

Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust

Thursday, July 8, 2021, 7:00 PM

Virtual Zoom meeting <https://amherstma.zoom.us/j/89395605218>

Meeting Minutes:

Present: Paul Bockelman, Allegra Clark, Rob Crouner, Sid Ferreira, John Hornik, Carol Lewis, Erica Piedade, Pat DeAngelis (Town Council Liaison)

Staff: Rita Farrell, Nathaniel Malloy

Guests: Maura Keene, Janna Tetreault, Hwei-Ling Greeney, Chad Fuller, Laura Baker

Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, this meeting is being conducted by remote means. There is no in-person access to the meeting. Members of the public who wish to attend may do so by following the instructions for access posted on the Town website for this meeting. A video recording of this meeting will be posted on the Town website two-three weeks after it has occurred.

1. Announcements

Francis Goyes Flor is moving to Boston and will resign in September. Please encourage people you know to complete the Community Activity form (<https://www.amherstma.gov/caf>).

We have received six applications from candidates to replace John Page as our intern/research assistant. Four candidates will be interviewed next week by Nate, Rita, and myself.

2. Review minutes from June meeting – not reviewed. Available before August meeting

3. Final update on COVID Emergency Rental Assistance program – Janna Tetreault, Assistant Program Director, Community Action Pioneer Valley

Number of households submitting applications and applications approved in past three months (April-June, 2021): Four applications were submitted and three were approved.

Table presented by Janna: Amherst Emergency Rental Assistance final report
Key findings:

196 applications were received between July, 2020 and June, 2021, by Community Action Pioneer Valley, the program administrator. 50 were approved (26%). Of the remaining applications, 46 were denied (23%) and 83 (42%) were incomplete. This percentage changed over time; 51% were

incomplete from July-September, and 36% in the following period, October-June. Of all applicants, 25 had a primary language other than English, mostly Spanish. Not included are an additional 56 applications that were ineligible because the applicant did not live in Amherst, had no COVID reason, or were subsidized and not behind in their rent.

The total amount distributed for rental assistance was \$99,060.50 over the year the program was in operation. Of the 50 approved applications, there were 8 households of one person (16%), 12 households of two persons (24%), 10 households of three persons (20%), and 20 households of four or more persons (40%). Applicants were similarly distributed.

Because of significantly decreased applications in the later months of the program, the Trust voted not to continue it beyond June. During the same period, Wayfinders which administers the State RAFT program showed a large increase in rental assistance awards to Amherst households in the first six months of 2021.

Upon request, Janna promised to provide additional information on household served by race/ethnicity and a brief statement of lessons learned through this process.

The Trust voted unanimously (6-0) to send a letter of thanks to CAPV for administering the program.

4. Discussion of Amherst Seasonal Shelter:

This has been an exceptional year for Craig's Place. They have served a record number of individuals at two shelters in Amherst and one in Hadley. A committee has been appointed by the Town Manager to address questions about the future location of a shelter in Amherst and related questions regarding homelessness in Amherst. Allegra Clark reported that the Committee is considering other locations for a congregate shelter and is hoping to develop opportunities for permanent supportive housing. Also, the lease on the University Lodge has been extended one year and remains available to Craig's Doors to shelter persons who are homeless.

5. Update on East Street-Belchertown Road RFP

RFP has been reviewed by Shirin Everett, Town attorney, resulting in minimal substantive changes to the RFP. Nate reported that we will no longer require potential bidders to submit a letter of intent within 30 days to be eligible to bid. That is not allowable under procurement rules established for Chapter 30B. Instead, bidders must be present for a mandatory site visit to take place at the East Street School. There was also some concern expressed by the Town attorney over the specificity of requirements in some sections of the RFP. This

was allayed by ensuring that these were all part of the “highly advantageous” criteria.

It is expected that the RFP will be released within two weeks.

6. Update on Strong Street evaluation

Nate reported that the Town Manager has approved the process for the Housing Trust to proceed with its work on planning for housing on the Town’s Strong Street property. Rita and Nate will be preparing contracts for outside organizations to assess the property on Strong Street for potential development. It is possible that the Town Department of Public Works will do part of what is needed. The following are the areas for evaluation:

- Wetlands assessment
- Soil analysis
- Road access requirements
- Available and needed utilities
- Land survey
- Architectural/engineering study to determine possible types of housing on the site

7. Report on State legislation

John received a request for Ellen Shacter, Director of the Somerville Office of Housing Stability, to sign on to endorse legislation that would allow local governments to charge a real estate transfer fee on the sale of homes over a certain threshold (possibly \$500,000) to fund the development of affordable housing (H.1377 (Rep. Connolly)/S.838 (Sen. Comerford)). Since we approved supporting this legislation at our last meeting, John signed on to the statewide petition. He has yet to send letters of support to Sen. Comerford and Rep. Domb.

8. Discussion of applications to the CPA Committee (John)

John presented two draft applications to be submitted on behalf of the Housing Trust.

1) Support for Affordable Housing: \$500k

General support for potential, new, affordable housing developments.

Note: Estimate of the size of developable property at Hickory Ridge is 8-9 acres.

2) Support for Technical Consultant: \$30k

Application outlines both past work and anticipated future work over the next two years.

The members of the Housing Trust voted to approve the applications for submission with no revisions. Erica suggested using formatting that would make the proposals more distinct from each other.

9. Update on Draft Comprehensive Housing Policy

Sets a goal of 250 new, affordable units over the next five years.

John reported on a note he sent to Mandi Jo Hanneke, CRC Chair.

“This latest draft of the Comprehensive Housing Policy represents a very positive change from the earlier drafts. There is a new recognition of the unmet needs and a significantly greater commitment to address them. There is also increased attention to the role of the University as a source of the Town’s housing problems.

“With regard to the latter, I would recommend taking one further step. I would establish a goal with respect to the additional on campus residential growth to be negotiated with the University. Capacity should be increased to serve the needs of at least 3,000 additional students and their families; 5,000 would be even better. That should include affordable housing to serve the needs of low-income students.”

10. Planning for Fall Housing event: Affordable Housing in Amherst – Thursday, Sept. 2, 4 PM. This is an invitation to John from Amherst Neighbors. He proposed asking Amherst Neighbors to make this an event that is open to a wider audience like the March, April and May housing forums and would include discussion of the housing needs of older adults. Nate suggested that additional speakers be included as we did for the three Spring events.

11. Public Comments – none.

12. Items not anticipated within 48 hours – none.

13. Upcoming Meetings

1. Housing Trust, August 12
2. Housing Coalition, August 24