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**Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust**  
**Thursday, May 12, 2022, 7:00 PM**  
**Meeting Minutes**

Present: Allegra Clark, Paul Bockelman, Carol Lewis, Risha Hess, Aschleigh Jensen, Erica Piedad, Rob Crowner, Sid Ferriera, John Hornik, Nate Malloy, and Rita Farrell

Public: Maura Keene, Michele McAdaragh (Wayfinders), George Ryan, Jennifer Taub, Dave Ziomek, Janet McGowan

**PUBLIC MEETING**

1. Announcements

George Ryan taking minutes for this meeting

Will need a minute taker for June meeting

CHAPA co-sponsoring an event including 2 Mass communities on how to structure advocacy efforts Thursday May 26 1-2PM; John will send more info later

2. Review minutes from March meeting

Carol Lewis had already sent a comment to Chair

No other comments or corrections

3. Planning and discussion of Housing Forum for Wayfinders Project for East Street/Belchertown Road

John has approached UU about hosting – need to fix a date

Michelle McAdaragh suggests week of Sept 12; also would like to do a zoom session in addition (two meetings)

**John:** we could do a mixed event so we don't have to do it twice

**Nate:** purpose is to inform public, need to engage neighborhoods, help kick off the project; project eligibility phase (2-3 months) overall 9 month project to get to a comprehensive permit; Town usually sets

up a webpage to catalog public inputs and to help get project visibility; Sept 12 week a good time frame for Town

**Michelle** would prefer an earlier start – perhaps 6:30PM?

**John:** wants to reach Fort River School community, may need support such as child care, perhaps Housing Trust funds could be used

Consensus is for 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday/Thursday in September; John will approach UU

**Michelle:** how soon should public outreach start? **John:** Trust can begin outreach via posters in July; could also do outreach through Amherst schools;

**Nate:** schools have a parent contact list that Town could access; staff has been talking about how to promote project; John will reach out to Mike Morris, Superintendent

**Carol:** what else is Wayfinders going to do in terms of outreach?

**Michelle:** who is going to take the lead? Forum alone not enough

**Risha** has a conflict for the 13<sup>th</sup> for Forum; no other preferences expressed by Trust members

**Erica:** article in Amherst Bulletin would be ideal; would like two events, zoom forum during the day and live meeting in evening?

**John:** focus would be on Belchertown Road and Wayfinders but also opportunity for Trust to provide updates on what it is doing

**MOTION:** (Carol second) To hold this Forum in 2<sup>nd</sup> week of September

Passed: Unanimous (9-0)

#### 4. Planning and discussion of Forum for Future Housing Needs of Older Adults

Monday May 23 from 2:30-4pm (Zoom)

Advertised and promoted as a listening session

Primary focus is to hear from older residents in Amherst

A meeting looking at the housing needs of an aging population

Aging in place

Affordability and accessibility  
Safe and walkable neighborhoods

**John:** review of survey data (put up on screen)

1. Did a random sample mail survey
  - 500 sent out to over 55+ using Town street list
  - 223 returned; 45% return rate
  - Sent out 2 mailings
2. Convenience sample surveys
  - Largest came through Amherst Neighbors website/messaging
  - Also pick up surveys at a number of local
  - Also did some person to person requests
  - Got 651 returns

Total: 874 surveys received to-date

Highlights of housing-related findings:

Over 70% rated remaining in Amherst as extremely important or very important to

John sees a high % respond “housing is not affordable” – illustrates housing affordability is an issue for a significant number of older adults; please with survey data overall, accomplished what they set out to do

Town staff planning 3 more forums related to the survey

Consensus that Trust is comfortable with participating in this event; Trust will not be primary presenter

## 5. Discussion of new Trust Chair and role

John has spoken to Carol and Erica – open to becoming Chair if they can do it together; vote will not be taken until next meeting; both asked John to produce a job description which is in the packet

(Job description put up on screen)

John reviewed job description with Trust members; we are all community organizers at the end of the day; cultivating relationships with a wide range of housing advocates, developers, legislators; importance of advocacy

**Nate:** staff is a resource; Trust can hire people to assist (e.g. Rita) – don't be daunted by John's list; there is help

**Carol:** could we have your address list – list of names and contact info

**Erica:** this is not a done deal; other Trust members should step forward if they are open to being a candidate; opportunity for anyone to step up

