

6/24/2019

This document contains the text of Valley Community Development Corporation's letter to the Town Council Finance Committee (dated May 21st, 2019) concerning their proposed development at 132 Northampton Road, and a step by step response from a neighbor.

Summary of key points:

WHAT IS AT STAKE:

- We pay taxes to support the common good and should work to increase our affordable housing stock and support solutions to end homelessness. We should consider whether this proposal is a good one to meet those needs.
- Valley needs the Town's support to proceed: State funding for the proposed development hinges on funding from the Town of Amherst. This is the key moment of leverage to ask for modifications to the proposal in response to concerns raised by more than 50 neighbors and abutters.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TOWN:

- Valley CDC's proposed development at 132 Northampton Rd. will do little to increase the stock of affordable housing or solve homelessness, yet comes at a large cost to taxpayers.
- Amherst pays \$750,000 for the project and gains back only \$418,238 in taxes over the next twenty years. That's a net loss to taxpayers of -\$331,762, without including any costs of foregone capital use, the value of the development rights given away to Valley CDC, or other unbudgeted costs resulting from the project such as additional need for social services or loss of open space use at adjacent Pratt Field.
- As currently structured, there is no mechanism to hold the developer accountable to the town for any unexpected costs.
- The proposed development will likely have little impact on the number of people experiencing homelessness in Amherst. At best, 4-5% of the people who seek help at Craig's Doors shelter could be accommodated. Realistically, no change in homelessness in Amherst is expected due to the regional nature of the problem.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPER:

- The developer is a highly respected non-profit organization. We do not doubt that they are ultimately seeking to do good and that they are good people.
- The developer has a substantial organizational and financial stake in this development. Valley CDC's project budget shows multiple fees that do not directly pay for the building, staff, or operations: These include \$550,000 in developer fees and overhead, plus > \$16,000 in management fees on an ongoing basis.
- Given Valley CDC's financial stake in the project, their letter places inappropriate pressure on the Town Council by asking them to finance this project prior to

meaningful input by town residents or due consideration of more cost-effective solutions to town goals.

ALTERNATIVES EXIST

- A more fair deal for the Town would use the \$500,000 in CPA funds to acquire this parcel and re-start the process of developing it for affordable housing. This would give the Town a mechanism for accountability, the long run value of the asset, and time for meaningful input from neighbors to create a stronger affordable housing proposal at the site.
- We could also commit these funds to other initiatives to reach our goals. Many alternatives exist that could provide more housing, more benefits to the Town of Amherst, or do more to solve homelessness. This project should not move forward unless it is actually better than realistic alternatives to support the common good.

FROM VALLEY CDC:

May 21, 2019

To the Amherst Finance Committee:

Valley Community Development Corporation (“Valley”) understands there is considerable misinformation circulating about our proposed mixed-income Studio Apartments at 132 Northampton Road. Information is attached to address some misconceptions and to respond to concerns from neighbors and abutters to the property. Perhaps the largest misconception is that this housing will only serve persons from special populations who are very low income. This is not the case. This is an intentionally mixed income development where the majority of units (almost 60%) are for typical moderate income renters who earn up to \$49,700 per year. This type of housing is sometimes referred to as “workforce housing.” A majority of the Amherst workforce is income-eligible to live in these units, including many persons employed in the service industry, health care, local schools, public safety, municipal government, and education.

RESPONSE: According to [Valley CDC’s application to the Community Development Block Grant](#), the project consists of:

- 10 units for 30% AMI homeless persons (MRVP-Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program)
- 2 units for clients of the Dept of Mental Health - 30% AMI tenants (MRVP)
- 8 units for 50% AMI persons (self-pay)
- 8 units for 80% AMI persons (self-pay)

This development would be the only one in Amherst to serve only single, low-income people. 43% are from the highest need populations. There are no restrictions to the development that

would prevent Valley CDC from serving 100% of clients from high need populations. In fact, in Valley CDC's budget, the rents for the apartment with vouchers would bring in more revenue than the ones without (\$702 per month vs. \$650 and \$675).

