



**Town of Amherst  
Open Meeting of the Residents  
Regarding Studio Apartment Supportive Housing – 132 Northampton Road  
Monday, June 24, 2019, 6:30 p.m.  
Large Activity Room  
Bangs Community Center  
70 Boltwood Walk**

*Project Page <https://www.amherstma.gov/3489/Northampton-Road-Project>*

*Complete video is available online: <https://amherstmedia.org/content/amherst-town-council-open-meeting-june-24-2019>*

## **Minutes**

### **1. Call to order and declaration of a quorum**

President Griesemer declared the presence of a quorum and called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Councilors present: Councilors Bahl-Milne, Brewer, DeAngelis, DuMont, Griesemer, Hanneke, Pam, Ross, Ryan, Schoen, Schreiber, Steinberg, Swartz.

Councilors absent: None

Councilors participating remotely: None

Others present: Assistant Town Manager David Ziomek, Clerk pro tem Athena O’Keeffe, Planning Director Chris Brestrup

President Griesemer announced audio and video recording by Amherst Media, the Daily Hampshire Gazette, and Art Keene.

### **2. Rules of Engagement**

President Griesemer reviewed the rules of engagement.

### **3. Presentations**

- a. **Recommendation of the Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC) – Nate Budington, Chair, Community Preservation Act Committee**

Nate Budington, Chair of the CPAC, spoke about the committee membership, and that the project received unanimous and enthusiastic support from the committee. Mr. Budington provided data and statistics regarding affordability of housing, rental housing and accessibility issues. Mr. Budington urged the Council to approve the project.

**b. Project Description and response to known questions – Valley CDC**

**1) Project overview and highlights of neighbor concerns – Laura Baker, Real Estate Property Manager, Valley CDC, and Joanne Campbell, Executive Director, Valley CDC**

Laura Baker, real estate property manager at Valley CDC, spoke about the site location, preliminary site plan, site characteristics, comparable properties in Northampton, income caps, anticipated tenant information, anticipated zoning approval process including notices to abutters and public hearings, key concerns and discussion points.

**2) Discussion of tenant selection procedures & typical tenant issues – Property Manager Liz Reno from Housing Management Resources, Inc. (HMR)**

Liz Reno from Housing Management Resources, Inc. manages about 200 affordable housing units. Ms. Reno spoke about the importance of stable housing. Residents come from different backgrounds, many residents make minimum wage \$12/hour; there is a lack of housing for people at that income level. Residents complete a background check. Many residents are formerly homeless. HMR ensures residents are connected with services and providers, and provide ongoing coordination with services and residents.

**3) Discussion of public safety concerns/police dispatch data – Laura Baker, Real Estate Property Manager, Valley CDC**

Ms. Baker spoke about public safety concerns, provided an analysis of emergency and police call data from four comparable properties between 2016 and 2018.

**4) Sharing of experience from one of our studio apartment tenants**

Pamela, a tenant at one of the Valley CDC properties in Northampton, spoke about living at Bridge Street, that there is a feeling of safety there, and sense of community.

**c. Statement from the Amherst Affordable Housing Trust – John Hornik, Chair**

John Hornik, Chair of the Amherst Affordable Housing Trust, stated that on January 10, 2019 the Trust voted unanimously to support the project.

**d. Abutters and Neighbors**

**1) Description of the neighborhood and comparison to the Northampton neighborhoods where the other Valley CDC SROs are located – Resident, Steve George, 23 Dana St.**

Steve George of 23 Dana Street spoke in opposition to the project. Spoke about maintaining the character of the neighborhood, the project site and zoning in the neighborhood, taking neighborhood to mean surrounding residences, which are primarily 1-2 family style structures. Three other types of uses such as dorms, which have live-in trained residence councilors on each floor. There is a boarding house with 13 units and a live-in building manager, and the Arbors which is an assisted living facility. Family orientation of the neighborhood, 21 children and 40 living in a 500 foot circle in the neighborhood.

Northampton SROs are in business zones, one in urban residential c, which is the highest density and closest to downtown; all of which are less than a mile to bus stops, a food store, pharmacy, post office and “center.” Proposed project would be an extreme outlier.

**2) Perspective of someone who works with SRO residents and a testimonial from a former SRO resident – Resident, Melissa Porter, 110 Dana St.**

Melissa Porter of 110 Dana Street, and with 30 years of experience working in human services, spoke about concerns regarding staffing.

