



AMHERST MUNICIPAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST
PUBLIC MEETING
Thursday, June 11, 2020
7:00 P.M.

Virtual Zoom meeting. Video recording available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K27BDfSTDY>

In Attendance

Members: Rob Crowner, Sid Ferreira, John Hornik, Tom Kegelman, Carol Lewis, Erica Piedade, Will Van Heuvelen (7)

Staff: Nate Malloy, John Page

Guests: Community Members Barbara Wilbur, Kate Troast, Kathleen Anderson and Janet Keller

Absent: Paul Bockelman.

Prepared by John Page.

Meeting called to order at 7:03PM.

- 1. Announcements** – None.
- 2. Review Minutes from May 21** – Minutes from the May 21, 2020 of the Trust meeting were approved consensus with the addition of a link to the meeting recording.
- 3. 132 Northampton Road—Discussion with Laura Baker about Valley CDC's Comprehensive Permit Application**

The presentation from Valley CDC included in the packet from the Trust's June 11, 2020 meeting.

Laura Baker introduced Jane Loechler, the new Executive Director of Valley CDC as well as Joanne Campbell the outgoing Executive Director. Laura outlined the facts associated with their application to the ZBA for a 40B special permit. The proposed development is 28 small studio apartments designed for single adults, two of which are handicap accessible. The building includes:

- 2 offices - one for property management and one space for resident service coordinator who would link tenants to community-based services,
- 10 units would have a homeless preference (30% AMI or lower required) subsidized using a project-specific voucher,

- 2 units would be reserved for individuals receiving services from the Department of Mental Health (DMH) subsidized using a project-specific voucher,
- 8 units would serve residents at 50% area median income (AMI), and
- 8 units would serve residents at 80% AMI

Laura detailed their definition of individuals experiencing homelessness and highlighted the key elements of proposed supportive service plan.

The ZBA Hearing opening hearing date is set for Thursday, June 25 at 6:00PM and scheduled to continuing on the Thursday, July 2 at 6:00PM.

Laura presented Valley CDC's Sergeant House in Northampton as a comparable property. She compared and contrasted the Sergeant House and the 132 Northampton Road project. She noted how Valley was able to rebuild the Sergeant House preserving the architectural elements of the original historic structure and adding additional units on to it.

For the Amherst property, Laura presented updates to the proposal including demolishing the original structure and entirely new construction. The parking and greenspace were reconfigured to create a larger buffer between the structure and Pratt Field, include a garden space, and Aesthetically, Laura said the style was modeled after housing on the Smith and Amherst College Campus. Laura detailed the floor plans and use of each room including explaining the layout of the residential units.

John opened the discussion to the members of the Trust. Tom commented on the beauty and quality of the project presented, commending Valley CDC. Tom raised that the rent for the 50% AMI residents was higher than the comparable units of Valley in Northampton. Laura responded that in response to the abutters' requests for a variety of income levels including address a need for "workforce housing" possibly for employees of the adjacent college. Rob also commended Valley for their work. Rob asked what happens if one of the single resident's family dynamics change, they get married, for example. Laura said they have changed the overnight guest policy in response to neighbor requests. Laura emphasized that the units are only made for one person.

Rob asked if they had named the property yet. Laura explained that they had not yet decided on a name and were using Northampton Road Studio Apartments. Laura welcomed input on the name from the Trust and the community.

Carol asked about storage in the apartments. Laura showed that the studio units have a single closet in the unit. John asked about the furniture. Laura explained that Valley will not provide furniture but there are social services available to them which do. Erica asked how Valley will determine who will receive the units when the need is so great. Laura explained the specialized units, individuals who are applicable apply for the homeless preference, DMH voucher holder units, and handicap accessible units. The remaining units are offered through a lottery process to applicants that meet the income eligibility requirements. Beyond income levels there is no "merit" or need-basis prioritization to the selection. John asked how green the building would be. Laura



said that Valley's goal is to meet the passive house standard with this property. This will be achieved by double thick walls, triple-glazed windows, a high-efficiency heat and air-handling system, and photovoltaic solar units on the roof. The building will not utilize fossil fuels, being supported by electric heat, hot water, and air conditioning. Laura explained the trade-off of appeasing requests for a Victorian-style ascetic and creating a roof to maximize solar potential.

