



AMHERST MUNICIPAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST
PUBLIC MEETING
Thursday, September 12, 2019, 7:00 p.m.
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall

In Attendance

Members: John Hornik, Erica Piedade, Paul Bockelman, Rob Crowner, Tom Kegelman, William Van Heuvelen, Carol Lewis, Sid Ferreira, Nancy Schroder (9).

Staff: Nate Malloy, Rita Farrell, John Page

Guests: Maura Keene, Chad Fuller, Joanne Campbell of Valley Community Development

Absent: No Trust members absent.

Prepared by John Page.

Meeting called to order at 7:00PM.

Business

1. Announcements

Nate updated Trust members on the status on RFP for East Street School property. There has been at least one inquiry. The submission deadline has been extended October 15. Tom raised that he has not seen much marketing around the release of the RFP. Nate outlined the normal posting procedure and said that he relayed a list of possible developers to the procurement department. Paul asked Trust members for suggestions. Rita suggests trying to get an article published in local papers. Tom suggested requesting a list of CDC's from DHCD and forwarding RFP to all as well as reaching out to architects who will relay to developers. Paul will establish a review committee once proposals are received and will take John's recommendations into consideration when appointing members to the review committee.

John shared the announcement of a public-private partnership (P3) plan to developed new and renovated housing at UMass including erecting a residence hall for approximately 970 students, demolishing Lincoln Apartments, demolishing North Village Apartments, and replacing them with 170 units. However, at the same time there has been an additional 800 first-year students entering this year. Sid suggests asking the University directly via University relations what efforts they are implementing to address displacement specifically what is their plan for relocation and strategy to mitigate impact. Tom raised a specific concern about the lack of phasing causing major disruption for current residents and the entire housing market. Maura Keene raises whether there will be any control on rents or mechanisms the University will be able to employ to maintain affordability of P3 units. Trust members expressed concern that both the temporary and possible permanent increase in demand could exacerbate the existing affordability crisis in Amherst.

Trust members shared concerns for the families that are displaced especially families with children. Tom questioned whether federal and state relocation statutes apply to the University in this situation. Rita and Nancy affirm that in most cases there is an affirmative and weighty responsibility on the part of the owner to mitigate displacement. Paul suggests that the Trust take a position on whether the University should, irrespective if they are required to, adhere to federal and state regulation such as the Uniform Relocation Act. Erica affirmed saying that it is important that the Trust make a statement and advocate for those being displaced.

Paul suggested that the Trust be prepared to speak at public comment at the Town Council meeting on October 7. Tom noted that it is important to express gratitude for a commitment to building additional on-campus housing but stand firm in the commitment to mitigating the effect on current residents and impact on off-campus housing.

John committed to preparing a letter for review at the next Trust meeting and will attend the October 7 Town Council meeting at which the University is expected to present about the public-private partnership for housing it is pursuing. Sid suggests inviting Tony Maroulis, Executive Director of External Relations and University Events to the next Trust meeting.

Trust unanimously voted to ask Tony Maroulis to present information and answer questions about the public-private partnership for housing that the University is considering at the next Trust meeting.

2. Approve Minutes from August Meeting

Trust votes by consensus approve minutes from August 8, 2019 meeting with the correction that Sid Ferreira be added as present.

3. Discussion of Trust priorities

John shared that in order to be effective the Trust has to establish and then act on priorities, expressing that charge of the Trust is broad and all-encompassing in issues related to housing and homelessness. For each of the following priorities he asks Trust members to commit to leading the initiative or it will be placed on the back burner.

a. Develop CPA-AMAHT joint housing strategy

John, with Nate's assistance, will work on CPA-AMAHT housing strategy. John intends to meet with Nate Buddington, Chair of the CPA Committee at some point in October on the topic. Nate Malloy noted that CPA have begun considering mid- and long-term planning and that in the past staff has recommended developing criteria, long-term strategy including criteria.

b. Local housing voucher program

Nancy, Erica, and John, with the assistance of Trust Consultant Rita Farrell will research how this is implemented in other communities. Trust concluded that this topic will require input from CPA and therefore needs to follow priority a above. Rita will provide examples on those existing programs as models.