Chris, a prior resident of two different SROs in the valley, shared his experience living at an SRO; on-site staffing made a difference in his experience, and that people with mental health crisis need on-site staff to make sure issues do not go unaddressed.

**3) Analysis of emergency services for Valley CDC properties in Northampton – Resident, Rosie Cowell, 104 Dana St**

Rosie Cowell of 104 Dana Street, expressed concerns the management plan for the site, measured outcomes for similar sites in Northampton, and talked about overall call rates excluding motor and medical calls at five sites compared to averages in Amherst. Looked at individual categories; ration of calls per resident per year compared to Amherst. Suggested 27/7 on-site management.

**4) Consideration of financial matters, both initial costs and the plan for ongoing support – Resident, Kate Sims, 77 Dana St.**

Kate Sims of 77 Dana Street, spoke about financial concerns, stating that the cost is high, and that 7 rooms will not significantly reduce homelessness. Suggested using CPA funds to acquire the site, commit to affordable housing and re-do process with meaningful input from neighborhood. Suggested an alternate plan to use the house as it stands and build a 2-3 family house on site with family-oriented accessible affordable housing.

**5) Next steps: A call for continued dialogue to develop a plan we can all support – Resident, Hallie Hughes.**

Hallie Hughes of 30 Orchard Street spoke about feelings that this has been an adversarial process, precedent setting with capital projects; ideas to look for funding for additional care on site. Spoke about the Town’s fiduciary duty, the urgency of making changes before approval, and suggested Valley CDC return next year. Suggested that the Town take out CPA funds, and set a precedent that developers and neighbors must demonstrate the ability to work together. Stated that the project will not impact funding to Craig’s Doors or other service providers.

**4. Timeline – What to Expect Going Forward – Chris Brestrup, Director of Planning, Town of Amherst**

Planning Director Chris Brestrup, spoke about the timeline, which assumes the project will move forward. Outlined the project timeline for the next several months, highlighting points that the public can submit comment in writing and at meetings. Project information will continue to be posted on the website. Online comment submittal process, which will be sent to the subsidizing agency. Materials and decisions will be posted online as they are submitted and become available; deadlines for applications, decisions, and appeal period.

## **5. Councilor Questions (Clarifying) – None**

Councilor Brewer asked for confirmation that the Council President is the chief elected officer for the Town.

Councilor Hanneke asked about 30, 50, and 80 percent AMI levels in units. Asked what happens to the units if they are to be rented to 50% or lower AMI level and there are not enough applicants.

Councilor Steinberg asked if Ms. Brestrup would clarify if the developer has the right to seek funding if the council does not approve the CPA proposal, and based on other projects, what types of conditions might the ZBA apply. Ms. Brestrup responded that Valley CDC is able to apply if the Town does not approve the CPA funding; Valley CDC has received funds from the town for feasibility studies. The ZBA might impose a variety of conditions, for example, the Beacon project had 130 conditions, including level of income, conditions related to the site, parking, information that must be given to tenants relating to services in the area, and so on. Any conditions would be made available to the public along with the ZBA decision.

Councilor Bahl-Milne spoke about the concern about the number of emergency service calls. Based on her research, bringing people into housing actually reduces cost and incidence of calls. Chief Livingstone responded that it is difficult to quantify calls to residents “out there,” the biggest factor is management, but he does not anticipate many problems. Average 17-18,000 calls per year, 12% of the calls are homelessness issues. The reality is that few individuals are responsible for a high percentage of the calls.

Councilor Hanneke asked about applying for a comprehensive permit rather than a special permit, about the cost to develop the site, the ability of the ZBA to restrict the number of units, and if the number of units can be increased or decreased after the application. Ms. Brestrup responded that Valley CDC is seeking to increase the number of units allowed in the zoning district, which is why they would seek a comprehensive permit. The ZBA can restrict the number of units, as was done in the Beacon project and Aspen Heights. The ZBA can negotiate the number of units.

Councilor Pam asked for clarification about roles and responsibilities, and stated that she would like more details about the project before the Council votes.