This development is not like [Rolling Green](#) or [Butternut Farm](#), which include a mix of unit types and are family-oriented. It also does not constitute ordinary "workforce" housing. Residents must undergo non-routine screening by Valley CDC and will be subject to special rules that include no overnight guests. The living spaces are small in comparison to other apartment buildings in Amherst and surrounding communities (240 sq ft. each) and the 28 residents will share common spaces. The project development has only 7 paved parking spaces for the 28 spots yet the closest bus stop is 0.4 mi away, with very limited service routes, many of which do not operate in the summer.

VALLEY: Valley believes that most of the concerns raised by neighbors and abutters are appropriate for discussion at the zoning permit hearings for this development, which lie in the future. Zoning hearings typically review scale and density, traffic and parking, neighborhood impact, public safety, etc. We assume the Finance Committee's role is to focus on the potential financial impact of the development, rather than to serve in lieu of the zoning permit body.

RESPONSE: Lack of a full review of this project by the Town Council would bypass local democracy and oversight. The proposed development relies crucially on Town funding because that funding is needed to move forward to seek funds from the state. It is the sole responsibility of the Town Council to allocate those funds. All aspects of the project should be considered carefully before committing any taxpayer dollars to an outside developer. If Valley CDC supports an open and transparent process, they should be open to discussing all aspects of the project up front.

VALLEY: Assuming the Finance Committee follows the recommendation of the Amherst CPC and advises Town Council to approve CPA funds for this development, Valley will continue to advance project plans to the stage when zoning permit hearings can take place. At that time, there will be ample opportunity for community input. As is typical, we assume any commitment of CPA funds will be contingent upon Valley obtaining zoning permit approval and raising all other necessary financing. No CPA funds are at risk or will be dispersed until the project has been approved by the Town's Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). Therefore, the commitment of CPA funds is not a de facto project approval. It signals the Town's interest in a proposed development which responds to identified community housing needs and a willingness to move forward to a more formal level of review.

RESPONSE: This statement implies that all of this is just "preliminary" and that Valley would be open to changes in the scope of their project. In fact, neighbors of the project and town councilors have already asked for such changes. Suggestions have been raised to make the project more progressive by including a smaller scale for the project, more on-site staffing, family-oriented housing, or a true mix of unit sizes including families. The two families

immediately abutting the development have [raised concerns since January](#). Amherst College is also [on record as having concerns in April](#).

Valley CDC has not made a single change to their proposal in response to any of this concerned input so far. There is no reason to believe they would make any changes to their proposal once the town has already committed funding and the most important point of leverage is lost. **In a true participatory process, the Town would have sought neighborhood input immediately after this site was acquired.**

VALLEY: The proposed mixed-income Studio Apartment development is an outgrowth of over 3 years of intentional actions by the Town to promote critically needed affordable housing. These actions include public forums (with one having over 100 residents attend), roundtable meetings with local and regional developers and service providers, planning efforts by the Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust (AMAHT) and staff, and positive vote by Town Meeting to change zoning to allow this type of project by-right.

This is a misrepresentation of the history and full set of priorities. The notes of the public forum ([which can be found here](#)) show that it began with a promotional panel event from Valley CDC entitled “Studio Apartments Coming to Amherst.” Valley CDC also led a brainstorming session at the forum to “inform” the public that their model is a good one. Another interpretation of these notes is that Valley CDC has engaged in a long process of lobbying for their preferred mode of development. That does not mean it is the only or best solution, or that the site specific and financial considerations for the 132 Northampton Rd. development have been properly vetted by the town. It is questionable whether their development is the “grassroots” solution that they are implying.