Sid asked about the accessibility to gym equipment for residents. Laura explained that the proximity to the bike trail and the Valley Bike Share kiosks and walkability to Downtown would encourage outdoor health and wellness activities. Tom suggested a possible agreement with the college for use of their facilities. Will raised the issue of parking spaces. Laura emphasized that many of these tenants will have cars and the goal of 14 spaces. They have created 16 spaces. In their experience, this will be enough. She also verified that a parking study was available in their submission.

John then opened up the discussion to comments from member of the public.

Kathleen Anderson asked whether the property was intended to include students. Laura clarified that their residents would not be students. In fact, their funding sources restricts them from offering housing to full-time undergraduate students. Kathleen also asked who does Valley imagine paying the estimated rents. Laura noted that those at homeless preference and DMH units (both 30% AMI and below) would have a project-based subsidy. She further explained that the 50% and 80% AMI limits are ceilings and many people who work for the Town, colleges, and currently live in Town would fall into those 50% and 80% AMI buckets.

Kathleen asked for clarification that the land was not owned by Amherst College. Laura clarified that Amherst College is an abutter but Valley CDC owns the land.

Kate Troast asked what percentage of residents would come from the Amherst population and how many would come from Hadley, Leverett, Pelham, and Shutesbury. Laura said it is up to the Town to include a condition for local preference for individuals that live in Town, work in Town, work for municipal government, or have children in the school system. That preference would be applied to the lottery process. However, outside of Amherst preference, no additional preference for Hadley for example can be applied.

Kate Troast asked Laura to provide a three-dimensional rendering of the smoking bench and covering because she had concerns about the public seeing tenants smoking. Laura noted that the pavilion design is included in the site plan submitted to the ZBA.

Janet Keller from the Amherst Community Land Trust expressed her gratitude to Valley CDC for pursuing this project.

Barbara Wilber, an abutter, asked about ways to include diversity in the selection of residents. Laura explained that Valley is required to do affirmative marketing as part of the lottery process, however, they cannot discriminate on the basis of race during the application project.



Regarding COVID-19 and its implications, Laura noted that has impacted on move-in but emphasize that the most vulnerable people during sheltering-in-place orders is those that do not have a home underscoring the need for developments of this time. Laura did note that depending on the guidance from the state and municipality Valley may need to limit use of the common spaces and the building would need increased cleaning and sanitization.

John turned to the topic of penning a letter of support to the Zoning Board of Appeals for the project. John has begun writing a draft and would like to receive feedback from Trust members. He shared his intention to include:

- the significant need for this type of housing,
- to move this project forward and not replicate the process endured during the Butternut property, which was detrimental delaying the project years,
- appropriateness of the structure and location of the project,
- integrity of the developer,
- strong management plan in response to community concerns which includes presence of support services while respecting dignity and personal privacy of tenants, and an
- outline the finances and implication of many conditions and possibility of making the project financially untenable.

John asked what other topics the letter should address. Carol asked John to include the fact that Valley is pursuing passive house and the sustainable aspects of this project. Erica asked John to stress how much Valley has worked with the community, particularly abutters, in creating this final plan. Tom endorsed not being too restrictive with either conditions or invasive management plan.

John committed to sending out a draft for Trust members to review and provide feedback to Nate. He also encourages members of the Trust and the public to author their own letters of support to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) prior to the June 25th hearing.

VOTE: To empower the chair author a letter of support for the 132 Northampton Road 40B special permit application to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)

MOTION: John

SECOND: Erica

VOTE PASSES, 7-0-0 (Crownier – N, Ferreira – Y, Hornik – Y, Kegelmann – Y, Lewis – Y, Piedade – Y, Van Heuvelen – Y)

4. Update on Emergency Rental Assistance Program



John reported that Nate and the Procurement Officer Anthony Delany sent the request for inquiries (RFI) out for bids to four agencies and three agencies responded. Way Finders responded with the lowest bid, however they did not agree to conduct selection with a preference for families but instead planned on upholding a first come first serve allocation, distributing Amherst's program the same way they distribute RAFT. Community Action Pioneer Valley, a regional antipoverty agency, provided the second lowest bid with administrative fees of only \$38,000. Community Action Pioneer Valley (CAPV) is in the process of signing the contract with the Town and will be the administering agency for the Trust's Emergency Rental Assistance Program.

