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## AMHERST MUNICIPAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST PUBLIC MEETING

**Thursday, November 14, 2019, 7:00 p.m.  
South Meeting Room #101, Bangs Community Center**

### **In Attendance**

**Members:** John Hornik, Carol Lewis, Erica Piedade, Rob Crowner, Sid Ferreira, (5)

**Staff:** John Page

**Guests:** Pamela Rogers Executive Director of the Amherst Housing Authority (AHA), Laura Baker Valley Community Development Corporation (CDC), Kathleen Anderson.

**Absent:** William Van Heuvelen, Tom Kegelman, Nancy Schroder, Paul Bockelman (4)

Prepared by John Page.

Meeting called to order 7:08PM.

### **Business**

- 1. Announcements** – None.
- 2. Approve of October Minutes**

*Trust votes by consensus to approve minutes from the October 10, 2019 meeting.*

- 3. Reflections & Discussion of Fall Housing Forum**

Erica shared that engagement was great with 60+ in attendance but reflected that there were not clear next steps articulated. She added that it was valuable to have the experts present on each of the separate topics.

Erica reported on the homelessness break-out group saying Craig's Doors discussed the goal of establishing a permanent year-round shelter. They were able to articulate specific needs but need the marketing and communication support to spread their message. Could use the assistance of development and PR professionals. Craig's Doors is also continuing to look for Board Members to help guide the organization.

Carol reported on the improving access group. Amherst Housing Authority staff in that group identified that finding the information about affordable units is cumbersome but also there is difficulty filling out the many forms and applications for an affordable unit once a person finds one. There is a need for an affordable housing database. John shared that private organizations including MHP, MHF, and the Kuehn Charitable Foundation are working on developing a "housing navigator"

that matches those who need it and those who can place them. Increase access but also increasing availability. Information about that on-going initiative can be found at [www.kuehncharitable.org/housing-navigator](http://www.kuehncharitable.org/housing-navigator) . Sid offered that UMass has off-campus housing office and that there may be opportunity for collaboration. They have an existing platform and must encounter similar challenges including students with a language barrier.

John turned the conversation to next steps and policy advocacy posing the question should the Trust get involved in advocacy at the State level. Trust members identifying organizations such as CHAPA, Western Mass Health Equity Network, and the Network to End Homelessness to connect with. One example would be the upcoming Deeds & Real Estate Excise Tax with the money benefiting housing and climate change. Laura emphasized that the economy is strong currently, however, if it waivers and the state experiences budget cuts, investment in social services including affordable housing initiative will be cut and could use additional advocacy around them.

Kathleen commented that the recording by Amherst Media is important. Trust members agreed the video and slides should be easily available on the Trust's website. Laura suggested the next forum could focus on mobilizing the young people through more targeted outreach to students in the colleges specifically saying departments including public health & policy, sociology should encourage students to engage with this topic. Erica suggested the next forum could be centered around how housing is a major social determinant of health and examine linkages between housing and healthcare. For example, Medicaid funding used to build affordable housing for chronically homeless folks, and health maintenance organizations are purchasing housing for their most at risk patients, and case management state funding to support those who are homeless – can include finding and maintain a home. Erica explained how this can build a coalition around public health, environmental, and criminal justice reform.

#### **4. Advancing Proposed Town Affordable Housing Policy**

John reported out questions and comments from the Town Council Community Resource Committee, Finance Committee, and the Planning Board. All three bodies raised that while the Town housing policy outlines a goal, an implementation strategy is key to accomplishing those goals. The mechanisms and tools can be used to reach those goals was also raised. Trust members agreed that is still the first phase of gathering information and changes from stakeholders and that the most important aspect of adopting a Town-wide housing policy is to be proactive instead of reactive in addressing the housing crisis.

The following tools were discussed for achieving the housing policy goals:

- Establishing 40R “Smart Growth” overlay district(s)
- Advocating Zoning Amendments and the current work of Zoning Subcommittee (ZSC) of the Planning Board including improving the effectiveness of Amherst’s inclusionary zoning bylaw and changing our accessory dwelling units (ADUs) regulations.
- Researching and responding to the barriers that prevent the creation of tiny homes at the state and local level.
- Establishing voucher subsidy program

#### **5. Responding to needs of persons who are homeless Discussion of ideas on tiny houses and encampments**

With several members absent, the Trust focused on the topic of “tiny houses.” John reiterated the need for an organization who will manage a tiny house development, village. Shelter and then tiny

homes. Carol asked what Town policies or regulations need to change to allow for tiny houses. Zoning emerged as one of the significant barriers. In addition, to local laws, state laws propose some barriers, specifically, state Boards of Health Code.

Laura identified Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity as a good resource for policy on tiny homes available at [www.pvhabitat.org/big-enough](http://www.pvhabitat.org/big-enough).

## **6. Development a plan for identifying and accessing affordable housing – initiate work group on this and local rental subsidy program**

The Trust discussed how student housed off-campus exacerbates the housing affordability crisis but also that student advocates could be partners in our work including connecting the issue of residential affordability to the affordability of college. Including the Student Government Association (SGA) and Student Trustees on the UMass campuses could provoke action from the University system. Likewise, John suggests leveraging the Governor's housing initiatives and how university housing would contribute to his statewide housing goals.

The Trust then turned to the work they can do to increase accessibility to affordable units. An initiated a subcommittee that would develop a proposal in order to increase access to housing – a type of housing navigator that could be paired that with local housing voucher program. Consultant Rita Farrell will provide technical support including examining the Cape Cod models. This is also an opportunity to collaborate with UMass for both their research and technological capabilities, as well as their existing knowledge of housing placements and registries.

***The Trust voted unanimously to create a subcommittee to work on increasing access to affordable units and establishing a local rental subsidy program.***

The Trust also concluded that to increase access, it will have to continue to work to increase number of affordable units.

## **7. Updates**

- a. Craig's Doors – opened November 1. Kevin Noonan, a former ED, has taken over as Executive Director. They continue to seek Board members and volunteers.
- b. Evaluation of East Street Proposal –A proposal was submitted, and the Town will be assembling a committee to vet proposals. Paul appoints the members of the review committee. No plan at this point to reissue the RFP. Valley CDC shared that they submitted a proposal and sent a list of questions to the procurement officer. None were answered.
- c. Evaluation of Town Property on Strong Street –The Town initiated discussion with wetlands analyst and are trying to setup a time for them to survey the sight.
- d. UMass residential plans for North Village and Lincoln Apartments have changed. Included in the 11/14/19 packet is a summary of John's meeting with Nancy Buffone and Tony Maroulis of the University.
- e. 40R Smart Growth Overlay District – The next community meeting, including presentation of a downtown 40R is going to be December 19 at 6:45PM in the Town Room of Town Hall.
- f. 132 Northampton Road – Valley drafting request for Project Eligibility Letter (PEL) from DHCD so they can prepare all materials for their 40B – comprehensive permit. They received a contribution of \$100,000 from Inter-Faith Housing Corporation.

Valley has also observed that Amherst College student activists have been reporting and engaging on the project.

**8. Items not anticipated within 48 hours** – None.

**9. Public Comments** – None.

**10. Next Meetings**

- a. Housing Trust, Thursday, December 12, 7 PM, First Floor Meeting Room of Town Hall

Meeting adjourned 9:05PM.