In fact, the [notes from that town forum](#) show support for multiple other solutions to homelessness, including inclusionary zoning, creating shelter space for families, using conservation land for cluster-housing, expanding the possibility for backyard homes, using outreach counselors to help prevent homelessness and ensure access to services, working with landlords to accept renters without upfront deposits, building a comprehensive town safety net, figuring out how family members could rent to those with vouchers, developing more housing for the ~4500 UMass students living in town who crowd out affordable housing for others, and facilitating more large-scale developments like Rolling Green.

Furthermore, the notes of this meeting say “Studios and SROs need to be situated in the downtown area, where tenants could access public transportation, retailers and social services to transition from homelessness.” The current proposed site is not in the downtown area. In fact, there is no commercial activity close to the site (unless you include private residences that do Air BnB-type accommodations). Meanwhile, the town allowed another developer to override zoning requirements to build two five-story apartment buildings in the crucial downtown area without a SINGLE unit of affordable housing.

Valley CDC has indeed gone to a lot of meetings. Valley CDC's proposal requires an override of current town zoning laws and required repeal of a law against developers having units of all one size. That law was designed to stop developers from engaging in exactly the kind of project now being objected to: one with lots of tiny units that delivers a lot of revenue for the developer.

Valley portrays the \$50,000 grant for site selection as evidence of support for their project. However, with this funding in hand, in fact any site they selected would appear to be already supported by the town. The notes of the Amherst [Affordable Housing Trust from February 7th](#) mentions opposition by neighbors at the CBDG hearing and the need to "quell the false concerns."

Regardless, all of these meetings and prior actions are behind us. **The Town Council should think about whether or not the proposed development actually meets Amherst's highest needs and is a smart contribution to regional development or not.**

VALLEY: It responds to the highest housing priorities within the Town's Master Plan, Housing Market Study, Housing Production Plan, and the AMAHT Strategic Plan.

RESPONSE: In fact, none of these documents state that single unit occupancy housing is the highest priority for the town. These documents list several crucially important but competing priorities for housing. Town residents are invited to read these documents for yourselves and make your own interpretations. For example, p. 8 of the Amherst Affordable Housing Trust Strategic Plan (FY 18-FY22) says, "The largest unmet need is housing for people with disabilities, followed by housing suitable for families; and for seniors. In addition, there is an unmet need for housing for persons who are experiencing chronic homelessness."

[Town of Amherst Master Plan](#)
[Amherst Housing Market Study](#)
[Amherst Housing Production Plan](#)
[Amherst Affordable Housing Trust Strategic Plan](#)
[Amherst Community Development Strategy](#)

In addition, one thing these documents do say (see p. 73 and p. 93 of the Amherst Housing Production plan) is that **there should be meaningful input by neighbors in all processes regarding development.**

VALLEY: It comes with recommendations and support from: the AMAHT, the Town CDBG Advisory Committee, the Amherst Housing Authority, the Amherst Community Preservation Act Committee, the Amherst League of Women Voters, Amherst Forward, and individual Amherst residents. A compilation of sample support letters is attached. There have been many points of contact with Town boards and committees and multiple public meetings during planning. These are summarized in an attached timeline prepared by the Amherst Planning Department.

RESPONSE: We assume these organizations have very good intentions. That does not mean that they have made careful, informed and considered deliberations about the project. They have responded only to the positive information provided to them by Valley CDC. None of these organizations appear to have looked closely at the financial implications for the town (which are clearly negative, see below), the safety concerns outlined in a letter from residents (which emerged from police call logs of Valley's Northampton properties obtained in May 2019), or the conflicts with open space (which emerged from discussions with Amherst College in May 2019). **More than 50 neighbors of the project have signed an informed letter of concern based on these facts.** We hope these organizations will take time to reconsider their recommendations upon reflection of the facts of the proposal and a wise consideration of alternatives.

Crucially, Valley CDC did not present the development plans to abutters until after they had already received the key CPAC recommendation and after the Community and Resources Committee voted to forward the recommendations. (Note that Councilor Schreiber was absent from that crucial CRC meeting, so only four town councilors participated.) The minutes of the CPAC meeting ([here](#)) show that none of the major concerns listed above were asked about or vetted prior to that point. The minutes of the CRC committee ([here](#)) show not a single question was asked about Valley CDC's project.