## **6. Public Comments and Questions**

President Griesemer explained public comment will be taken topic-by-topic. The following topics were raised for public comment:

- Selection of location
- Size and scale of the project, number of units, unfilled units
- Screening of tenants
- Support staff
- Public safety and emergency services
- Financial concerns
- Timeline
- Bias in the form of the meeting
- Comments in favor of the project
- Comments from those with experience working with tenants
- Legal obligations regarding anti-discrimination laws

Michael Giles of 57 Blue Hills expressed concerns about people saying they are in favor except for changes. The way the project has been proposed has not been perfect but the site is good, Valley CDC is highly motivated to make the project work. Trusts the developer, has faith that adjustments will be made. The project is a huge opportunity to take a step toward addressing homelessness in Amherst.

David Ahlfeld of 59 Blue Hills Road, and a resident for 30 years, lives within the radius outlined in Mr. George's presentation. Rafters is also in a radius from his house. The character of the neighborhood, appearance of single family homes, many are student rentals in single family homes. About a third are owner occupied, a third are student rentals and a third are dorms and apartment buildings. The nature of living downtown.

Cathy Neale of Dana Street recently moved to Amity Place. Supports the project, worked in public education, many teachers travel an hour or more to get to schools. Think of this as a place that is inclusive of people who may teach your children.

David Levenstein of 100 Woodside Avenue supports the project as proposed, but has a lot of questions about the project. The process will be worked out with the ZBA, with conditions, that process seems reasonable to me. Curious about waivers, why 28 units, there are many alarms that are more about change. The at-risk population are already our neighbors, but we do not see them.

Anne Burton of 10 Dana Street, one block from site. Question about how the location was selected, there are other houses on large parcels. Spoke about her experience living close to many SROs in New York City. Concerns about the sidewalk on Dana Street.

Abby Jensen of 100 Dana Street understood the property was selected because it became available to buy; perhaps another property would be better. This project is not a strategic plan, and there are better properties that would suit the project. Risk to the neighborhood if Amherst College decides to close Pratt Field to the public.

William Loinaz previously of 25 Orchard Street, now at 14 Orchard Street. The developer stated that Route 9 corridor does not match the character of the neighborhood. Does not seem like it would fit in.

Connie Kruger, resident, former Select Board member, and worked in affordable housing field for many years. There is no perfect site; looked at many sites across the state and worked on Chapter 40B projects, looking at the criteria, the site is very good, meets the criteria. Good site and good developer, and supports the proposal. Important not to vilify each other in this process. Most important is design and management, which is what will make this fit into the neighborhood. Hope that that neighborhood welcomes new neighbors.

Katharine Troast, an Amherst resident, this is the first time we have had the opportunity to talk as a neighborhood about the project. Spoke about her negative experience after making public comments in opposition to the project. Ultimately, wants all parties to be happy with the outcome. Has not seen any concessions from the developer and expected some changes.

Ms. Baker stated that this is the Valley's second effort in ten years to find a site. Took two years and looked at dozens of sites in Amherst. Can walk in either direction. Wrote to homeowners on Northampton Road looking for those who would be open to selling because it is walkable in both directions, and with mixed use for residential and business.

Elisa Campbell of the Amherst League of Women Voters, supports the project. Comment on number of units, there are homeless people and there are people with limited income. This project is designed to meet the needs of some of those people. East Street project is intended to be family housing. Surprised to find the level of income that would qualify to live there. Housing has become expensive compared to income. To rent a one bedroom in Amherst, have to make \$57,000/year.

John Willoughby of 100 Dana Street surveyed neighbors, 34 responses. Results 30-2 in favor of affordable housing, in district, family housing, not in favor of the proposal. In favor of affordable housing, but not this project. Delay in letting neighbors speak led to perception that neighbors are not in favor of affordable housing.

Barbara Gravin Wilbur of Northampton Road, and an immediate abutter. Agree that there has been disrespect. Amherst residents for over 50 years. Density of project is too high. Other ways affordable housing may be addressed. Ask developers to build smaller, more affordable homes. Suggested working with local banks to offer home loans for low-income borrowers.

Lee Edwards, an Amherst resident commented about the scale and income levels. Hard to imagine scale of fear for what these few people would do to a community. Do see homeless people on the street and hope that those people would have a place to live. Low-income residents do not have a negative impact on the neighborhood. Think the town could be more generous.

