



AMHERST MUNICIPAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST
PUBLIC MEETING

Thursday, December 12, 2019, 7:00 p.m.
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall

In Attendance

Members: John Hornik, Carol Lewis, Erica Piedade, William Van Heuvelen, Rob Crowner, Nancy Schroder, Tom Kegelman (7)

Staff: Nate Malloy, Rita Farrell, John Page

Guests: Hwei-Ling Greeney of Amherst Community Connections, Laura Baker of Valley Community Development Corporation (CDC), Maura Keene, Chad Fuller

Absent: Sid Ferreira, Paul Bockelman (2)

Prepared by John Page.

Meeting called to order at 7:05PM.

1. Announcements – None.

2. Approve Minutes from November Meeting

Erica's name misspelled. Striked "Erica" and replaced with "Erica."

VOTE: To approve 11/14/19 meeting minutes.
Minutes approved unanimously as corrected.

3. Amherst Community Connections — Presentation & Request for Letter of Support

Hwei-Ling explained the mission and work of Amherst Community Connections specifically addressing the needs of single individuals including the formerly homeless. ACC provides support services to help individuals navigate the housing market. ACC submitted a proposal to CDBG requesting \$50,000 in social service funds to support their program. ACC employs an integrated model that includes other housing and homelessness social service agencies. Hwei-Ling detailed the program results in a brief impact statement.

Hwei-Ling requested a letter of support and invited Trust members to attend drop-in hours anytime during the day Monday-Friday 8:30AM-12:30PM to learn more about the organization.

Tom asked what the \$50,000 would be used for. Hwei-Ling said it would go toward programing cost – primarily staffing. Nate explained that CDBG social service dollars are used to support an activity which can include staffing or administrative overhead, whereas CPA dollars have to go to programing directly for example, ACC's local voucher program.

John asked how this proposal was different than last year's "One Stop Shop" proposal. Hwei-Ling explained that that program was not selected for CDBG funding and that this proposal is similar, but the application draws a stronger connection between the social services investment and housing placement.

Erica inquired about effectiveness of the program, asking Hwei-Ling how she is successful at placing voucher holders in affordable units in the Amherst area. Hwei-Ling explained that relationships enable ACC to place individuals in units in their desired market. Erica then inquired about ACC's follow-up and tracking. Hwei-Ling explained their process including their voluntary post-housing survey which tracks housing status, for example, did the individual remain housed 6 months later, as well as informs improvements in their operation.

Amherst Community Connections complete CDBG proposal is included in the 12/12/19 packet.

VOTE: To empower the Chair to write a letter of support for Amherst Community Connection's CDBG application.

MOTION: Erica

SECOND: Carol

VOTE PASSED unanimously.

John rearranged the agenda addressing item 10. "Updates" next.

10. Updates

a. Evaluation of East Street proposal submissions

Committee is convened to review the single submission from Valley CDC. First meeting is tomorrow, 12/13/19 at 10AM.

b. Evaluation of Town-owned Strong Street property

Wetlands study and other site work must wait until Spring to continue. However, the Trust can discuss what are the possible used of the property at our next meeting.

c. 132 Northampton Road

Amherst College student population, including now the Association of Amherst Students (AAS), are engaging with the issue. The “Amherst Student” – the collegiate newspaper – has published several articles about the proposed project. Amherst College President Biddy Martin has weighed in formally saying the college support this project. Laura Baker shared that Valley hopes to submit project eligibility letter (PEL) to CHCD soon. Nate explained that the PEL is the first step in the comprehensive permit (40B) with the ZBA. Laura announced that Valley CDC will release a supportive services plan with the PEL.

4. Discussion of Trust CPA Proposals

John outlined the two proposals he drafted for submission to the Community Preservation Act (CPA) Committee and detailed CPAC’s funding history of Trust initiatives. The first proposal is for \$400,000 to the Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund and the second if for \$40,000 is to retain a professional consultant for the Trust. *The complete CPA proposals are included in the 12/12/19 packet.*

VOTE: To submit CPA proposals to CPAC as presented.

MOTION: Nancy

SECOND: Tom

VOTE PASSED 6-0-1.