When asked about time necessary to implement the program, Nate said that some time preparing marketing and the program was necessary but anticipated a swift launch of the program. Carol inquired to the role of the Trust in the emergency rental voucher program it has funded and launched. John explained that once the Trust approved the RFI, it is the auspices of the Town Manager and staff to enter into a contract with the agency. Therefore, from this point forward Town staff would work with CAPV on implementation. However, John expected to be present during the implementation of the program and expected the Trust receive data and impact information as the program is conducted. Nate emphasized that the framework of the program and its structure was outlined and approved by the Trust and that CAPV must use that framework to guide their work.

5. Legislative Updates

Two Western Massachusetts Representatives, Lindsay Sabodosa of Northampton and Paul Mark of Peru offered *H.4718. An Act Providing for A Rent Increase Freeze in Response to COVID-19*. John, at the Trust's request, contacted Senator Comerford and Representative Domb seeking their support for the rent increase freeze bill and the expansion of the RAFT program. John reported that he received confirmation that both members had expressed support even if they were not initial cosponsors of the bill. John read a note from Jared Friedman, Senator Comerford's Chief of Staff expressing her support for the legislation and outlining the process going forward.

Additionally, John raised that the Citizens Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) is asking the Commonwealth to add \$50Million to the RAFT program through a supplemental budget or through next year's state budget. Jared assured John in his correspondence that Senator Comerford had forward CHAPA's recommendation to the Budget Committee and was in support of the funding. In his message, Jared further explained the direction forward was a question of process, whether through direct allocation or through an economic recovery package. If an economic development bill moves forward first, he explained, that may be an effective vehicle to advance housing objectives.

6. Updates with Discussion

a. Consultants for East St. School and Strong Street Properties

Nate mentioned that the Town hired a new planner, Ben Bregguer, who formerly worked as an assistant to the Trust, has been hired in the Planning Department. Regarding the East Street School property, Nate noted that the closure of public buildings has gotten in the way of completing the reports. Nate committed to following up with consultants regarding the asbestos and wetlands delineation. No update on the Strong Street Property.

b. 40R Consultant Work

John explained that Nate, Rita, and himself originally applied for, and received, a technical assistance grant to hire consultants to study and produce a 40R district boundary and design guidelines that were complete enough to be adopted by the Town. John said that he will meet with the consultants to discuss next steps and report back. Nate noted that establishing a 40R district is one tool to achieve its goals and if the Trust supports this being adopted than they should author and letter of support and advocate for its passage.

c. CDBG CARES Act funding recommendations

John and Nate provided an update on Cares Act Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funds and the recommendation by the Town's CDBG Advisory Committee. Two applications for housing supportive services were submitted. John sent a letter of support for funding at least one of supportive housing proposals offered by Family Outreach of Amherst (FOA) and Amherst Community Connections (ACC). The CDBG Committee met and recommended to the Town Manager that Family Outreach of Amherst's program at \$50,000 enabling them to hire another case worker.

7. Upcoming Events:

- a.** Next Tuesday evening Amherst Housing Coalition will meet at 6:30PM via Zoom.
- b.** Following Tuesday, June 23 Regional Meeting of CHAPA Franklin, Hampshire, Hampden County via Zoom.
- c.** ZBA Hearing on 132 Northampton Road – Thursday, June 25 at 6:00PM.
- d.** Next Meeting of the Housing Trust Thursday, July 9 at 7:00PM.
- e.** Possibly suspending the August meeting.

8. Public Comment – None.

9. Other items not anticipated within 48 hours – None.



10. Adjournment

VOTE: To adjourn.

MOTION: John

SECOND: Erica

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

Meeting adjourned at 8:30PM.