



AMHERST MUNICIPAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST PUBLIC MEETING

Thursday, March 11, 2021

7:00 PM

Virtual Zoom Meeting. Video recording available at:

IN ATTENDANCE

Members: Allegra Clark, Francis Goyes Flor, Sid Ferreira, John Hornik, Erica Piedade, Will Van Heuvelen (6)

Absent: Paul Bockelman, Rob Crowner, Carol Lewis (3)

Staff: Nate Malloy, Rita Farrell, John Page

Guests: Jim Linfield and Rachel Belanger of Way Finders, Laura Baker of Valley Community Development and Member of the Public Maura Keene, Kathleen Anderson, and Yee-Lunn Lee.

Prepared by John Page.

Meeting called to order at 7:00PM.

1. Announcements

John alerted Trust members that the Community Resource Committee (CRC) of the Town Council and the Planning Board were taking up several zoning reforms including updates to the Town's inclusionary zoning bylaw and believes the Trust should play an active role in these deliberations.

2. Review Minutes from February 11 Meeting — Minutes were accepted with Scribner's edits.

3. Update on Emergency Rental Assistance Program

John reported that based on the data to-date, the Trust has only spent about half of the funds allocated to the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, serving 55-60 households, some twice, with a slight tendency to serve larger households. All of which is a positive outcome, he noted.

Sid asked about applications marked as incompletes and what exactly that meant and if any additional follow up could be done. John relayed that Community Action's policy for the latest round was to attempt follow-up in three follow-ups phone, email, and by mail. Nate asked whether the Trust should request Community Action to reach back out. John committed to asking Janna who is overseeing the program at Community Action to come to the next meeting to discuss the incomplete apps. Erica noted that last time the Trust passed

changes/provisions to reduce barriers, including self-declaration and second round of funding and wished to know the impact of those changes.

Nate reminded Trust members that the contract with Community Action was extended through June, but likely the program cannot be extended after that. If the funds, the Trust allocated are not spent they will be returned to the Trust and can be spent on a new rental assistance program or different strategy.

4. Discussion of Draft Request for Proposals (RFP) and Timeline for Belchertown Road and East Street School Sites

The working group met on February 25th and has analyzed both the RFP and evaluation criteria and will review one more time in entirety then will go to the whole Trust to review together. John, Erica, Francis, Carol formed the working group.

Rita presented the process and touched briefly on the content/substance of the comparative criteria. Rita, John, and Nate plan on meeting with Town staff to review further. Rita clarified that the RFP is for housing production at both sites.

Together the Trust members reviewed the RFP section by section.

Seeing experts in attendance, Rita asked for feedback on the management plan requirements:

- Laura Baker from Valley Community Development shared that the zoning board and DHCD ask for very specific and review of management plans. Suggesting that the Trust's RFP should be only preliminary, outline, or guiding principles.
- Rachel Bellanger from Way Finders noted that attention to the subject is admirable, but premature. Were she bidding, she would respond that the Trust would have full access to review these documents once drafted. That would be more beneficial. Another approach she suggested was to ask applicant to explain their eviction procedures/ narrative of practice at existing projects and/or ask for a management plan from other (one or two) projects.
- Jim Lindfield philosophized that RFPs should be an expression of intention. For example, a statement of values is reflected in the review committee giving weight to the applicant's management plan and eviction process. Project managers/real estate might not be able to fully weigh at this point of this bid with any specificity without consultation of their management team and full-service plan – both of which depend on the composition of tenants in the building.

Rita would suggest reviewing the language on this section at the next working group meeting, recommending being less proscriptive but meeting the same overarching goals.

Optimistic Schedule

- a. Release RFP, April 2021
- b. Select Developer, June 2021
- c. Reach agreement with developer - Summer/Fall 2021
- d. ZBA Approval - Summer/Fall 2022

- e. Pre-application to DHCD - Nov/Dec 2022
- f. Full application to DHCD - January 2023
- g. DHCD Approval - Summer 2023
- h. Break ground - Spring 2024
- i. Complete construction - Spring 2025

Nate explained the need to specifically authorize the use of Trust funds for costs associated with on-going property maintenance such as landscaping and any necessary re-housing of the current tenants.

VOTE: To authorize Trust funds up to \$20,000 for expenditures related to on-going property maintenance or re-housing of tenants.

MOTION: John

SECOND: Erica

VOTE PASSES unanimously, 6-0-0 (*Clark – Y, Crowner – Y, Flor – Y, Hornik – Y, Piedade – Y, Van Heuvelen – Y*)

5. Discussion of Strategic Action Plan

John outlined the Trust's FY2020-2022 priorities highlighter where the Trust has met those goals and where there was more work to do:

FY2020-2022 PRIORITY INITIATIVES:

- 5. Foster development of second town-owned property.
- 6. Foster strong communication and integrated efforts among the various housing entities active in Amherst.
- 7. Explore establishing new or expanding existing rental and homeownership housing assistance programs; research how to improve access to existing programs
- 8. Support and develop programmatic, legislative and policy housing initiatives to mitigate the effects of the COVID pandemic on low- and moderate-income households
- 9. Explore new and existing revenue sources including institutional sources with the goal of insuring that the Trust is in a strong financial position for the next five years.
- 10. Review the Town's zoning by-laws and work with town departments and the planning board to effect updating of these by-laws
- 11. Explore opportunities for conservation based with town departments

Ongoing

- 12. Actively advocate for initiatives to address homelessness and support homelessness prevention
- 13. Advocate for town policy and regulations to further promote affordable housing and provide active political support for local housing initiatives.
- 14. Promote public awareness and outreach to grow more support and understanding of local affordable housing initiatives through print, online, and media campaign.
- 15. Review all affordable housing development proposals including Comprehensive Permit applications and developments subject to the Inclusionary Zoning bylaw.

