



AMHERST MUNICIPAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST
PUBLIC MEETING
Thursday, July 9, 2020
7:00 P.M.

Virtual Zoom meeting. Video recording available at:
<https://youtu.be/59KFtjBCM74>

In Attendance

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

Staff: Nate Malloy, Rita Farrell, John Page

Guests: State Representative Mindy Domb, Laura Baker of Valley Community Development, and Community Members Elisa Campbell and Maura Keene

Absent: Paul Bockelman.

Prepared by John Page.

Meeting called to order at 7:00PM.

1. Announcements

John acknowledged that Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC) Chair and Amherst Community Member Nate Budington is stepping down from his role after several years of service. John recognized his role in supporting affordable housing initiatives in Amherst. Additionally, Joanne Campbell, Executive Director of Valley Community Development for over 20 years, is retiring. Joanne was critical in both the Valley Main Street Apartments project in Amherst and currently on 132 Northampton Road Studio Apartments among many regional initiatives.

Nate reported that MassHousing has a new workforce housing homeownership program. Amherst is eligible because it is on an applicable census tract. MassHousing is looking for existing projects to support to meet their homeownership objective. Nate will forward detailed information to the chair for discussion at a future meeting.

2. Review minutes from June 11

The minutes from the June 11, 2020 of the Trust meeting were approved consensus with the addition of Laura Baker of Valley CDC's invitation for Trust and community members to play a role in the naming of the studio apartments at 132 Northampton Road.

3. Discussion of Launch of Emergency Rental Assistance Program



Janna Tetreault, Assistant Director of Community Services for Community Action Pioneer Valley reviewed the application, the eligibility requirements. The application and program details are available online at <https://www.communityaction.us/amherstrentalassistance>. *A copy of the application is available as part of the Trust's July 9, 2020 packet.*

Janna reported that Community Actions has received 26 applicants thus far (three days). Four were partial applications, probably the result of people on the Trust looking at how the system works. Only three were ineligible so far; one ineligible for living in Leverett and two because they currently living in subsidized housing. For individuals and families that are currently living in subsidized units, Community Action will direct them to several other resources available to them.

Regarding access, Janna explained that paper applications are available; however, they have not received a request for any yet. Any non-English speakers should contact Community Action for assistance. Currently they have bilingual support staff which are fluent in Spanish. Sid expressed that the application for especially a non-English speaker, may look intimidating. Janna clarified that they have a contract with the LanguageLine Solutions and can access translators for a wide array of support to applicants.

Regarding marketing, Carol asked where the program has been promoted so far. Outreach initiatives have included:

- Articles in the Daily Hampshire Gazette & Amherst Bulletin (Nate)
- Emails to Registered Landlords (Nate)
- Outreach to the Amherst Human Service Network (Nate)
- Email to Town Council (now on Town website) (John)
- Email to Housing Trust Distribution list (about 90 people and organizations) (John)
- Email to the Housing Advocacy Coalition Distribution list (about 90 overlapping people and organizations) (John)
- Request to Amherst Regional Public Schools Family Food Distribution Program (John)
- Outreach to Family Outreach of Amherst, Amherst Community Connections, Craig's Doors, and Amherst Survival Center (John)
- Email to Health Department's Rental Assistance Program (John)
- Posts State Representative Mindy promoted on Facebook and Twitter
- Posts on the Coalition Facebook Page
- Email to Pamela Schwartz, Pioneer Valley Coalition to End Homelessness

In addition, Community Action is conducting their own affirmative marketing campaign. Separately, Community Action is mailing 28,000 postcards with information about all of Community Action's COVID-related housing support programs.



Other Outreach: Carol noted outreach immigrant-support networks. Nate noted that the Center for New Americans is part of the Human Services Network, but Janna will reach out directly to the Center for New Americans in Amherst. Nate will reach out to Western Mass Community Legal Aid. Will will forward to Jobs with Justice organization. Rita suggested outreach to churches and synagogues and John committed to following up with the houses of worship. Carol will forward to Hampshire County Mosque in Hadley.

John raised the subject of demographic information that is included on the application. Janna explained that this demographic information is used for reporting to state and federal funding sources regarding the populations they serve. Janna clarified that you can decline the question regarding race and other questions are optional.

State Representative Mindy Domb suggested adding the option of "X" for sex rather than M for Male, F for Female, and "Other." This would align with legislation being considered to permit not only Driver's Licenses but all government documents to have the "X" non-binary gender option. Mindy also has sent notes to United Way and Senator Comerford. She recommended sending to the Housing Court in Hadley, as well.

Erica emphasized the importance of collecting demographic information to see the population the programming is reaching and serving. Erica suggested adding a disclaimer affirming that the demographic information is being used to promote a program that reflects our community and details of how the data will be used.