c. Increasing the efficacy of inclusionary zoning requirements

Maura and Carol raised the issue of effectiveness of inclusionary zoning. Despite Town Meeting revisiting the inclusionary zoning bylaw in 2018 it has still not been triggered. Nate clarified that mixed-use developments are exempt from the inclusionary zoning. Nate suggested pursuing a bylaw change requiring all development to incorporate affordable housing. John asked Nate to

clarify why current inclusionary zoning has been ineffective. Nate explained that developers' ability to build by right in some zones as well as the perceived burden of inclusionary zoning and therefore efforts to avoid it causes developers to not trigger inclusionary zoning. He also noted that misunderstanding of what affordable units mean deter developers, even who were willing to include affordable units. Nate explained that more education or resources for developers to guide them through the process of building or including affordable units would contribute to the creation of more affordable units.

Tom presented other models to include affordable units within a community that required inclusionary zoning. For example, if a developer seeks to develop a sub-development, they could conform to inclusionary zoning by selling some parcels of land of the sub-development to the Town or directly to an affordable housing developer to develop affordable units, rather than navigating the complex affordable housing regulatory arena themselves. Tom asked Rita if there is anyone at the state level or PVPC that would develop a service to assist developers with conforming to inclusionary zoning regulations and navigating the process of building affordable units. Rita explained that if production levels were high enough it would worthwhile to be a regional service. However, currently not enough volume to support it. Rob noted that inclusionary zoning reform may be necessary but should come after the Trust's ongoing work with developing a 40R overlay district.

d. Program to support accessing affordable housing opportunities

John explained that Amherst Housing Authority focuses on helping individuals receive Section 8 vouchers, adherence to HUD requirements, and managing their properties, there is no staff focusing on creating greater access to affordable housing and placement in units once assistance such as Section 8 voucher is received. There are many barriers for people seeking affordable housing including lack of information and resources, or producing first, last, and deposit. Hwei-Ling Grenney of Amherst Community Connections and Laura Reichsman of Family Outreach of Amherst provide some of these services to a small fraction of the population that need them and could provide more information on the topic. Nancy shared that from her time at the Amherst Housing Authority the first, last, and deposit requirement is a huge barrier and reiterated that too many people are left with No guide, no navigator, no advocate. Joanne Campbell of Valley Community Development affirmed that it's a regional problem explaining that Valley CDC shares several applications for all available units that they know when an applicant comes to their office seeking housing, but they do not help them fill it out. She shared that each application process is different and complex to navigate as the resident seeking housing. Trust members suggested organization that may be able to provide some guidance including Community Action, Rapid Rehousing, and the Chamber of Commerce.

e. Discussion of Subcommittees

The Homelessness Subcommittee of the Trust includes Trust members: Nancy Schroder and John Hornik as well as Jay Levy of Elliot Homeless Services, Erin Cassidy, and community member Pricilla White.

4. Discussion of Informal Camping/Housing

John Hornik shared about a meeting which requested by Cinda Jones of W.D. Cows Land Co. Other participants included Assistant Town Manager David Ziomek, Public Health Director Julie Federman, Director of Placemaking for The Mill District Hannah R., Executive Director of the Amherst Survival Center Lev Ben-Ezra on the issue of homelessness and informal camping on land in North Amherst.

John presented some research developed with the assistance of Jay Levy of Elliot Homeless Services on options that are practiced in other communities including 1) Formal encampments, 2) Safe-haven transitional housing option year-round, and 3) tiny houses either permanent or transitional. A clear barrier to all of these is finding private not-for profits to serve as the operators.

Cinda Jones is seeking to have a role in the solution whether donating or purchasing land as well as assisting with building materials. In discussion Paul clarified that the Town would only act to remove persons from private land or remove informal encampments if trespass notices are acted.

Erica shared that each model is important but first we need to find out more information. Trust concluded that substantial research needs to be done before decided which model(s) to support given limited financial and human resources. Nancy will begin this work on the Homelessness sub-committee. Carol, Erica, and Chad will do research on their own and report back to the Trust.