When Valley CDC did present their plans after these meetings, only immediate abutters were invited. The crucial sequencing of these dates is not included in the "timeline" posted online. These actions have the appearance that Valley CDC hoped not to disclose the details to many people until they had secured the financing and it was too late to consider whether this development was really a good idea for Amherst. This pattern appears to continue with Valley pressuring the Council to advance it to the next stage of the ZBA without meaningful input.

VALLEY:

Primary Financial Impacts:

- Valley has received or requested **\$750,000** in local funds for the proposed development (\$50,000 in CDBG planning funds already spent to identify the site and undertake site feasibility analysis; \$200,000 in CDBG planning funds approved locally to pay for design and energy efficiency; and \$500,000 in CPA funds recommended by the Amherst CPC.)
- If awarded, \$750,000 in local funds translates to **\$26,786 per affordable unit**. This is the **lowest per unit allocation** of local funds for any Town-assisted affordable housing that has been developed to date. The median amount of Town funds per new affordable housing unit is \$42,000, with a high of \$160,000 per unit and a low of \$30,357.

RESPONSE:

This is a misleading argument. The total development cost of each unit is stated in Valley CDC's budget at \$171,901 per unit. ([Their documents.](#)) Pointing only to the share paid by the town implies that state and federal funds are free and seeking them has no impact on the town or society in general.

We all pay state and federal taxes and if they are spent on this project, then another, more worthy affordable housing project, will not get funded. In addition, the Town of Amherst will need state matching funds for other critical capital projects: such as the elementary schools renovation, new fire station, library, and DPW building. We must maintain a good reputation for being careful stewards of state and federal funds.

In their project documents, Valley CDC says they have benchmarked their project cost against five others. However, email communication with Laura Baker confirmed that these are all from Valley CDC's own projects. **No information has been provided about external cost benchmarks.**

Clearly, the development creates housing that is significantly more expensive than the current stock. **Email communication with Laura Baker confirmed that the total development costs for the proposed 12,890 gross square foot building are \$373 per square foot.** In comparison, the median list price of housing in Amherst is \$219 per sq ft according to Zillow. The current median list price of housing even in the Boston-Cambridge-Newton region is \$300.

Valley CDC maintains that their costs are high because they are building affordable housing and building small units. **Yet their costs are still far higher than the comparable benchmarks.** For the relevant Springfield region, the 2018 HUD guidelines for a 500 square foot affordable housing unit in a building with an elevator (the type proposed by Valley CDC) is: \$88,527 for total construction costs and \$141,644 for total development cost. (Source note: The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development publishes [annual guidelines for the maximum total construction cost and total development costs for affordable housing](#). These costs are based on the average of two construction cost data sets from individual regions across the country: the R.S. Means for "average" quality construction and the Marshall and Swift cost index for "good" construction quality. See [this document](#).) Compare:

Valley: \$172,000 per 240 square foot unit; \$373 per square foot
HUD guidelines: \$141,644 per 500 square foot unit; \$283 per square foot

Valley's costs per square foot are thus at least 30% higher than the best available external benchmark for affordable housing developments of similar size and type, in our region.

Valley's development budget shows substantial soft costs, which include: \$263,000 for architecture and engineering, \$65,000 for legal fees on top of routine permitting, \$30,000 for "Clerk of the works" which is someone to supervise construction, on top of the \$20,000 construction monitoring fee, \$17,000 for a construction testing fee and \$28,000 for an energy consultant. In addition to those soft costs, Valley has budgeted \$550,000 for developer fees and overhead. Valley's operating budget shows that they will collect more than \$16,000 per year in management fees. These are fees on top of any cost to actually operate the building and provide staffing.

Many organizations charge overhead and these numbers are not necessarily excessive. But they highlight Valley's substantial financial interest in this development. The Town Council must consider whether it is appropriate to use taxpayer dollars to support an outside organization in this way, however worthy their mission may be.