John raised the issue of the letter inviting landlords and whether any additional paperwork should be required. Janna suggested circulating a sample lease addendum to landlords ensuring there is formal documentation and preserving the integrity of the current lease agreement rather than a simple verbal agreement. Carol affirmed the need for some form of written agreement so that both the tenant and landlord have a record of the discounted rent. Janna emphasized the efficacy and efficiency of accomplishing this a single interaction with landlords. Rob noted that the Trust was seeking to record the participation of landlords so that the Trust/Town can publish the names of landlords that are partnering in this work.

Nate explained that the Trust's contribution to the Rental Assistance Program may be fully reimbursable through federal CARES Act Funds. Nate is working with the Finance Department to ensure the reimbursement.

John shared that that Way Finders has just announced an expansion of the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program. In particular, the RAFT program has been extended to include not only rental assistance but also mortgage assistance. This is a state and federal program administered locally by Way Finders. Announcement available on line: https://www.wayfinders.org/sites/default/files/assets/v2_engcovidrafftlyer2020_0.pdf

Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) and Mass Housing Partnership (MHP) surveyed the towns and cities that have launched local rental assistance programs. Currently

Nearly 20% of Massachusetts's cities and towns were implementing or considering creating rental assistance programs for their residents. Forty-eight (48) communities had an ERA program in place and twenty-one (21) others were considering creating a program.

That CHAPA/MHP report is available online at <https://www.chapa.org/housing-news/report-release-massachusetts-emergency-rental-assistance-programs-in-response-to-covid>

4. Update on ZBA review of Amherst Studio Apartments (132 Northampton Road)

Laura Baker of Valley CDC provided an update on the two recent Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) hearings. The initial meeting was a presentation from Valley and questions from the Board. The second was devoted almost primarily to public comment. Laura noted both overwhelming outpouring of support and a few pointed comments in opposition from residents living nearby. Laura and John asked Trust members and those listening to attend virtually and give testimony at the next hearing which is focused on the supportive service plan on Thursday, August 6 at 6:30 PM.

More information about the project is available on the Town of Amherst Planning Department's website at <https://www.amherstma.gov/3520/Valley-CDC-132-Northampton-Road>

5. Discussion of Plans for Wetland Consultant at East Street School and Strong Street

Nate is working with a consultant out of Wendell to complete a wetlands delineation – both the flagging and presentation to and certification by Conservation Commission. Nate hopes to have a contract signed for wetlands study next week. Secondly, the Town informed Nate that it will permit inspectors to enter the East Street School building to conduct a hazardous materials study.

6. Discussion of CPAC Recommendations to Town Council

John shared that CPAC has recommended \$236,000 Valley Community Development new homebuyer program in Amherst. The new program, like its predecessor, intends to place individuals/families in four homes. Additionally, CPAC included \$200,000 in CPA funds to the Housing Trust for in its recommendation to Town Council.

7. Legislative Updates

House and Senate have agreed on language for the 2020 supplemental budget. This includes

- \$20 Million to expand the RAFT program. CHAPA will continue to lobby for increased funding for RAFT in the FY 2021 budget
- \$13.5 Million for Housing Authorities
- \$5.8 Million for permanent supportive housing via the Department of housing and Community Development (DHCD) budget.

On June 30, 2020, Representatives Mike Connolly and Kevin Honan filed HD.5166 to protect housing stability for tenants, homeowners, and certain multifamily housing owners impacted by COVID-19. The bill also creates a fund to support landlords. The bill is expected to be assigned to



the Housing Committee. A full summary of the bill is available here:

<https://www.chapa.org/sites/default/files/Summary%20of%20Housing%20Stability%20Bill.pdf>

Earlier in June, Senator Sal DiDomenico filed a bill supporting a right to Council pilot program. The Trust voted to support this legislation and the Amherst Town Council authored a letter of support.

More recently Senator DiDomenico filed S.2785, emergency legislation to establish a statewide Right to Counsel Pilot project. The bill would protect low-income renters and owner-occupants facing eviction in areas of the Commonwealth hardest hit by COVID-19. The bill would establish right to counsel projects within each of the Housing Court's six divisions in Massachusetts. The pilot is consistent with principles and proposals adopted by the Massachusetts Right to Counsel Coalition. A fact sheet on the legislation, produced by CHAPA, is available here:

https://www.massrtc.org/uploads/2/7/0/4/27042339/s_2785_rtc_fact_sheet_9-26-20.pdf

8. Opening for New Trust Member

There is one open position on the Trust at this time. Community Participation Officer Angela Mills received ten applications through the Community Activity Form and is setting up interviews for later this month. This is a position appointed by the Town Manager. Interested community members should complete a Community Activity Form online at

<https://www.amherstma.gov/FormCenter/Community-Activity-Form-14-14/Community-Activity-Form-62-62>

9. Upcoming events

- a. ZBA Hearing on 132 Northampton Road – August 6th, 6:30 PM
- b. Housing Trust, August 13, 7 PM

10. Public Comment – None.

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

12. Adjournment

VOTE: To adjourn.

MOTION: John

SECOND: Carol

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

Meeting adjourned at 8:15PM.