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**AMHERST MUNICIPAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST**  
**Thursday, August 8, 2019, 7:00 p.m.**  
**First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall**

**In Attendance**

**Members:** John Hornik, Erica Piedade, Rob Crowner, Nancy Schroder, Sid Ferreira (5)

**Staff:** Nate Malloy, Rita Farrell, John Page

**Guests:** None

**Absent:** Carol Lewis, Paul Bockelman, Tom Kegelman, William Van Heuvelen (4)

Prepared by John Page

Meeting Called to Order: 7:05PM

**Announcements**

John shared that \$10,000,000 was added to the state budget: Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program funding (from \$100,000,000 to \$110,000,000). Additionally, MRVP vouchers raised to current fair market rents. State increased the match money for Community Preservation Act monies.

John reported back from a meeting of the Homelessness Subcommittee about AHA Voucher utilization data from Erin Cassidy.

- In 2017, AHA issued 55 vouchers. 20 expired without lease-up, or 36%. Of the 35 vouchers that leased up, only 13 leased in the Town of Amherst. 6 leased in our extended jurisdiction (which includes Hadley, South Hadley, Belchertown, and Granby). The remaining 16 leased in other areas like Springfield, Holyoke, Chicopee, Easthampton, etc.
- In 2018, AHA issued 15 vouchers. 3 expired without lease-up, or 20%. Of the 12 that leased up, only 3 leased in the Town of Amherst. 3 leased in our extended jurisdiction, and the remaining 6 leased in Springfield, Holyoke, and Greenfield.

Even after waiting as much as five years on a waitlist, resident still struggle to be placed in housing in Amherst according to this data. Sid raised the question what support system there is to assist individuals once they receive a voucher. Nancy shared that AHA does not have the people power to provide such support. They do provide resources (lists) of landowners and management companies. John referenced an experimental program in Seattle that provided voucher holders with a "housing navigator" who had access to cash to assist with first, last, and deposit and who assisted with securing a rental. Additionally, for landlords there was a loss mitigations fund. The program was very successful – 54% were placed in "high-opportunity" zones vs. 14% of those who did not participate in the program.

Trust members identified two problems: 1) non-voucher holders who are priced out and could use a local-voucher program to stay in their homes 2) voucher recipients who cannot find a housing in Amherst at the subsidy price level. Nancy shared that the purpose of the Landlord Forum was to educate landlords and explain the opportunities to partner with organizations and voucher programs but also to destigmatize renting to homeless and voucher-holders.

## **Business**

### **1. Approve Minutes from July meeting.**

*Trust voted by consensus to approve the July 11, 2019 minutes.*

### **2. Discuss steps to initiate exploration of Town-owned Strong Street property for affordable housing.**

VOTE: To submit a formal request for land disposition of Strong Street property to the surplus property committee for the purpose of developing affordable housing on the site and permission to begin wetlands analysis.

MOTION: Erica

SECOND: Nancy

VOTE PASSES Unanimously

### **3. Plan for Fall Housing Forum**

John shares his goals for the forum:

- a. To highlight current housing problems in Amherst
- b. To gather support for Affordable Housing Policy
- c. Test support for other initiatives
- d. Update on progress since last forum

The Trust discussed the audience, sponsorships, and community partners. Location will be Large Activity Room in the Bangs if available with Unitarian Universalist (UU) Community Room as an alternate location. A tentative date was set for October 28<sup>th</sup>. The Trust deliberated and tried to decide how to best focus the forum.

### **4. Discussion of Trust Priorities**

#### **a. Develop CPA-AMAHT joint housing strategy.**

A Town Housing policy is the first step in a strategic plan because it identifies priorities. John has sent the Trust's Town Housing policy to Town Planning Director Christine Bestrup, Town Council President Lynn Griesemer, and CPAC Chair Nate Buddington. When John meets with Nate Buddington about Town Housing Policy, he will also raise the better way to utilize CPA funds strategically. The Trust identified the following components needed to develop invest CPA dollars in housing for strategically:

- i. Develop 5-year Budget Plan
- ii. Develop annual announcement followed by hearing
- iii. Creation of affordable rental housing delegated to the Trust and administered through RFP process
- iv. Local housing voucher program through RFP process
- v. Homeownership subsidy program through RFP process
- vi. Plan to renovate/maintain existing affordable housing

#### **b. Develop a local housing voucher program.**

Trust members raised the following questions:

- Is there *de facto* wait list for AHA program?
- Should we include levels of affordability: Up to 100% AMI?
- How much are we willing invest in this program?
- How do we encourage landlord to participate in the program(s)? Landlord “extra damage” insurance – and changing the narrative about the risk of renting to voucher holders.
- How do we ensure housing is good quality?

**c. Program to support developers and housing seekers through a “housing navigator” initiative.**

Trust discussed the possibility of a “housing navigator” program that would assist developers through creation and compliance of affordable units as well as help those seeking affordable units navigate the application and placement process. Trust identified next steps including talking with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), potential vendors, and CPAC.

**d. Update Trust’s Strategic Plan**

With several new members it is important that our plan reflects where we want to go. Trust members asked to consider their top priorities for next meeting.

**e. Discussion of Subcommittees**

Nancy, Sid, Erica, Rita volunteered to serve on a local voucher program subcommittee.

**5. Updates for review and discussion**

- East Street School. RFP is out with a submission date of October 1. Based on number of applications deadlines could be extended. Town Manager will call review committee together. Erica and Rob were interested in serving.
- Draft Town Affordable Housing Policy: Addressed above in 4a.
- Affordable Housing Coalition activities: The coalition will work to spread the word about Fall Housing Forum discussed in 3.
- Support zoning changes for 40R and Smart Growth planning: Chris Bestrup, Sunnaborg, David Eisen have chosen to focus on a Town Center 40R district—overlay zone. The next step is to plan public meetings. Development of design guidelines that are fitting with the character of Town is important to create buy in from community members. In order to incentivize density, may need to down-zone downtown and allow density through the 40R process.
- 132 Northampton Road: Valley CDC is currently working on project eligibility letter (PEL) to DHCD.
- Status of Craig’s Doors: Gerry Weiss as President of Board has now taken over as interim Executive Director of the shelter. They are working actively to open on time in November.

**6. Items not anticipated within 48 hours – None.**

**7. Public Comments – None.**

**8. Upcoming Meetings**

- Housing Forum Planning—Thursday, August 15, 2PM, Bangs Garrabrants Room
- Homelessness Subcommittee – Friday, August 30 8:30AM
- Trust—Thursday, September 12, 7 PM, Town Hall

Meeting adjourned 9:20PM.