VALLEY:

- If awarded, the Town contribution of \$750,000 will comprise 15.6% of the total development cost and will leverage over \$4,000,000 from other public and private sources.*
- The current assessed value of this property is \$249,300, which is estimated to increase to \$963,000 following development.*
- This property will pay real estate taxes following development, as it does now. Real estate taxes are projected to increase almost four-fold, from the current annual tax of \$5,435 to an estimated annual tax of \$21,000 in the first year of operations. Over the first 10 years, this amounts to increased tax revenue of \$178,435 over the present use; over 20 years the increased revenue is \$418,238.*
- All on-going operating costs will be paid from rental income or state sources, with no on-going use of local funds.*

RESPONSE: Using Valley CDC's own numbers, this means that the town will pay \$750,000 now to get \$418,238 over the next twenty years. **That is a large negative number: -\$331,762 in twenty years.**

That number doesn't account for the cost of forgone use of that capital. If we don't have the \$500,000 in CPA funds available for other projects, we will have to borrow more and pay interest on that loan. E.g., if we pay 3.5% interest on a \$500,000 loan, then over 20 years we would owe \$350,000 in interest to another party as we embark on our town's much needed capital projects.

In addition, this does not take into account any of the potential unbudgeted capital or operating costs of this project, or the lost use value of open space. Unbudgeted capital costs may include needs for better traffic management and lighting in the area. Unbudgeted operating costs may include additional need for social services to staff the building to ensure the safety of residents occupying the building or the neighborhood.

The project may result in the closure of Pratt Field to the public. Currently, the general public, including a large number of families with young children, enjoys access to this large recreational open space immediately adjacent to the area. This open space is provided at no cost to the town. Amherst College, however, has a legal responsibility to mitigate safety risks to their students and reserves the right to close the field to public use at any point they see fit. Any incidents where student safety is threatened or even just perceived to be threatened may result in public closure of this neighborhood commons. If the project does indeed result in the closure of Pratt Field to public access, that is a cost to the town in terms of lost use value of an open space.

Most distressingly, there is no proposed mechanism to hold Valley CDC accountable for these types of unbudgeted costs.

Considering everything together, this development seems to subsidize the development of an asset, where substantial financial gains go to an outside developer while substantial local costs are borne by the town. The Town Finance Committee should give serious consideration to this imbalance.

VALLEY: · The Town's cost for public safety is expected to be slightly reduced because the cost of police response is estimated to be less when currently homeless Amherst residents are placed in housing.

RESPONSE: It is unclear what evidence Valley CDC is basing this assumption on. Valley CDC seems to be assuming that the development will result in fewer homeless persons residing in Amherst. Unfortunately, there is no reason to believe that will occur. Craig's Doors shelter was full and forced to turn away people nearly every week in the winter. Homelessness is a regional problem and there are people needing help statewide. While it is a worthy goal to create more housing, it is unrealistic to assume that this will lead to any net change in homelessness in Amherst.

This is backed up by [a recent study](#) from the Boston Federal Reserve research department finding no change in homelessness at the local level due to increased subsidized housing. Change was only seen when there were substantial new resources at the regional level. This is due to the reality of mobility of many homeless persons across town and city boundaries.

Even if the project does house persons who would otherwise have been homeless in Amherst, at most 70% of the units may be requested to be reserved for people experiencing homelessness in Amherst. That means, at a maximum, 7 homeless persons from Amherst can be housed. That is only 4% of the people who need help (Amherst's Craig's Doors shelter says that during the 2017-2018 fall/winter, [they served 172 individuals.](#))

Realistically, this development will not change the situation of homelessness in Amherst.

VALLEY: · The CPC has recommended bonding \$500,000 for this development. We note that, by the time CPA funds will be dispersed for this development, more than \$100,000 in current annual CPA debt service will be retired.

