



AMHERST MUNICIPAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST
PUBLIC MEETING
Thursday, April 30, 2020
7:00 P.M.

Virtual Zoom meeting. Video recording available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVHS0a2x9iM>

In Attendance

Members: Paul Bockelman, Rob Crowner, Sid Ferreira, Tom Kegelman, Carol Lewis, Will Van Heuvelen, John Hornik, Erica Piedade (8)

Staff: Nate Malloy, Rita Farrell, John Page

Guests: Town Councilor Dorothy Pam, Planning Board Member Janet McGowan, and Community Members Maura Keene Chad Fuller, and Hwei-Ling Greeney

Absent: None.

Prepared by John Page.

Meeting called to order at 7:07PM.

- 1. Announcements** — None.
- 2. Short-Term Emergency Rental Program**

John began by stating the goal of the meeting: To finalize guidelines and an RFQ for an emergency rental assistance program.

In response to the Trust discussion at the 4/23/20 meeting, Rita highlighted the changes to the guidelines raised at the previous meeting:

- In response to the request for a discrete amount of Trust funds Rita added, “The AMAHT will commit up to \$250,000 for the combined costs of program administration and grant funds for this program. Any additional funding for this program will be contingent upon securing funding of other town or state resources.”
- Rita added “with the exception of RAFT utility support” as not to disqualify from the program applicants who were receiving financial support to help with utilities through RAFT.
- In response to increasing the subsidy amount, Rita explained while the Trust cannot subsidize 100% of the rent of all who need it in Amherst, the Trust can

- increase the subsidy limits in Section 4 weighing the depth versus breadth of support.
- Increased the per month subsidy (from 35%) to approximately 50% of what the market rate is for an average rental.
 - John recommended adding a maximum subsidy per household. Rita set a at \$4,000.
 - Based on consensus of Trust members at 4/23/20 meeting, Rita added a simple selection by lottery process. Rita noted that the Trust did need to identify any groups it wants to prioritize such as households that have no income or households with children. These “buckets” need to be incorporated into the lottery process.
 - Rita suggest releasing the funds in two phases. Allowing for a second application round. This is good practice, and generally necessary to comply with affirmative marketing standards.

John expressed the desire to prioritize families with children in the process. Nate noted that typically priority categories are capped. For example, local preference in rental developments supported by DHCD are capped at 70%. Carol shared that she did not want to cap the preference for families. Agreeing, Rob suggested requiring that *at least* 70% of the selected applicants be families with children which the Trust came to a consensus on and adopted as part of the guidelines.

Chad asked how the Trust will let the public know about this program. John explained that the burden is on the administrator to market the program. John offered that the Trust can also spread the word through landlords as well as social service agencies. The Town and Trust has access to those organizations which deal directly with tenants and can recommend this program.

Tom asked how this program differs from the existing RAFT program which is also a homelessness prevention program and if there would be any efficiency in simply contributing the Trust’s fund to an existing program but earmarked for Amherst residents. John explained that this program is meant to be complementary to RAFT and, as it is written, to serve the populations excluded from RAFT. In particular, RAFT is restricted to residents with an income less than 50% AMI, however, this program currently permits individuals up to 80% AMI.

Regarding the application requirements, Carol expressed skepticism about requiring income projections because of the difficulty anticipating one’s employment situation in the next three-months. Rita explained that the income and asset projections question is aimed at assessing whether the individual is receiving unemployment insurance and additional \$600 in income from the CARES Act as well as if they have savings in the bank. Additionally,



Carol asked whether this rental subsidy could be used to pay rent owed in previous months. To specify, Nate and Rita added a date certain of April 1 for which the subsidy could be applied to rent after April 1 to the guidelines.

Erica questioned the upper limit of \$4,000 over four months for a single household when the 3-bedroom cap is \$1,100 per month. To simplify and clarify Rita amended the limit a household could receive to be \$4,000 over three months resolving the issue.

Paul asked how many residents the program would serve. Rita answered that it depended greatly on the mix of units that apply. Carol reasoned that if all the subsidies granted were for 3-bedrooms unit at the maximum rent, \$200,000 in subsidies would serve 60 families. Rob asked is there a chance that less than \$200,000 in subsidies will be requested? The consensus among John, Rita, and Nate was that the full \$200,000 would be administered.

Sid left at 8:55PM.

