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**Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust**  
**Thursday, April 14, 2022, 7:00 PM**  
**Meeting Minutes**

Present: Allegra Clark, Paul Bockelman, Carol Lewis, Risha Hess, Aschleigh Jensen, Erica Piedad, Rob Crowner, Sid Ferriera, Jennifer Taub, and John Hornik  
Nate Malloy and Rita Farrell  
Maura Keene, Victoria Haskins, Michele McAdaragh, Diane Smith, Laura Baker, Rachel Belanger, George Ryan, Dorothy Pam

**PUBLIC MEETING**

1. Announcements

- a. Welcome new Trust members: Risha Hess, Aschleigh Jensen, and Jennifer Taub (Town Council liaison)
- b. Not changing meeting dates
- c. Phase 2 of the Pioneer Valley housing report: Website of UMass Donahue Institute: see Greater Springfield Housing Report Releases Second Study: <https://donahue.umass.edu/news-events/institute-news/greater-springfield-housing-report-releases-second-study>

Highlights:

**The Pioneer Valley has a serious affordability issue and it can be addressed**

- Based on a calculation of income mismatch for rental housing, the region currently needs at least 17,000 more rental units at or below \$500 a month. This is possible with federal and state funds flowing into the Pioneer Valley to help with recovery.

**COVID-19 made the housing situation harder, particularly for those already in difficult economic positions**

- The pandemic, along with being a public health crisis that hit families and networks of frontline workers with elderly, immunocompromised, smokers and diabetic members hardest, also dramatically worsened economic conditions for low-wage, service and marginal workers primarily through layoffs. Many of the workers who were laid off are people of color and women, who are frequently bearing the economic brunt of both layoffs and the markedly increased care needs of both children and ill family members.

**Prices are going up**

- Housing prices were gradually rising before the pandemic then rose dramatically (for both sales and rentals) during the pandemic due to limited housing stock and low-interest rates.

**Place-based opportunity is here and available to be shared**

- Access to clean air, public transportation, high-scoring schools, nearby jobs, networks of people who are not in poverty and high employer engagement (by hiring local residents) are some of the measurable critical amenities that make the specific place people live important to their chances in life. Economic and racial segregation in the Pioneer Valley could be addressed by a regional, coordinated and intentional approach to housing production and supporting programs.

**Segregation is part of our present**

- Segregation exists both historically and in the present day in the Pioneer Valley. Housing costs, deficits and regulations are reinforcing and continuing to perpetuate segregation across our communities. The approach of working regionally on cost and availability of housing were the primary solutions suggested to begin to change these trends.

**John’s Comments:** I find it frustrating to see this defined as a "regional problem". Yes, the geographic area identified as the Pioneer Valley does share these problems. But the legal and political authority to address them lies with individual towns, as well as the State and Federal governments.

While the latter are needed to provide resources, the towns must decide through planning, zoning, and some financing what can happen on the ground. Groups like PVPC, FRCOG and others can consult, convene, and complain, but they can do nothing if the towns are uninterested in working with them. This is illustrated by the fact that Hampshire County government was literally dissolved two years ago. This is a major barrier to "scaling up" change to use Frank Robinson’s words.

So... to my mind describing this as a “regional problem” has very, very limited value. When Way Finders does a new development, it does not happen in the region; it happens in an individual town, or it does not happen.

The idea of regional goals for housing production only makes sense in an academic presentation. It does not make sense on the ground. If it did then Amherst, Belchertown, Hadley, etc. would already have a regional housing production plan. Sadly they do not and are not likely to in the foreseeable future.

2. Review minutes from March meeting: No comments
3. East Street School/Belchertown Road developer selection and planning
  - a. Way Finders’ proposal was presented by Diane Smith, Chief Real Estate Development Officer; Michelle McAdaragh and Rachel Belanger were also present to respond to questions. The PowerPoint presentation is in a separate attachment to these minutes.

- b. The Way Finders presentation was followed by a brief discussion about planning for a larger public meeting when the work would be presented. Decisions about when to hold the meeting, whom to invite, and how to reach out will be discussed at the Trust's May meeting. There was a preference for waiting until September.