5. Plan for Fall Housing Forum

John explained his plan for the housing forum as presented and asked for comments from Trust members. Nate and Sid suggested that we provide time for audience members to pose questions. Paul notes that it is the night before an election and that might be a deterrent.

Trust members identified the goals of the forum to educate and gather support for the Town housing policy. Paul shared concern that the scope is broad and may need focusing in. Carol said the upside to many topics is there's a place for everyone to connect and learn more. Last forum focused on the East Street School. Nate shared that eight breakout groups is too many. The common thread tying the issues together is the housing crisis in Amherst.

6. Updates for review and discussion

a. Town-owned properties

John shared that the Town surplus property committee met and has decided to complete site evaluation of both the Strong Street and Hickory Ridge properties. Town Council still has to approve a supplemental appropriation to purchase the Hickory Ridge property, but an agreement is already signed. Paul reported that the entire parcel is Town owned while some land will be leased to current owner for development of a solar array. Paul shared that the primary goal for this project as stated by the CPA proposal is conservation and recreation including creating up walking paths to provide safe pedestrian access to business district at Pomeroy Village center. In addition to those goals, parcels along West Pomeroy may be suitable for housing or other development. Of the 150 acres, 23 acres will be leased for solar, 17 set assists for habitat mitigation, and much of the property is wetlands that will be protected, leaving small parcels *may* be developable. All options are still on the table for the site and more study is necessary.

b. Status of Town Affordable Housing Policy

John shared that he will be presenting the policy to the Community Resource Committee of the Town Council on Wednesday, September 25, 8:30AM, Town Room, Town Hall and to the Planning Board at their Wednesday, October 2, 7PM meeting.

c. Update on establishment of 40R Smart Growth zoning overlay district

Nate shared that Planning Director Christine Bestrup, and Consultants Karen Sonoburg and David Eisen, and himself have focused in on proposing a downtown 40R overlay district and are planning a public presentation in mid to late October. Nate shared his concerns, similar to those raised about current inclusionary zoning that it presents weak incentives for developers to opt into 40R process in the downtown because mixed use and density is allowed by right in the business district.

d. Status of supportive housing at 132 Northampton Road

Joanne Campbell, Executive Director of Valley Community Development shared that they are working on completing request to DHCD for Project Eligibility Letter (PEL) and intend to submit it to DHCD in 30-60 days. That will be followed by a request to ZBA for special permit and expects an approximately 9-month comprehensive permit process. Valley intends to enter in the December 2020 round of funding for supportive housing by DHCD. John Hornik and Joanne Campbell will be costarring on an episode of Byline with Stan Rosenberg.

e. Status of Craig's Doors

John provided an update of Craig's Doors seasonal shelter. They are currently recruiting new executive director and staff with the goal of opening November 1. The shelter will continue to have a home at First Baptist Church. Jay Levy of Elliot Homeless Services has joined the Craig's Doors Board of Directors; Jerry Gates has resigned from the Board. Staff has been hired part-time to staff the resource center.

7. Items not anticipated within 48 hours – Discussion of Trust Meeting Time

Trust discussed the possibility of changing meeting time to earlier in the day. John suggests 4PM so that members could get home at an earlier hour. The issue of public participation and ability to recruit diverse members to the Trust were raised in reference to the earlier time. The 7PM time was preferred by almost all Trust members with several unable to attend meetings beginning before 5:30PM. It was concluded that the Trust would stick to the 7PM time for meetings.

8. Public Comments – None.

9. Next Meetings

- Wednesday, September 25, 8:30 AM, CRC, Town Hall. Consider Affordable Housing Draft Policy.
- Thursday, October 10, 7 PM. Meeting of the Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust at First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall.
- Wednesday, October 2, 7 PM. Planning Board will consider recommendations related to setting goals for affordable housing development in Amherst, Town Room of Town Hall.
- Monday, November 4, 6:30 PM, Social Hall of the Unitarian-Universalist Society. Amherst Housing Forum.

Meeting adjourned at 9:13PM.