John asked if the Trust was comfortable committing to the \$250,000 to this program. Carol asked how much money this would leave in the Trust Fund. Nate responded saying approximately \$150,000 would remain in the Trust's account for capital expenses and \$70,000 for consulting services. Paul suggested allocating the funds and accept that the full value may not be reimbursed by CPA. Erica emphasized the urgency and need to pass this program tonight.

VOTE: To allocate \$250,000 in Trust funds, approve the emergency rental assistance program guidelines as amended, and issue an RFQ.

MOTION: Carol

SECOND: Erica

VOTE PASSES unanimously, 7-0-0 (*Bockelman – Y, Crouner – Y, Hornik – Y, Kegelman – Y, Lewis – Y, Piedade – Y, Van Heuvelen – Y*) Sid Ferreira had to leave prior to vote.

At the 4/23/20 meeting of the Trust, the topic of voluntary rent reductions by landlords was raised. John authored a letter to send to landlords asking their leniency and cooperation in keeping Amherst families housed including the request to reduce rents during the state of emergency which he presented to the Trust.

John shared that former Trust member Nancy Schroder was skeptical that landlords would respond positively to the letter and that it might evoke resentment. Tom said it was not worth sending the letter unless you can embed negotiation into the rental subsidy program. Contrastingly, Will said the tone of the letter is one of mutual cooperation and partnership and does not find it disrespectful. Carol concurred suggesting that the Trust



ask for any relief or reduction rather than a specific amount. Rob requested that at the end of the three-month period, the Trust report out the number of families and amount rent that it was able to leverage including any amount landlords agree to forgo. Publishing both quantitative and narrative data could compel the public and landlords to step up and contribute to the program.

Janet McGowan, speaking as a member of the public, shared her appreciation for the Trust's work. She strongly supported efforts to pursue voluntary rent reductions by landlords. She contended that it is in the landlord's interest to keep people in their units even if it's at a reduced rent. She also affirmed there is no harm in asking. Landlords can always say no, but they may in fact say yes.

Chad Fuller, a member of the public, spoke in response to the sentiment that landlords may be unwilling to offer rent reductions because existing lost revenue as result of COVID-19 noting that landlords operate a real estate or property management business and can receive relief funds from the federal government for those losses.

John resolved to amend the letter to leave the ask ambiguous instead of a specific amount of rent reduction.

VOTE: To approve Rent Reduction Request letter as amended.

MOTION: John

SECOND: Erica

VOTE PASSES unanimously, 7-0-0 (*Bockelman - Y, Crouner - Y, Hornik - Y, Kegelman - Y, Lewis - Y, Piedade - Y, Van Heuvelen - Y*) *Sid Ferreira had to leave prior to vote.*

3. Updates

- 1. UMass Residential Development**—At the 4/23/20 meeting of the Trust, members came to the consensus that it was important to invite UMass External Relations to an upcoming meeting to provide an update on the replacement of North Village and Lincoln Apartments as well as the effect of COVID-19 on the residential student population. Paul expressed concern, that not unlike the Town, the University has many outstanding questions that have emerged as a result of COVID-19 from on-campus enrollment to budget cuts and may not have a meaningful update to provide yet. John agreed to ask for them to come to a future Trust meeting and if they respond that it is inappropriate at this time or they have no news he would relay that back to the Trust.
- 2. Legislative Issues**—John reminded Trust members that the eviction and foreclosure moratorium had been passed by both houses of the state legislature and signed by the Governor in response to the COVID-19 emergency.



4. Upcoming Events — Nate reminded Trust members that consultants were presenting their draft 40R bylaw and design guidelines at the Wednesday, May 6 meeting of the Planning Board at 6:30PM.

5. Public Comment

Chad Fuller asked for an update on both East Street School and 132 Northampton Road. John reiterated the report from the 4/23/20 Trust meeting: Regarding the East Street School site Nate was waiting for a wetlands delineation and hazardous materials (asbestos) report to be conducted at the site but COVID-19 had caused delays. Regarding 132 Northampton Road project, Valley Community Development received their project eligibility letter (PEL) from the Department of Housing & Community Development and is preparing a comprehensive 40B permit application to submit to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA).

6. Other items not anticipated within 48 hours — None.

7. Meeting adjourned at 8:30PM

VOTE: To adjourn.

MOTION: John

SECOND: Tom

VOTE PASSES unanimously, 7-0-0 (*Bockelman - Y, Crowner - Y, Hornik - Y, Kegelman - Y, Lewis - Y, Piedade - Y, Van Heuvelen - Y*)