



AMHERST MUNICIPAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST
PUBLIC MEETING
Thursday, May 21, 2020
7:00 P.M.

Virtual Zoom meeting. Video recording available at: [Link](#)

In Attendance

Members: Rob Crowner, Sid Ferreira, John Hornik , Tom Kegelman, Carol Lewis, Erica Piedade, Will Van Heuvelen (7)

Staff: Nate Malloy, Rita Farrell, John Page

Guests: Community Members Elisa Campbell, Maura Keene, and Amherst Community Connections Executive Director Hwei-Ling Greeney

Absent: Paul Bockelman.

Prepared by John Page.

Meeting called to order at 7:05PM.

1. Announcements

Community Participation Officer Angela Mills informed John that the Town is beginning to recruit once again to fill vacancies for Boards & Committees. Any interested parties should apply on the Town website at www.amherstma.gov/getinvolved

2. Review Minutes from April 23 and April 30 —Minutes were approved as presented.

3. Discussion with Representatives from UMass on Residential Development — John shared that the University had no new information at this time.

Joh took up item **8. Unanticipated agenda items - CARES Act CDBG Funding** next.

4. Discussion of proposed 40R overlay district

Nate showed the proposed 40R district boundary map and shared that the consultants had presented it as well as the proposed Zoning Bylaw to the Planning Board at their May 6, 2020 meeting. John viewed the 40R overlay district as an opportunity to add housing units and in particular affordable units as well as implement design guidelines in the Downtown. Rob expressed his support for the proposal because it unlocks pieces of the downtown to housing production. Currently, there is no capacity to build in the BL districts of the Town Center because of dimensional regulations. This proposal would allow new development in these areas that

include affordable units. Rob affirmed that this may be controversial but explained that the design guidelines make this strategy more palatable to residents concerned with aesthetics.

John said the next step is to send comments to the Planning Board and Planning Department by next Wednesday, May 27, 2020. Nate said the final step of this multi-year process is a final presentation to the Planning Board. Nate said that currently the project does not have a champion and that if the Trust believes this is an effective tool to produce affordable housing it needs to advocate for it. Carol contended that even for a person whose only priority is the aesthetics, the addition of design guidelines should be attractive. Erica asked of examples of successful implementation of 40R districts. John provided an example of the 40R district in Northampton on Village Hill.

5. Updates with Discussion

a. Emergency Rental Assistance

John has been attending webinars and workshops on the topic. John shared what he has learned as well as more information about the state's current and new emergency RAFT program which expands the program to those households between 50 and 80% AMI. John updated the Trust members that, in conversation with the Town's Procurement Officer, Nate and Rita finalized the RFI, however, a few issues remained outstanding. Nate wanted clarity on disqualifying an applicant if they were eligible for but had not received RAFT. Nate explained that since drafting the program, the new RAFT program had been launched, and additional funding was provided to RAFT administrators. The question again arose how this local program differed from RAFT.

Rita explained that because the RAFT administrators are regional, in Amherst's case Way Finders serves Hampshire and Hampden County, the pool is very large, and processing takes time. There is no requirement that RAFT funds be spread out among all those communities. The Trust's local emergency rental assistance program focuses on Amherst residents ensuring they are supported.

Carol argued for only excluding those that had received RAFT subsidies when applying as not to make an applicant jump through hoops. John provided a counterargument that he would like to see the Trust funds go as far as possible and that the way to achieve that is by serving those who are not eligible for other programs. Rita cautioned that it may take a very long time for households to be admitted to the RAFT program and for the subsidies to be released. Sid emphasized the urgency of executing the program and reducing barriers to entry.

VOTE: To maintain the eligibility requirements as outlined in the Emergency Rental Assistance program as written which state that being eligible, but not receiving, RAFT will not disqualify an applicant from the local rental assistance.

MOTION: John

SECOND: Erica

VOTE PASSES, 5-2-0 (*Crowner – N, Ferreira – Y, Hornik – N, Kegelman – Y, Lewis – Y, Piedade– Y, Van Heuvelen– Y*)

Nate said that the Procurement Officer can distribute this tomorrow (May 22, 2020) and within 7-10 days the Town could have contract with an agency.