#### 4. Housing and Zoning:

Jennifer Taub presented information about issues related to managing competition for housing in Amherst that are the focus of the Community Resources Committee going forward. The overall goals are to protect housing that meets the needs of year-round households, particularly families, as well as expanding the size and diversity of housing stock for all. Housing needs to serve all types of residents, not predominantly students.

Increasing numbers of students are renting in Amherst neighborhoods, spurred by pricing by the bedroom, putting rentals out-of-reach for many households. There are new studio apartments in the market that are only 250-300 square feet but will rent for as much as \$1900/month.

Nate pointed out that homeownership for low-income families is increasingly difficult. Valley Community Development has assisted people in bidding \$250-300 thousand on a home, only to find that someone else subsequently offered a higher amount backed by cash.

Jennifer indicated that different types of zoning changes will be considered, including defining different types of apartment buildings, both larger and smaller, duplexes and triplexes by right, and cottage development. There will be an effort to encourage greater development of by right accessory dwelling units, consistent with bylaw changes in the past year. The Town Planning Department is currently working on drafting new zoning bylaws.

Carol noted that inclusionary zoning is a mechanism that will incrementally expand affordable housing in Amherst, alongside larger developments like the affordable studio apartments at East Gables and the mix of one, two and three-bedroom affordable units at East Street-Belchertown Road.

#### 5. Updates and Discussions on:

- a. Strong Street property evaluation. Nate briefly presented pending environmental issues related to development of the Town Strong Street property. As more data becomes available, this topic will come back to future Trust meetings.

b. Age and dementia friendly survey (John)

As of April 10, 669 surveys have been returned, an increase of 272 in the past three weeks. We will continue to receive surveys until the end of April. Overall, the most responses came through the mailed survey (201 out of 500 mailed), followed by other (178), Amherst Neighbors (114), and “someone I know personally” (91). If we take out “other” which is multiple sources, the three larger sources account for about 60% of all respondents. I note that the “other” includes elected officials, Mindy Domb and Town Councilors. It also includes Senior Center staff, as well as surveys distributed through the Bangs Center Meal distribution program and the *Senior Spirit*.

The number of respondents who are persons of color has increased significantly. Three weeks ago, we had 36 and now we’re up to 73. There does not seem to be one particularly important source: The mailed survey increased from 13 to 17, “someone I know” from 4 to 18, and “other” from 11 to 20. As our outreach each efforts continue, we’ll probably see a bit more improvement by the end of April when data collection will end.

c. East Gables: Construction has started on the 28 studio apartments at 132 Northampton Road.

d. Legislative Advocacy

CHAPA Notes:

**Update on Emergency Rental Assistance Programs**

**Governor Signs Supplemental Budget with \$100 Million for Emergency Rental Assistance**

On April 1, [Governor Baker signed a supplemental state budget](#) for FY2022 that provides \$100 million in additional funding for emergency rental assistance through the RAFT program. The budget also extends renter protections through March 31, 2023, which pauses eviction cases for tenants who have a pending application for emergency rental assistance.

On April 15, the state will stop accepting applications for the federally funded Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) and Subsidized Housing Emergency Rental Assistance (SHERA) program as these federal funds are depleted. Residents can still [apply online](#) for the state emergency rental assistance program, RAFT. This program provides up to \$7,000 for rent and other housing costs, including moving expenses. Homeowners can continue to access the federal [Homeowner Assistance Fund](#).

**House Ways & Means Releases FY2023 State Budget Proposal**

On April 13, the House Committee on Ways and Means released its [FY2023 state](#)

[budget proposal](#). The budget would provide millions of dollars in increased funding for many of CHAPA's affordable housing priorities, including the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program, the Alternative Housing Voucher Program, Public Housing, RAFT, and HomeBASE. The Massachusetts House will debate its budget proposal the last week of April.

The meeting was adjourned at 9 PM.

Attachment: Way Finders' Power Point Presentation

Minutes respectfully submitted by John Hornik