Rob Crowner abstained citing the need to see the financial records for the Trust before voting on financial matters.

5. Discussion of Developing a Plan to Increase Access to Affordable Units

John and Rita presented a draft plan for improving access to affordable rental units in Amherst. *The draft proposal is included in the 12/12/19 packet.*

Nancy claimed that there are many organizations that already service components of this need and called for better coordination and greater investment in those organizations such as the Amherst Housing Authority, Family Outreach of Amherst, Center for New Americans, ARPS Family Center, Bridge Family Center, Council of Social Service Agencies of Hampshire County, Amherst’s social service network facilitated by the Town Health Director, and the UMass Off-Campus Student Center.

Rita articulated that the need for a “one-stop-shop” resource center and housing navigators that can walk clients all the way through the process. Nate expressed the need for a guide or tool to direct people to the correct human service agencies. Tom suggested this could take the form of a Housing Resource Guide whether physical or digital. Carol expressed the

difficulty of maintaining a living document that is up to date and acknowledge you need staff committed to completing that.

Carol and Erica reinforced Nancy's statement – shifting the discussion to what organizations are already doing this work and how can we support them citing Community Action and Family Outreach of Amherst. Laura Baker shared that Valley CDC serves as a housing counselor or “navigator” for those seeking affordable homeownership and that Way Finders serves as a counselor/navigator for renters, but the work is labor-intensive, and needs requires investment to increase capacity.

John turned to tools and technologies. Sharing that a statewide housing navigator platform is being developed by the Kuehn Foundation in partnership with several state housing agencies and should be launching in a year or two. Their goal is to create a single, reliable source to find affordable housing, search openings, and access information on upcoming lotteries and open waitlists in Massachusetts. He reiterated that a tool such as this is only powerful if paired with adequate staffing to update the database.

Nancy emphasized learning from and supporting the work of Pamela Swartz, Director of the Western Mass Network to End Homelessness, specifically drawing on her work on Cape Cod.

Tom expressed the need for a “resource and referral” model with intense training for hands-on and committed counselor.

John spoke to his perspective process and expressed the release an RFP and see what agency respond and are best equipped to meet the needs articulated in the draft plan.

Carol raised whether the community might best be served by a collaborative effort of existing organizations.

Erica suggested the first next step be environmental scan of what current resources exist.

The Trust established a subcommittee to look into increasing access at its 11/14/19 meeting. Nancy, Erica, Carol, and Will agreed to serve on this subcommittee. Nate reviewed the procedures for holding subcommittee meetings and Trust members set a goal of holding their first meeting before the Trust reconvenes on January 9, 2020.

6. Preview Smart Growth Forum for 40R District in the Downtown

In preparation for the third community meeting on Thursday, December 19 at 6:45PM in the Town Room of Town Hall, John and Nate previewed the presentation that the

consultants will present for Trust members. *This presentation is available on the Housing Trust's website at www.amherstma.gov/2199/Amherst-Affordable-Housing-Trust-Fund*

7. Update on status of the proposed Amherst Affordable Housing Policy

Nothing new to update.

8. Discussion of Legislative Advocacy –

Pamela Schwartz, Director of the Western Mass Coalition to End Homelessness is seeking a resolution in support of acts to ensure the rights to counsel in eviction proceedings and acts promoting housing opportunity and mobility through eviction sealing by the Amherst Town Council and is requesting a letter of support from the Trust. *Complete correspondence with the Chair is included in the 12/12/19 packet.* John agreed to draft a letter of support to be reviewed by the Trust at the next meeting.

Trust members raised the question of eviction rates in Amherst. Nancy and John said they will bring Amherst eviction data to the next meeting.

9. Responding to needs of persons experiencing homelessness – No new updates.

11. Public comment – None.

12. Items not anticipated within 48 hours – None.

13. Upcoming Meetings

- a. Housing Advocacy Coalition Meeting — December 17th in Room 101 of the Bangs Community Center at 6:30PM
- b. 40R Smart Growth Third Community Meeting — December 19th in the Town Room of Town Hall at 6:45PM
- c. Next Meeting of the Housing Trust — January 9th in the First Floor Meeting Room of Town Hall at 7:00PM