



---

## AMHERST MUNICIPAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST PUBLIC MEETING

Thursday, February 11, 2021

7:00 PM

Virtual Zoom Meeting. Video recording available at:

### IN ATTENDANCE

**Members:** Allegra Clark, Rob Crowner, Francis Goyes Flor, John Hornik, Carol Lewis, Erica Piedade, Will Van Heuvelen (7)

**Absent:** Paul Bockelman, Sid Ferreira (2)

**Staff:** Nate Malloy, Rita Farrell, John Page

**Guests:** Janna Tetreault of Community Action Pioneer Valley, Jim Linfield of Way Finders and Member of the Public Maura Keene

Prepared by John Page.

Meeting called to order at 7:00PM.

### 1. Announcements

John welcomed and introduced new Trust member Allegra Clark. Hailing originally from Boston, Allegra brings experience in working with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and people who have behavioral health problems and continues the trend of adding younger voices to the Trust membership.

John also announced that Amherst native and UMass Amherst Alum James (Arthur) Jemison has been appointed Primary Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Community Planning & Development at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). He previously served as Director of Housing and Revitalization for the City of Detroit, Michigan. Before that he was the Deputy Undersecretary of Housing for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and Deputy Director of the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

John provided the update that the Governor signed the Economic Development Bill, during the Trust's January meeting last month, and with it several Housing Choice provisions which lower barriers to housing development when applying smart growth principles including changing the vote quantum for the passage of select zoning amendments. While, the law's application is still being reviewed by Town attorneys, CHAPA summarizes the bills effects on housing in this presentation:

<https://www.chapa.org/sites/default/files/DHCD%20Overview%20of%20Housing%20Choice%20and%20MBTA%20%20Communities%201-28-21%20FINAL.pdf>

**2. Review Minutes from January 14 Meeting** — Tabled until next meeting.

**3. Update on Emergency Rental Assistance Program**

Janna Tetreault of Community Action Pioneer Valley provided a brief update on the Emergency Rental Assistance Program. She noted a decline in applications, receiving only 9 since the last Trust meeting. Four households have been able to take advantage of the additional three-months of assistance approved at the last meeting. She identified one reason for several applicants are being denied as household that owes arrears, has little-no savings, but their income is sufficient to pay rent going forward. To remedy this, she suggested language for an amendment to the eligibility guidance.

**VOTE: To amend the Emergency Rental Assistance eligibility guidelines to read, “Applicants must have insufficient income and/or assets to pay their rent for three months when applying for future rent assistance. For households in arrears the income and/or asset test is waived.”**

**MOTION: John**

**SECOND: Erica**

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

**4. Discussion of Draft Request for Proposals (RFP) for Belchertown Road and East Street School**

John outlined the RFP timeline. Rita led a discussion on outstanding questions the RFP group is working on and need input from full Trust on. Section-by-section comments are available in this document:

<https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/54784/RFP-Working-Group-Update-to-Trust-Feb-2021>

**5. Update on State Legislation**

Will reported that the Governor released a draft budget for FY22 at the end of January which included cuts to eviction prevention and rental assistance programs. Will said he will gather more information and bring a letter back to the Trust on budget priorities. In the meantime, he referred members to CHAPA’s summary of the budget and the Western Mass Collation to End Homelessness call to action on the state budget. Those are available at <https://www.chapa.org/housing-news/governor-baker-releases-fy2022-state-budget-proposal> and <https://www.westernmasshousingfirst.org/advocacy/2021/the-governors-fy22-budget-cuts-to-housing-and-homelessness-programs/>, respectively.

**6. Discussion of Local Strategies to Reduce Evictions**

With declining requests for support through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, but no evidence of reduction in need, John explained that any outreach suggestions would be welcomed. Landlords have been sent information to help keep their tenants housed.

**7. General Updates**

**a. Comprehensive Town Housing Policy**

The Town Housing Policy being considered by the Community Resources Committee (CRC) of the Town Council goes beyond just affordable housing but incorporated the items proposed by the Housing Trust. Former Trust Member Tom Kegelman has been recruited to advise on affordable housing issues. The CRC plans to wrap-up their discussion and have public forums on the policy in March or April.

John circulated a memo Councilor Mandi Jo Hanneke, Chair of the Community Resource Committee (CRC) requesting input and feedback on their latest draft of a comprehensive town housing policy. An approximated outreach timeline is included as well. A copy is available at: <https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/54781/CRC-Housing-Update-to-Town-Committees>

The Trust will discuss at the next meeting and send any comments or questions you have to Nate and John, and they will develop an aggregate document to relay to Mandi Jo.

John also mentioned an anticipated new regional report on affordable housing need and underdevelopment by the Donahue Institute. He will share once available.

**b. Updates to Strategic Plan** — Tabled to next meeting.

- i. Review progress on pre-existing priorities
- ii. Discuss how we organize to accomplish new priorities

**8. Public Comments** — None.

**9. Items Not Anticipated Within 48 Hours** — None.

**10. Upcoming Meetings:**

- Housing Trust - Thursday, February 11, 7 PM
- Community Resources Committee - Tuesday, February 23, 2-4 PM
- Housing Coalition - Tuesday, February 23, 6:30 PM
- Training Events from MassHousing Partnership (MHP) you may have missed, but recordings and documents are available at:  
<https://www.housingtoolbox.org/recorded-workshops-and-trainings/affordable-housing-trust-cpa-conference>

Meeting adjourned at 8:50PM.