, and constructive."

**"There's been a real focus on how the towns can help each other and explore different ways that zoning affects local needs."**

The roundtables have also served as a launching point for deeper learning. Presenters from UNH Extension and the State Office of Planning and Development attended and listened to the concerns raised, eventually developing webinars in direct response.

Importantly, the roundtables are also becoming a touchpoint of encouragement for the people doing this work. "They're regular people trying to understand complex zoning laws and public notice requirements. These sessions have been a kind of support system," Gross described.

**The message from volunteers is clear: when supported, connected, and heard, progress follows.**

Looking ahead, MHC and SWRPC plan to continue the gatherings quarterly, each one hosted in a different rural town. "We go to them instead of them coming to us," Gross explained, noting that this allows the hosts to showcase their hometown and attendees a chance to see different parts of the region. The goal is to keep listening, keep showing up, and keep the conversations going, especially in the smallest or most distant communities that are often overlooked.

"The instant enthusiasm and collaboration happening at the Citizen Planner Roundtables highlights a major strength of the Monadnock Region: that lasting, positive change happens when we are all at the table together," said Liz LaRose, President of Monadnock United Way.



A collaboration between Monadnock United Way, Southwest Region Planning Commission and The Monadnock Interfaith Project.

## What's Next

In 2025, MHC will add staff to deepen this work and update its strategic plan. Volunteers have made it clear: when supported, connected, and heard, progress follows.

## How You Can Help

**Want to be part of the solution?**

Explore volunteer planning board openings in your town, or connect with MHC to learn more about shaping the future of housing in our region: [www.muw.org/mhc](http://www.muw.org/mhc)