RESPONSE: Requests for CPA funding exceeded available funding this year. This development means that \$500,000 in other worthy projects over the next several years, including better proposals for affordable housing, cannot be funded by CPA, as explained above.

VALLEY: It is important for the Finance Committee and Town Council to commit CPA funds at this time. Local funds serve as the catalyst for raising the bulk of necessary financing from the State. Valley's ability to successfully compete for State funds (which are severely

oversubscribed and for which competitions are only held annually) is linked to the strength of local support. Inaction, or delay in committing local funds, will adversely impact the development. Valley has significant carrying costs for the site—the pressure of these costs increases over time. The purchase of this property early in the planning process is something Valley has never undertaken, due to the financial risk. However, we found that the hot housing market in Amherst and the abundance of cash investors made early purchase the only viable option.

RESPONSE: This highlights the key role that the Town Council plays in this development and why this must be decided by the council, not the ZBA. **It also highlights the concerns of the neighborhood. Is it appropriate for an outside developer to pressure the Town Council to rush a process of community discussion and financial vetting?**

VALLEY: There is also a human cost to delay. Craig's Doors shelter reports being unable to accommodate many homeless persons throughout the past winter. Each winter that passes without developing viable permanent housing for Amherst's most vulnerable residents increases the toll on these individuals.

RESPONSE: Valley CDC bought this property in January. It is a fully functional 4-bedroom house. It sat empty for the rest of the winter of 2019. Why could it not have been rented out during that time to deserving individuals? Why can it not be rented out now to worthy individuals?

There is also a human cost to wasteful spending. If development costs were lowered or if other developers were allowed to build housing at lower prices, more housing would be available than under this high cost project. State and federal money could go to more cost-effective development projects so that more people can be helped.

The project does not actually help the most vulnerable homeless individuals. Valley CDC will only accept residents who have already gone through the process of appropriate paperwork with the state to be eligible for vouchers. These clients would already have the best chance of finding housing.

This development will do nothing to help the homeless in Amherst who do not pass that screening or do not qualify for vouchers. The town should consider solutions that help a substantial number of homeless persons in Amherst.

To date, Amherst has fallen far short of its production goals for affordable housing, as defined in its Housing Production Plan. Placing any delays or roadblocks in the way of an affordable housing development that is responsive to Town needs is directly counter to the Town's interests. An affirmative recommendation from the Finance Committee would carry forward the 3 years of planning and positive work done by the Town to provide much needed housing.

*Please let me know if you have questions or need additional information.
Thank you for your time and consideration,*

Laura Baker

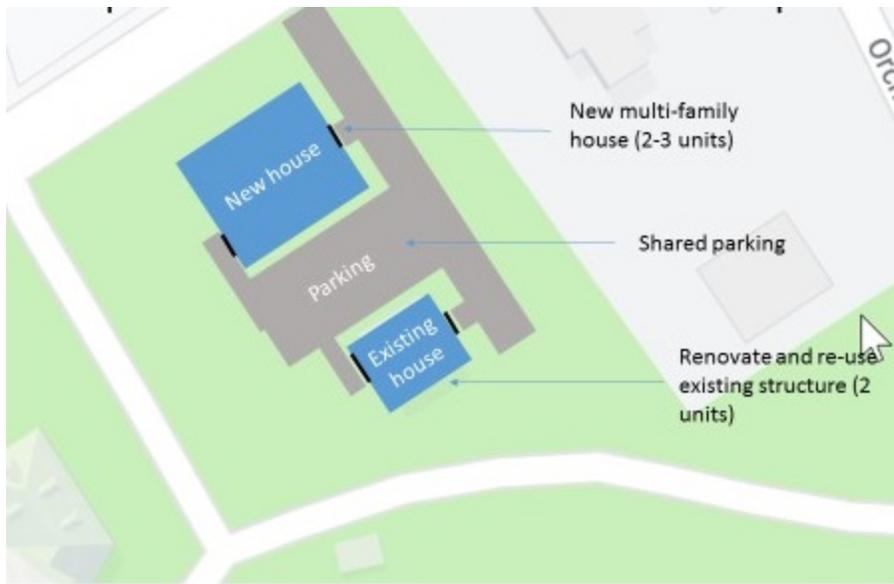
It is a legitimate and desirable use of taxes in Amherst to support projects that would help to provide additional housing and/or help homeless persons. However, Valley's proposal provides small gains for the Town at a high cost.