Carol asked if the rental assistance materials will be provided in English and Spanish. Nate confirmed that the final version of the RFI includes language that in the marketing and application, materials must be provided in English, Spanish, and other languages as appropriate.

Hwei-Ling asked if Amherst Community Connections would be sent the BID when released and Nate confirmed they would.

b. Comprehensive Permit Application for 132 Northampton Road

Valley CDC received their project eligibility letter (PEL) from the Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD). John will ask Laura Baker, the Real Estate Manager at Valley CDC, to present at a future Trust meeting. John hoped in weeks to come the Trust would author letter of support to the ZBA as well as provide testimony. Hearings slated to begin in late June or early July.

Elisa asked if the hearing would be conducted remotely. Nate explain that at this point the plan is that hearing would be conducted virtually. The developers would present the project, the Board would be able to ask questions as well as provide time for public comment.

c. Consultants for East St. School and Strong Street Properties — No new update.

d. Legislative Issues

John raised the issue of H.4718 *An Act Providing a Rent Increase Freeze in response to COVID-19*. The legislation effectively what it would do is say that landlords could not raise rents until the emergency is over. Co-sponsors include Representative Natalie Blais, but not Representative Mindy Domb or Senator Comerford. Trust members asked John to reach out and ask Rep. Domb and Sen. Comerford to get their perspective on the topic.

CHAPA's Rachel Heller had suggested the following changes to DHCD's RAFT program: Adding \$50Million to the program, expanding the program to include households with up to 80% AMI, and increasing the maximum allocation per household from \$4,000 to \$10,000 in a year.

Carol was pleased to see that administration of the RAFT program appeared to be incredibly flexible and accommodating to households' various configurations and removed barriers by allowing eligibility based on income projections.

6. Upcoming Events

- a. Next Housing Trust meeting - Thursday, June 11, 7 PM

- b. Housing Coalition meeting - Tuesday, June 16, 6:30 PM
- c. ZBA Hearing on 132 Northampton Road - July (TBA)

7. Public Comment

Elisa supported expanding RAFT but recognized that the state's budget cuts may make advocacy for increased program funding difficult.

8. Other items not anticipated within 48 hours

CDBG CARES Act Funding —The state of Massachusetts received \$20Million in CDBG funds through the CARES Act via HUD. DHCD decided to allocate \$10Million of that to RAFT administrators in the state. The Town can apply for up to \$400,000. Identified priorities are microenterprise grant programs and social services specifically food insecurity and job training.

John shared that both Family Outreach of Amherst and Amherst Community Connections are proposing family housing stabilization programs to the CDBG Advisory Committee at their May 27th hearing. John suggested that the Trust author a letter of support for at least one of the programs. Carol expressed her support for the Amherst Community Connections proposal and suggested recommending both. Erica concurred saying the Trust should recommend both if they serve different populations. John said both focus on housing stabilization for families. Rob suggested writing a letter prioritizing housing stabilization and emphasize funding either or both proposals. John's hesitation about recommending funding two proposals was a concern of breadth or depth – neither program could be funded in a meaningful way.

VOTE: To empower the Chair to pen a letter to the CDBG Advisory Committee identifying housing stabilization as a priority and recommended that the committee fund at least one and possibly both the Amherst Community Connections and Family Outreach of Amherst's proposals.

MOTION: Erica

SECOND: Carol

VOTE PASSES unanimously, 7-0-0 (*Crowner – Y, Ferreira – Y, Hornik – Y, Kegelman – Y, Lewis – Y, Piedade – Y, Van Heuvelen – Y*)

Erica asked how these programs, if funded, would link with the Trust's emergency rental assistance program. John explained that the administrators of the Trust's program could refer applicants directly to other social services such as those offered by Family Outreach of Amherst or Amherst Community Connections.

9. Adjournment

VOTE: To adjourn.

MOTION: John

SECOND: Erica



TOWN OF
AMHERST
MASSACHUSETTS

VOTE PASSES unanimously, 7-0-0 (*Crowner – Y, Ferreira – Y, Hornik – Y, Kegelman – Y, Lewis – Y, Piedade– Y, Van Heuvelen– Y*)

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