**Nate:** this is a yearly office so always a chance for someone to step up

## 6. Updates and discussions on

- a. Strong Street property evaluation: **Nate:** National Heritage -- still waiting for a meeting to determine how there could be development on the property; still on the table as a possibility
- b. East Gables (132 Northampton Road): **John:** have begun site work; house has been demolished; plans for occupancy a year from September
- c. Legislative Advocacy: **John:** Right to Counsel legislation at State level for those facing eviction – Comerford may be Senate sponsor; **Nate:** has witnessed eviction hearings at Housing Court where Landlord comes with lawyer or two and tenant is left to own devices; this sort of legislation is badly needed; provision in current legislation for small landlords who also can't afford lawyer – not just tenants but also small landlords; **Carol:** importance of stressing that tenant should not wait but act as soon as possible; **John:** require that Landlord provide information to tenants as to what their rights are; question for Trust is whether they want to endorse this legislation; **Erica:** I would support this legislation (including support for small landlords)

**MOTION:** Carol moves to endorse Right to Counsel legislation;  
Second: Rob

**Risha:** would like to read legislation prior to a vote; John will send out for review and put on June meeting for discussion and possible vote

## 7. Discussion of ARPA funding with Asst. Town Manager

Dave Ziomek, Asst. Town Manager, joins panel

Topic: Trust proposals submitted to promote homeownership

**Dave:** I oversee Conservation and Development; worked over the years with John and the Trust; hiring a parttime planner in July to address housing production using CPA funds; two pots of ARPA money for shelter/transitional housing and affordable housing generally; would like to hear from Trust this evening; lot of work is “opportunity based”; staff casts a wide net, continues to be opportunistic – good example is Belchertown Road; real estate is challenging and expensive in Amherst; staff is skilled at finding parcels “that make sense”; ARPA gives few years within which to work; these projects are meant to be gamechangers, meant to make a significant stride forward in these two categories; guided by Master Plan and Comprehensive Housing Plan adopted by Town Council; looking at 3-4 sites for a shelter site; Strong Street, Hickory Ridge, South Amherst Campus, a vacant school site in coming years (Wildwood/Fort River), possible sites for conservation plus affordable housing; 2 million sounds like a lot of money but this is an expensive game; won’t get you to finish line; need to work with partners to make transformative projects possible

**Carol:** wants some money to go into homeownership opportunities, for families with kids in schools; provide predevelopment costs where homeownership is the goal – perhaps at Strong Street? **Dave:** Strong Street IF developable would be conducive to homeownership; also looking at affordable housing for seniors, helping them remain in our community – Hickory Ridge might be an opportunity for affordable Senior Housing; **John:** Valley CDC looking at a property in N.

Amherst with homeownership and families – there predevelopment assistance could be helpful; looks like they will be able to go ahead

**Dave:** Town Council did approve half million CPA funds (250K to Trust) for affordable housing, plus ARPA funds; Wayfinders may be coming back for more Town funds for Belchertown Road project

**John:** Amherst Community Land Trust and Valley CDC have home ownership programs but not on scale – one or two houses at a time;

given high cost of purchase upfront costs are so high; **Rob:** lots of existing homes in Amherst that are not affordable to people; hard to get a “game changer” feeling; but when there is an opportunity to do one or two we should pick them off as we can; has a benefit to the Town in that it helps stabilize neighborhood; Land Trust purchases are protected by deed as to affordability and ownership; incremental and not a “game changer” but if we don’t start it won’t happen; **Dave:** what would investment look like? Staff has discussed Trust model; how do homeowners get equity if there is a restriction? If target population historically can’t get equity does it make sense to limit or deny them equity access; **Rob:** home is equity; may not be a windfall but the home itself is equity (you can borrow against it, e.g.); **Dave:** emphasis on opportunities and being able to act on them when they present; **John:** another area is working with landlords to move away from fossil fuels, to assist in meeting Town’s Climate Change goals; already a model in Chelsea; if Amherst could get a foot in the door, find one major property owner to work with Town on this; highly leveraged program, most of costs paid by MassSave; what remains could be met by ARPA funds; consistent with what ECAC is promoting; **Dave:** Stephanie Ciccarello has been in discussion – how to find right property owner to work with; have had prior conversations with limited success with large property owners: could they upgrade their playground? allow Town to come in to do some of their programs; some recent fruitful conversations with The Brook and Mill Valley due to acquisition of Hickory Ridge property; they brought up sustainability issues with Town and conversations continue; focus right now on access and trails relevant to Hickory Ridge but sustainability piece can be folded in as part of these conversations; key question: where do these potential savings go? To tenant? Landlord? Climate challenge is really around residential housing – Colleges and University are already committed, Town is active, but residential housing market is key piece of the puzzle

8. Public Comment: none
9. Items not anticipated within 48 Hours: none

**MOTION:** To move into Executive Session to discuss possible property acquisition for a permanent shelter and transitional housing where public discussion may be detrimental to ongoing negotiations

Passed: unanimous (9-0)

The public meeting was adjourned at 8:43 PM.