



AMHERST MUNICIPAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST **PUBLIC MEETING**

Thursday, September 10, 2020
7:00 PM

Virtual Zoom meeting. Video recording available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aXtixrxNCA>

IN ATTENDANCE

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

Absent: Paul Bockelman (1)

Staff: Nate Malloy, Rita Farrell, John Page

Guests: Janna Tetreault of Community Action Pioneer Valley, Hwei-Ling Greeney of Amherst Community Connections, Chad Fuller, Community Members Shelly Goehring, Maura Keene, and Janet McGowan, and a representative of the Amherst Community Land Trust

Prepared by John Page.

Meeting called to order at 7:05PM.

1. Announcements

Nate reported out the Aspen Heights, a three-story apartment on Route 9, triggered the inclusionary bylaw. 11 of 88 units are affordable, a mix of 1, 2, and 3-bedroom units. The Aspen Heights Property Management is working on the marketing plan for the affordable and market rate units. Project is moving steadily forward. Erica asked whether the property management companies are benefiting from vacancies in any way and how can we further incentivize landlords to fill units at a reduced rate.

Selection of new Housing Trust member — Paul, John and Nate are in the process of interviewing seven interesting individuals for the open housing Trustee seat.

2. Review Minutes from August 13 — Minutes from the August 13, 2020 of the Trust meeting were approved by consensus as submitted.

3. Discussion of Emergency Rental Assistance Program - Phase 1 and Phase 2 – Janna Tetreault, Community Action, Pioneer Valley

Final report on closing out the first stage of Round 1. 104 applications, 43 incomplete, 18 approved applicants. 20 denied for being over income or having enough income or assets. 22 of them were ineligible because they didn't live in Amherst, for example. Community Action has been sending pledge cards with the amount the Emergency Rental Assistance will cover. They are still gathering documents. The rent reduction letter to landlords will be sent Monday. John asked if the landlords were being cooperative, Janna reported that while busy, they have been cooperative, all but one private landlord.

Chad shared that this a remarkable time in history. Wondering whether we can communicate the information about Round 1 to Trust members and public.

Janna will provide reports with aggregate demographic information. Nate will prepare summary statistics. The issue of ensuring applicants privacy was raised by Carol.

Janna suggested the following changes to application and eligibility for Round 2 with the goal of getting more complete application:

- Move to pre-application online based on general eligibility criteria. Staff follows-up via phone and schedules an appointment to complete the application together. Allows staff to better explain, refer, and troubleshoot throughout the process.
- Move from a lottery system to a first-come-first-serve basis, revisiting that system after one month with the Trust. The advantage to this system is once a tenant has completed the application a gathered the documents Community Action can process the payment.
- Allow subsidized tenants for renter-arrears only.
- New marketing strategies including reaching out to larger landlords and tax-credit properties to make sure their residents know about the application.
- There would also be a fast-track application process for those reapplying from Round 1.

Carol asked how much of the funds we had used. Janna estimated \$37,000 of the \$250,000 for 18 households committed, plus administration. Nate explained that we were expecting far more applicants than the Trust was able to help. We had planned to use a lottery, but it proved unnecessary. Changing to a first-come first-serve basis makes sense unless an overwhelming number of people apply. Janna explained the order would be based on when an applicant completes their application. Janna noted that she also was surprised by the low number of applicants, but attributes that partial to a lack of urgency while social safety nets and moratorium were in effect. As those are rolled back, she explained, we will see an increased need for support.

Sid noted that Community Action should be aware and monitoring the effect on first-come first-serve process non-English speakers. Erica asked what will be stated on the application to indicate that there are supports for applicants for whom English is a second language. Communities identified by Sid included Nepali, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Cape Verdean/Portuguese.

VOTE: To adopt the following changes to the Emergency Rental Assistance program process and charge Community Action Pioneer Valley with executing these changes.

- **Move to pre-application online based on general eligibility criteria. Staff follows-up via phone and schedules an appointment to complete the application together.**
- **Move from a lottery system to a first-come-first-serve basis.**
- **Allow subsidized tenants for renter-rears only.**
- **New marketing strategies including reaching out to larger landlords and tax-credit properties to make sure their residents know about the application.**
- **A fast-track application process for those reapplying from Round 1.**

MOTION: John

SECOND: Carol

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

Janna projects that by the end of next week Community Action will be able to announce Round 2.

4. Setting Housing Goals for Coming Year – John.

- A. Evaluating additional Town property for affordable housing (e.g., Strong Street, Hickory Ridge, other?) Responsibility for this relies primarily on staff. Nate noted that Pioneer Valley Habitat is looking for another homeownership project in Amherst. Available lots work as well. Erica noted that there is land for sale on Pulpit Hill Rd. on Route 63. There is a surplus property process for Town-owned land. Nate suggested a memo to Town Manager that he has staff evaluate the Strong Street town-owned property. Maura asked whether Habitat rejected the Strong Street property a long time ago. Rob had suggested selling some lots at market rate to create a mixed-income development. John will draft a note to the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager.