Chris Sims of 77 Dana Street feels that the town and agencies have not done their due diligence. Implication that everyone who points out problems is hiding their true intent.

Ms. Baker: we do not intend to increase the number of units at the site. If there are changes, would go back to source of funding to discuss the changes. There are cost implications to any changes that we would make, number of units, staffing plan, and would need to look at funding those changes.

Robert Pam of 229 Amity Street asked about the size and scale, seems that many of the units will be transitional housing for a number of people. There is nothing wrong for housing people in this location, no issues with single units, name does not make a difference. It is not an insult to call it an SRO.

Robert Ryan, Chair of the Interfaith Housing Board and Amherst resident, spoke in support of the project. It has a mix of income, makes it a unique project. Allows people that work for the town to live in the town, many cannot do that now. There will not be a shortage of people that will want to live there, there will likely be a waiting list. Student housing makes housing very competitive and difficult to compete with student housing.

Homeless Amherst resident spoke in support of the project. Favors students, project is needed. Regarding staffing, residents may feel patronized by constant supervision.

Ms. Gravin Wilbur asked about preference to Amherst applicants. Ms. Campbell responded that if the ZBA chooses to enact a preference, the state would determine if those who live or work in Amherst receive priority. After the initial lottery, everyone would be placed on a wait list and there would be no local preference. Property management company does a credit check, CORI check, sex offenders, violent offenders and drug manufacturers are excluded. Check 5 years of landlord references. Regarding 30 50 80, percentage is not reduced if not enough applicants are initially found. The categories remain in perpetuity.

Councilor Bahl-Milne asked if resident re-certify their income each year. Ms. Campbell responded yes.

Councilor Schoen commented about the thin financial margin over several years, assumption is that units cannot remain vacant for long. Ms. Baker would look at demand for rents at different levels, at this price point in Amherst feel that there will be long wait lists for the units in Amherst, do not anticipate having a shortage of tenants at any level.

Councilor DuMont asked about certifying formerly homeless individuals as Amherst residents. Ms. Baker responded that paystubs show work in Amherst, other methods of verifying living in Amherst. Ms. Campbell added that people also usually have a mailing address on their license or where their social security checks are sent.

Gerry Weiss, president of Craig's Doors, and an Amherst resident, commented that it is likely that anyone who applies as homeless would be known by Craig's Doors staff. Would be able to verify that individuals are home-ready. Housed 172 individuals over the past winter. Turned away nearly 200 individuals over the year. Main cause of homelessness in the US is lack of affordable housing. The project is almost too good to be true with the site and variety of income levels.

President Griesemer disclosed her relationship with the Amherst Survival Center, and that she recused herself from discussion about the project at Survival Center meetings.

Lev Ben-Ezra, Executive Director of Amherst Survival Center expressed strong support on behalf of the Survival Center. Based on need, opportunity and reward. The criteria is that they have lower incomes and do not make enough money to rent elsewhere. Lack of affordable housing is worse in Amherst than greater area.

Aimee Gilbert Loinez of Orchard Street asked about the floor to income. Ms. Baker responded that there is no hard and fast floor. Driven by person's ability to afford the rent that is being charged and not spend 30% of their income. Trying to hold rents as low as possible. Vouchers would live in the property, tenants would not bring vouchers. Not a sober house, people can use legal substances, do not allow overnight guests at other properties. Non-smoking building. Rent increases as cost of living increases.

Don Perry, a Valley CDC Board Member, and former SRO resident spoke about his experience in a Northampton SRO. Spoke about connection to services coordinating efforts. Tenants are not transitional, the SRO becomes where people live long-term. Bridge Street is abutting a school in Northampton. Tenants want safe places to live. Valley CDC encourages residents to become invested in their community, plant flowers and serve on committees.

Jay Levy Eliot of CHS Homeless Services worked in the field for 30 years. Vouched for Valley CDC, worked with them on several projects. Services go with the person. Looking at what type of support services are needed. Spoke about funding sources for services.

Priscilla White, an Amherst resident, began SRO outreach project in Northampton. Worked with property owners so people in SROs could stay there. Found her stereotypes were wrong. Individuals needed help with budgeting and finding services, with a little support, less than 20 hours per week, people were able to thrive and maintain their place at the SRO. Do not underestimate the value of a 20-hour per week support person.