Reflections:

- Regarding priority 10: Zoning reform is underway.
- Regarding priority 7: Rita suggested encouraging both rental production and homeownership production. Rita noted it is important to frame homeownership as an issue of equity. Francis shared about her work with MHP on homeownership and its role as a wealth generator for families, saying that MHP has made narrowing the racial ownership gap a priority but their focus has been on gateway cities and the city of Boston. Possible strategies she identified to create intergenerational wealth through homeownership programs were shorter deed restrictions and programs that focus on assistance with down payment and closing costs.
- Regarding item 12, the Town is actively looking for a permanent location for the Craig's Doors shelter as well as simultaneously pursuing regional solutions to serve individuals experiencing homelessness. Trust Member Allegra will be serving on that committee. A housing first approach, unlike sheltering, can leverage CPA and CDBG dollars, as modeled by Amherst Community Connections (ACC).
- Erica expressed how all of these issues are interlocked and suggest a strategy to divide our time and resources to meet these goals including the establishment of standing committees and the expectation that each Trust member serve on at least one.
- Francis highlighted the importance of priority 14, promoting awareness and outreach to grow more support and understanding of local affordable housing initiatives. John referenced the ongoing work and advocacy by the Amherst Affordable Housing Advocacy Coalition, its presence on social media, and the upcoming community forums, as well as the new Engage Amherst platform. Trust members reflected that this is an area where more work could be done.
- Regarding item 9, pursuing new avenues of funding for Trust initiatives, John shared his recent technical assistance grant request to MHP on the Trust behalf, and Erica offered to serve on the committee if the grant was awarded.

6. Review and Discussion of Draft Comprehensive Housing Policy

John referred Trust members to the draft comprehensive housing policy which he had distributed in advance and Carol's written feedback and asked others to submit their comments. Allegra questioned the ranking of several affordable housing priorities as "low-priority" and committed to penning comments for the Community Resource Committee (CRC) of the Town Council. Nate requested comments be sent to John and himself so be collated and a summary statement from the Trust be drafted.

7. Report on State Legislation

Will again referred members to CHAPA's summary of the budget and the Western Mass Coalition to End Homelessness call to action on the state budget. Those are available at <https://www.chapa.org/housing-news/governor-baker-releases-fy2022-state-budget-proposal> and <https://www.westernmasshousingfirst.org/advocacy/2021/the-governors-fy22-budget-cuts-to-housing-and-homelessness-programs/>, respectively.

In addition, he specifically pointed out local option transfer tax legislation sponsored by Senator Jo Comerford allowing localities to pass their own luxury tax on houses, the fund benefiting municipal housing trusts. He pointed out that were this legislation to pass and the Town of Amherst to adopt such a provision the Trust would have a new revenue source. He also clarified the eviction sealing legislation had not yet passed at the state level.

Will encouraged the Trust to consider endorsing the provisions highlighted by CHAPA and the Western Mass Coalition to End Homelessness and asking the Amherst Town Council to do the same.

Lastly, Will noted the immediate concerns around state budget shortfalls. While the Governor and legislature expect state and local aid from the federal government to supplant funding gaps for critical services when, how much, and what those federal funds can be used for is unclear.

8. General Updates

John shared about the Housing Coalition's upcoming public forums in lieu of the housing forum the Trust has hosted in the past.

- March 30: Creating a Path to Homeownership in Amherst for Low Income Households
- April 20: Racial Equity and Housing w/Reparations for Amherst & Whitney Demetrius
- May 25: Climate Change, Sustainability and Housing

VOTE: To co-sponsor the Amherst Affordable Housing Advocacy Coalition's three upcoming forums and request the Town to facilitate the Zoom webinars.

MOTION: John

SECOND: Erica

VOTE PASSES unanimously, 6-0-0 (Clark – Y, Crowner – Y, Flor – Y, Hornik – Y, Piedade – Y, Van Heuvelen – Y)

9. Public Comments — None.

10. Items Not Anticipated Within 48 Hours — None.

11. Upcoming Meetings:

- Housing Coalition, March 30
- Housing Trust, April 8 – Zoning issues and penultimate draft of request for proposals.

VOTE: To adjourn

MOTION: John

SECOND: Erica

VOTE PASSES unanimously, 6-0-0 (*Clark – Y, Crowner – Y, Flor – Y, Hornik – Y, Piedade – Y, Van Heuvelen – Y*)

Meeting adjourned at 9:01PM.