Unanimously adopted, 7-0-0 (*Crowner – Y, Ferreira – Y, Hornik – Y, Kegelman – Y, Lewis – Y, Piedade– Y, Van Heuvelen– Y*)



- B. Reconvening subcommittee on Improving Access to Rental Housing and do ongoing work supporting renters including considering local housing voucher program. Tom was not opposed, but pointed out that probably the best long-term investment is the development of new affordable units.
- C. Review and change the AMAHT Strategic Plan. Erica is working with Rita on reviewing the most recent Strategic Plan and suggesting any updates or changes. She will have an update for the Trust at the next meeting.
- D. More Active Legislative advocacy. Will will be taking a new lead on this. John has connected him with his usual conduits of information.

Generally agreed upon.

- E. Revising AMAHT Draft Affordable Housing Town Policy. Nate notes that the Planning Department is looking at an update on zoning this year. Keep the affordable housing priorities as part of the conversation. Town Council tabled further changes to the Master Plan while they focus on zoning.
- F. Exploring reforms and revisions to the Zoning Bylaw. Carol noted that the discussion of housing and zoning policy should be integrated. Rob commented that Housing Policy should come first; housing goals could direct zoning reforms. Need agreement on where, what, and what -type of housing should be addressed before you can reform zoning. Town Council has to layout a consensus, a plan, a vision. Rob and Carol expressed interest in developing a draft of specific points for the Trust to communicate to the Town Council Community Resources Committee.
- G. Reconvening Homelessness Committee to monitor current circumstances and propose/support new initiatives [John: contact Jay, Nancy, Erin Cassidy] Focus on finding financing to fund care coordinators for people experiencing homelessness.
- H. Keeping homes out of the student rental market. Modest homes in family neighborhoods are slowly being acquired by real estate investors. There are programs to promote home ownership, both funded by CPA. Amherst Community Land Trust has funds for two homes and Valley Community Development has funds for four. Nate commented on the RKG Comprehensive Housing Market Study, which recommended a zoning regulatory measure which could be used to concentrate students in certain neighborhoods and make it more difficult in others. Tom noted the elephant in the room — UMass—limited residential units and high price of living on campus pushes students off campus. Janet McGowan, speaking as a member of the public, noted that UMass has added about 4,000 enrollments in the last decade but haven't added housing for them. John noted that that has resulted in displacing younger families because many family starter homes are now occupied by students. There are an estimated 800

few families living in Amherst since the Year 2,000. Erica suggested excise tax on every off-campus student rental. The City of Philadelphia pushed back against gentrification in the area around Temple University, creating college student restrictions. Nate noted that it is difficult to proscribe who can live in rental housing, and that students need affordable housing as well.

5. Update on evaluation of Town-owned property – Nate

- East Street School site: plans are moving forward to evaluate wetlands and building hazardous materials, Depending upon the outcome, the Trust could revise and publish a new RFP if supported by evaluations. Consideration could be given to changing the expected number of units and being less prescriptive in other requirements to be more attractive to a developer. Other issues include whether the Trust should pursue a demolition with the Historical Commission and developing a better list of potential developers.
- Strong Street property: wetlands, general readiness for development. John will send memo to Town Manager requesting evaluation contracts.

6. Update on ZBA review of Amherst Studio Apartments (132 Northampton Road) – John

Four review meetings have been conducted. Next is scheduled for tonight. Public comment will not be invited for this meeting. Recordings of past meetings are now available on-line.

The last ZBA meeting, Tuesday, August 25th provided a great opportunity for advocacy and this group more than met the challenge. There were 15-16 persons who testified brilliantly to the overwhelming need for the project, including Trust members, Carol and Tom. John suggested that people listen to comments beginning at about one hour and fifty-three minutes with Pat De Angelis. Here's the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVDllrZ7GDU&list=PLcnmFtV6BPFMt6RowO80-ac3rCNK1pdQS&index=15&t=0s>. John noted that the Valley Community Development team, led by Laura Baker, has been outstanding in presenting all of the many facets of this program and in responding to questions from ZBA members. Next Meetings – October 8 & 15 with chair always allowing public comment.

7. Discussion of Housing Policy Development in Town—

- Community Resource Committee: John submitted goals for a comprehensive Town Housing policy. The chair explained that CRC was not yet ready to receive outside input.
- Energy and Climate Action Building Task Group: John reported briefly on the work of this group, which has now met twice.

8. Upcoming Events noted in meeting announcement.



9. Public Comment – None.

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

11. Adjournment

VOTE: To adjourn.

MOTION: John

SECOND: Carol

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

Meeting adjourned at 9:02 PM.