Amherst's most important housing asset is the rights to develop our land. We have a "hot housing market" because that land is in scarce supply and is extremely valuable. The rights to develop at higher density than allowed by the zoning code are held in common by all town citizens and should be used for our the common good. The current proposal gives these rights away—indeed pays an outside developer to take them--without asking for anything in return.

There are many alternate ways to use this site to build affordable housing or ways to address homelessness that would likely be more financially and socially beneficial for the town.

Increase the overall housing stock: There are many types of development that would respond to the town's Housing Production Plan and to regional needs for affordable housing. **The fastest and cheapest way to increase overall housing units targeted at single individuals would be to build more student-oriented housing.** This was a major conclusion of the [2015 Housing Market Study](#). An example of this type of initiative is the development currently underway to build 1000 new units at UMass. This will pull in [~600 students who otherwise would have lived in town](#). These units provide good opportunities for the town to acquire existing rental buildings that are no longer serving students and make them part of the affordable housing stock.

Create town-owned family affordable housing at this site: Affordable family housing is also still a high priority need in Amherst (see [2018 presentation by John Hornik of the Amherst Municipal Housing Trust](#)). In that presentation, he noted the key problem that many families with parents working in Amherst can no longer afford to live here. **This site would be an excellent one for family-oriented, accessible, affordable housing** developed by the town of Amherst. If the town bought this land with the \$500,000 of CPA funding, they could then lease it to a developer in the same way that the East Street School site is being developed. It is interesting to note [that the town felt that a lease on that land would give them more control in case something went wrong](#). One specific option would be to convert the existing house into a two family house and then build another two or three family house at the site, with parking in between. This could be done by more cost-efficient organizations with a positive record in the town of Amherst, e.g. Habitat for Humanity. Because of the sloping nature of the parcel, this could accommodate four units that are fully accessible, without any need to maintain expensive elevators. This site provides an excellent opportunity to house families with disabilities. E.g.:



A [2018 report from the Boston Fed's Public Policy Center](#) on the supply of permanent supportive housing in Massachusetts finds that "Massachusetts has made marked progress toward increasing the state's PSH (Permanent Supportive Housing) inventory, with at least one PSH bed available per chronically homeless individual in 2016 and 2017. **There remains, however, a statewide shortage in PSH beds for chronically homeless families.**" This suggests that we would make a more impactful contribution—even to the region—by building family-oriented affordable housing.

Set aside funding for higher impact solutions to fight homelessness: The Town Council could also make a promise to spend the amount of money that would have been devoted to this project in order to fund other solutions. People who have worked for years on the problem of homelessness are now calling for us to move to accountable community systems for ending homelessness. That means that we need to match the complex set of people experiencing homelessness to the right set of solutions. (["Moving from Charity to Justice in Our Work to End Homelessness."](#)) We need solutions that have higher impact and are available to all homeless persons in Amherst. As suggested in the [forum on homelessness](#), these include providing outreach counseling tailored to individual needs and to assist in gaining vouchers for housing, providing more stabilization services for people about to become homeless, expanding efforts to work with landlords to accept vouchers, expanding Amherst Municipal Housing Authority properties, and increasing student housing so that more housing is available for people with vouchers. In particular, the forum notes mention outreach counselors as a solution that might mean "small investment for significant returns."

In summary, the current design proposal is not necessarily a good fit for our needs and goals. Rather than allowing an outside developer to set the agenda, Town Councilors should work towards solutions that benefit Amherst and answer the highest needs of the region.