



AMHERST MUNICIPAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST **PUBLIC MEETING**

Thursday, December 10, 2020
7:00 PM

Virtual Zoom meeting. Video recording available at:
<https://youtu.be/EMSGC8Xz3mQ>

IN ATTENDANCE

Members: Paul Bockelman, Sid Ferreira, Francis Goyes Flor, John Hornik, Carol Lewis, Erica Piedade, Will Van Heuvelen (7)

Absent: Rob Crowner (1)

Staff: Nate Malloy, Rita Farrell, John Page

Guests: Assistant Town Manager David Ziomek, Town Councilor Pat DeAngelis, Laura Baker of Valley Community Development, Janna Tetreault of Community Action Pioneer Valley, Elisa Campbell, and Maura Keene

Prepared by John Page.

Meeting called to order at 7:00PM.

1. Announcements

John shared that after six years as a member of the Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust, Tom Kegelman has resigned. Tom was the first chair of the Housing Trust, and prior to that he served as a member of the Town's Housing and Sheltering Committee for at least three years. John expressed his appreciation for Tom's exemplary service to the Trust and the Town.

2. **Review Minutes from November 12** — Minutes excluding the Executive Session of the Trust meeting were approved by consensus with Scribner's edits.

3. Update on Emergency Rental Assistance Program and Discussion of Issues and Challenges

Trust members reviewed the update on applications provided by Community Action as of December 8, 2020 and discussed strategies to improve the efficacy of the program. John posed offering those that applied in Round 1 the opportunity to receive a second round of funding. Paul stressed getting money into the hands of those that need it as soon as possible. Carol voiced support and also emphasized the use of the affidavit to affirm COVID-related lack of income.

VOTE: To expand the Emergency Rental Assistance Program to offer a second Disbursement to applicants who have previously applied.

MOTION: Carol

SECOND: Erica

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

Janna Tetreault of Community Action joined the meeting. She identified incomplete applications as one of the biggest remaining challenges. She reported RAFT having the same issue with only a 15% completion rate for the online application. Nate noted concern that one third of applicants remove themselves from being considered. Janna explained the two main reasons for that were that the applicants were full-time students or did not have a COVID-related loss of income. Some, she noted, simply did not live in the Amherst. John explained that the current program expires on December 31, 2020. To continue the program beyond that requires an extension of the program. Trust funds would be required to be used after the end of the calendar year. Janna said the agency will accept a no-cost extension.

VOTE: To extend the Emergency Rental Assistance Program contract with Community Action Pioneer Valley through June 30, 2021

MOTION: Erica

SECOND: Sid

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

4. Review update to Housing Trust Strategic Plan

Trust members reviewed the proposed changes to the Housing Trust Strategic Plan.

VOTE: To adopt changes to strategic plan.

MOTION: John

SECOND: Erica

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

5. Discussion of a Local Eviction Prevention Program

John detailed four types of actions other cities and towns are taking in addition to emergency rental assistance to prevent evictions:

- Local Eviction Moratorium
- Housing Stability Notification Act
- CDC Declaration Form to prevent evictions

- **Landlord Housing Stability Pledge**

Focusing on one priority to start, John recommended pursuing a Housing Stability Notification Act for Amherst. This would require that landlords include with an Eviction Notification (1) information about tenants' rights, (2) where they can seek financial help, and (3) other information that could help in avoiding the eviction. A copy of the City of Somerville's Housing Stability Notification Act is available at

<https://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/2019-19%20Housing%20Stability%20Notification%20Act%20signed.pdf>

Erica expressed her support calling this intervention practical, not unreasonable even for small landlords, and relevant beyond the COVID pandemic. She asked how this would be implemented here in Amherst.

John explained that Somerville produced an informational brochure and distribute to all residents. In Amherst, the Town could notify all landlords and make sure they have copies of what to distribute through the Rental Registration Program.

Francis asked whether the Town is notified when an eviction notice is sent. John explained that the Town is not notified and while historical eviction data is discoverable and in the public domain through the Housing Court records, it is not readily accessible. Nate noted, however, that Family Outreach of Amherst and Veterans' Services Director Steve Connor continue to attend Housing Court sessions and work with tenants in need. Additionally, under current advisement the courts are supposed to refer landlords and tenants to mediation first, with eviction as method of last resort. Trust members emphasized the need to get information to struggling tenants before they get to court.

6. Acquiring Property for Affordable Housing — Discussed in Executive Session, see below.

7. General Updates

- **Pending Legislation:**

Will summarized the recently passed FY21 state budget referencing the Citizens Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) summary available at <https://www.chapa.org/housing-news/conference-committee-releases-fy2020-state-budget>. He explained that the bill that emerged out of House and Senate conference committee had all the best outcomes for housing priorities. As of the time of this meeting, the budget remains to be signed by the Governor and Will asked members to advocate the Governor maintain the funding levels for housing initiatives in the final budget.

- **132 Northampton Road:**



Amherst Studio Apartments at 132 Northampton Road was approved by the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). No appeals were filed. Next, Valley Community Development applies to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for funding. The submission to DHCD will include detailed plans for both construction and financing.

8. Public Comments — None.

9. Items Not Anticipated Within 48 Hours

John introduced two projects that are going before the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Advisory Committee and are seeking Trust support:

- Family Outreach of Amherst (FOA) operates the Housing Retention Program to ensure that Amherst residents who are in danger of losing their housing get the support and advocacy they need to avoid homelessness. These services include assistance applying for emergency funding, gathering the many documents needed for a successful application, mediation with landlords, and helping tenants access other available services.
- Amherst Community Connections (ACC) recently received \$225,000 in CPA funding for supportive housing of six vouchers to assist those who experience long term chronic homelessness in our community. CDBG funds are being requested for the support services for participants to achieve long-term stable and affordable housing and financial self-sufficiency.

VOTE: To support both Family Outreach of Amherst and Amherst Community Connections Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) requests and empower the Chair to write a letter of support to the CDBG Advisory Committee on the Trust's behalf.

MOTION: Erica

SECOND: Francis

VOTE PASSES unanimously, 6-0-1 (*Bockelman – Abstain, Ferreira– Y, Goyes – Y, Hornik – Y, Lewis – Y, Piedade – Y, Van Heuvelen – Y*)

10. Executive Session

Executive Session was necessary to discuss possible land purchase for the development of affordable housing.

VOTE: To move to executive session

MOTION: John

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