

MEETING NOTES

SAFE AND HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS – WORKING GROUP

November 27, 2012

Introductions of Working Group members

ZIOMEK

- DZ noted that there are 2 unfilled positions – 1 faculty member and 1 student. It was suggested that having more than one student would make students feel less intimidated. Perhaps extend to the 3 educational institutions in Amherst and look at a different time to make it easier for students to attend.
- Email reminder – in order to comply with the open meeting law, members should not send emails discussing issues to other members. Questions, suggestions, etc. should go to DZ
- There will be no minutes – only notes of the salient points
- Public input will be limited during the early part of the process. Public can send questions, suggestions etc. via email to DZ and their concerns will be addressed at a later meeting.
- There will be public meetings later in the process.
- All meetings are open to the public. Agendas and all materials will be posted on the SHN Web page.

MUSANTE

John Musante spoke of the importance of the project and the objectives for the group.

- Develop recommendations for Select Board, Planning Board by March 1 to take to the Annual Town Meeting.
- Committee is heavily loaded with staff for a reason – staff will provide support and continued research.
- Urgency to this effort.
- Recommendations need to be action oriented
- Recommendations from John to the SB will be concurrent with budget development
- Two Focus Points
 1. Inspection/Rental Registration
 2. Detailed look at 4 unrelated bylaw

ZIOMEK

Challenge is complex – responsibilities of tenants, landlords, colleges/university, etc. Group will be looking at what departments are doing right now in the field with current regulations.

MORRA – INSPECTION SERVICES

- Inspection Services is tracking complaints and Jon Thompson, the Town's code enforcement officer is responding to those complaints.

- Progress so far:
 - 87 cases since June 1
 - 75 have been resolved
- Information is available on website on the Inspection Services and SHN pages
- Info will be updated on 15th and the end of the month
- Looking for creative ways to deal with issues now
- They need rental registration in order to do their job

FEDERMAN - HEALTH

- Refocus – more timely response
- Email response
- Writing orders with more detail, to get better compliance
- Working with the University
- Leaving off-campus brochure
- Leaflet neighborhoods two times a year
- Trying different education techniques
- Weekly/Bi-weekly drive-byes of nuisance houses

NELSON – FIRE

- Addition of full time inspector to handle complaints and housing issues
- Compliance is the goal – for safety
- Joint effort with Inspection and health to do joint inspections

LIVINGSTONE – POLICE

- Reinstitute joint patrols with University. Will expand in the Spring
- Continue to work with UMass administration
- Enforcement is still the largest and most important role of the APD

Town Departments are actively out there in the field. Trying to be more coordinated in their efforts

RENTAL REGULATIONS – TUCKER

How do you regulate rental properties?

1. Enforcement programs – enforce existing regulations (predominantly state regs)
2. BOH programs – which are the most powerful regulations, because they deal with health and safety issues.
3. Local ordinances and bylaws

COMMENTS & QUESTIONS

What should rental regulations include? Review preliminary draft.

How many rental units are there in Amherst? Don't really know – estimate 1,000 – 2,000, not including apartment complexes, but it could be much larger.

Regulations are to deal with entire dwelling units – not lodgers.

Has there been consideration given to self certification?

Why did rental registration not work in the past?

- Not enforceable
- Assessors' info can be 5 years old

Any rental registration needs to be practical and have a positive output/effect

Suggested that landlords go through a training process about what is required and expected and then be certified.

Can GIS be updated to tie it to property tax?

Are we drawing information from other college towns?

- Yes, however each state has different enabling legislation. Some cities/towns that have rental registration in place: State College, PA; Boulder, CO; Burlington, VT; Chapel Hill, NC; Madison, WI.

It was suggested that we get a list of peer institutions and their housing data and rental registration process to review.

The regulations will relate to Town Meeting work – i.e. zoning articles, etc.

The group and departments should ask themselves, “What are the tools I don’t have?”

4-UNRELATED - MORRA

There is evidence that occupancies are higher than the bylaw allows.

What should standard be?

Enforcement challenges:

- Need to enter the building appropriately.
- What info can they collect – number of beds, number of cars not enough. Need evidence that a space is occupied by a person, which takes time and follow-up.
- Unless invited – can’t go in!
- Can only do what Mass Gen Law will allow.

It was suggested that 4 unrelated is out of date and perhaps square footage and basic requirements for what constitutes a bedroom should be a determining factor.

It’s not how many can we fit in a dwelling that is critical, but how will it impact the neighborhood?

Our community is different – we have lots of undergraduates living in the community that behave in a certain way.

HOMEWORK

- Flesh out permit regulation pieces
- Review packet material
- Come up with a timeline for producing draft
- Invite public
- Subgroups? Decide after 2 meetings
- Update website – so that individual pieces of the packet can be viewed separately
- After January 1 – meet every 2 weeks.
- Set up email through website for emails regarding SHNWG