Aimee Gilbert Loinaz of 14 Orchard Street, proposed level of support is inadequate. Once residents are in place, the developer has a responsibility to support the residents—will it fall on the Town to support. Reserve to address building maintenance; the Town may be obligated to support.

Jeff Lee, an Amherst resident, spoke about his experience growing up on the grounds of a state mental hospital where father worked. Found that it was an enriching experience, got to know patients and developed an appreciation. State began de-institutionalizing mental health patients. The success of de-institutionalizing depends on places for low-income mentally ill people to live.

An Amherst resident spoke about her work with the Survival Center, about her background and letters regarding Pratt Field.

Jim Oldham, Vice Chair of CPAC, troubled with how the meeting was run. Imbalanced presentation.

Gaye Pistel of 72 Dana Street commended the Council for their efforts, and expressed concern that we have the opportunity to work together and are not.

Felicity Barry, an Amherst resident and community development lawyer commented that it does not appear that the project is out of line compared to other projects. Design process is expensive, requires architectural, and design review, civil engineering and architectural work. Length of time taken to develop is also a factor in developing. Legal costs are also a factor. Budget for the project is in line for other projects.

Peter Jessup, a board member of Valley CDC commented that the ZBA process is rigorous, urged the Council to look at this in terms of broad support and let the process proceed. Pointed out letters of support from neighbors of SROs in Northampton.

Tim Neale of Amity Place, and former member of the Finance Committee. Council is looking at budgetary approval, not approval of specifics of the project. This project meets specific CPA criteria; consider that when voting on budgetary approval.

Ginny Hamilton, an Amherst resident and former fair housing director in greater Boston. Remind decision makers of legal obligations to anti-discrimination laws. Olmstead decision failing to house people with disabilities, and encouraged approval of funds.

Katherine Appy, Co-Chair of Amherst Forward, expressed support of the project as proposed. Town Council should approve funding for the project; residents are already part of our community. Increasing affordable housing stabilizes communities. Denying, delaying, or altering the project runs counter to fair housing mandates. Housing is a documented problem. Urged the Council to approve without delay.

Tom Kegelman, an affordable housing developer and member of the Affordable Housing Trust commented that concerns are legitimate; there is a balancing act. Difficult job to take on a project like this. Urged the Council to consider the impact of delay on homeless residents.

Tim Atteridge of 143 Northampton Road and an abutter to the site spoke about concerns about money the Town will be obligated to spend if the project moves forward. Hope that the Council considers not funding the CPA proposal; the money that will be spent on the project needs to go to the taxpayers in the town.

A homeless resident provided comments regarding experiences living in an SRO.

Nicola Usher, an Amherst resident commented about creating an inclusive community, shifting focus to welcoming new neighbors, partner with Amherst College and model what an inclusive community looks like.

## **7. Councilor Comments**

Councilors thanked those that stayed through the lengthy meeting to offer comments.

## **8. Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting**

## **9. Adjourn**

**MOVED:** Councilor Steinberg moved, second by Councilor De Angelis to adjourn.

**VOTED** unanimously to adjourn at 10:45 on June 24, 2019.

Respectfully submitted,



Athena O'Keeffe  
Clerk pro tem



Approved July 1, 2019



Margaret Z. Nartowicz  
Town Clerk & Clerk to the Council

**Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented**

06-24-2019 FINAL Agenda - Open Meeting of the Residents 6-20-2019

132NR\_Presentation\_SteveGeorge

2. Code of Conduct - Amherst Town Council Rules of Procedure 5-20-19

3.b.1 132 Northampton Road Overview - Valley

3.b.3 Call Data Power Point - Valley

3.d.4 Response to Valley CDC Letter to Finance Committee-6-24-19

4. Amherst Supportive Housing Studio Apartments - Overview

4. Memo to Town Council Re Valley CDC Project 06-19-19

4. Tenant Selection and Screening Overview

6. Valley CDC Timeline re Supportive Housing

Draft TC Presentation

Emergency\_Services\_Data\_VCDC

Financial Considerations and Suggestion for Compromise-6-24-2019

Public Comments Regarding Studio Apartment Supportive Housing at 132 Northampton Road

Revised Town Manger Evaluation by Town Council Email 6-20-2019

Timeline for Town Manager FY19 Evaluation rev 06-20-19