

**AMHERST MUNICIPAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST
PUBLIC MEETING**

Thursday, June 10, 2021

7:00 PM

Virtual Zoom Meeting. Video recording available at: [LINK](#)

IN ATTENDANCE

Trust Members: Allegra Clark, Rob Crowner, John Hornik (Chair), Carol Lewis, Erica Piedade, Will Van Heuvelan (6)

Absent: Paul Bockelman, Francis Goyes Flor, Sid Ferriera (3)

Staff: Nate Malloy, John Page

Guests: Laura Baker of Valley Community Development and Members of the Public Susan DeGrave and Chad Fuller

Prepared by John Page.

Meeting called to order at 7:00PM.

1. Announcements – None.

2. Review minutes from May, June Meetings – Tabled for next time.

3. Discussion about Financing the Trust

John framed this discussion with the overarching questions: *What do we need funding for? What is our currently available funding by source? What are our options for adding sources or increasing amounts?*

Nate began by detailing the Trust's typical type of expenditures using examples from the past year:

- Purchase of Belchertown Road,
- Contracts for Emergency Rental Assistance
- Technical Consulting (\$10K/year)
- Research Assistance (\$1,500/year),
- Property Evaluation (e.g., wetlands, land surveys, architectural/engineering services),
- East Street conduit replacement (\$5K materials, Town DPW to provide labor).

He also highlighted current sources of funding and balances including Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds, Interfaith Housing Corp., and short-term rental tax. 35% of revenues from short-term rentals in Town go to housing *or* infrastructure Because of

pandemic there has been negligible income for 2020 but may amount to a few thousand dollars a year. More information on short-term rental tax revenue can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/room-occupancy-excise-faqs-short-term-rentals/download>

Carol asked if there is a point at which the Trust must return unused CPA money? Nate explained that uniquely housing trusts are allowed to back and accrue interest on CPA dollars and use it over several years. An update does need to be provided to the CPA Committee at their request.

John inquired what are other sources of income for housing trusts. Nate highlighted private donations and more aggressive pursuit of grant funding. Some Trust's make funds through the purchase and sale of property but to do so Trust's must adhere to municipal procurement laws. Most trusts are primarily funded through CPA funds, he explained.

John noted that another source for certain programs is Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. The Trust has supported for example Amherst Community Connections or Family Outreach of Amherst's applications for CDBG funding but the Trust itself has seldom pursued CDBG funding for its own work. Nate explained that the process is rigorous and that CDBG has specific uses and a lot of reporting. Most developers do not use CDBG funds for housing production because of how stringent the requirements are. Nate thinks supporting existing applicants is the most effective role for the Trust.

Another revenue source Nate highlighted was fees *in lieu of*, which is similar to the recent increase proposed in IZ reform. If half of the units are on site, then the other half could be off-site or the developer provides a PILOF and that goes to the Trust. Nate, citing Mass Development's suggestions, also noted locality taxing cellphone tower lease payments. Proceeds from tax title sales/real estate transfer fee legislation currently being considered as well, he noted. Even if these individual sources are not a lot of money he explained the combination or building on top of is how projects are funded.

Regarding funding needs, John, raised pre-development costs – as a match or to get a project started. State and quasi-public agencies want to see local investment in the projects they are funding.

Erica asked how the Trust can better fund and support a full spectrum of housing initiatives from rental assistance to mortgage subsidies, etc. John affirmed that the Trust can but it must comply with guidance for the funding source. CPA and CDBG have separately funded such programs by local agencies. If the Trust wanted to spend \$100K a year on rental assistance or a local mobile rental voucher program, this is something that could be outsourced to the Amherst Housing Authority, which could simultaneously sign them up for federal assistance and as they are transitioned off the waiting list, then local funds become available for new residents.

Nate expanded saying are lucky in that there are programs in the region that could always use greater funding. He noted the Trust's role could be financial support but also outreach and coordination. John noted that from his perspective by-and-large the Trust does not want to get into the business of administering programs when we have such strong

programs nearby. Erica, in agreement, asked how we can utilize our funds better to do just that because it takes so long to actually create new affordable units.

Will arrived at 7:30PM.

4. Update on Emergency Rental Assistance Program

Since the Trust's last update one month ago, there has been new applications. One person was from Taunton and referred to a program near them. Two are incomplete and staff have not been able to contact them. Two are in process. Three applications total are in process (2 new; 1 from previous) Two applications approved since last report for a total \$2,339 in additional rental support. So, as of this June 10th meeting of the Trust, Community Action Pioneer Valley has only three applications pending/nearing completion.

VOTE to fund any pending applications if they are approved up to three months rental assistance even past June 30 and to stop accepting new applications.

MOTION: John

SECOND: Allegra

VOTE PASSES unanimously, 6-0-0 (Clark – Y, Crouner – Y, Hornik – Y, Lewis – Y, Piedade – Y, Van Heuvelen – Y)

Erica asked if the Trust has any data on what Way Finders is spending in funds on residents from Amherst. John noted that currently there are still RAFT (state) funds available, but the Trust could enter in a contract with Way Finders to administer a local voucher program.

5. Report on State Legislation

Will highlighted two pieces of state legislation that were pending.

S. 868, An Act Empowering Cities and Towns to Impose a Fee on Certain Real Estate Transactions to Support Affordable Housing, sponsored by Senator Jo Comerford, would permit Amherst (and any other municipality) to adopt a real estate transfer tax of up to 3% on a large portion of real estate transfers in town, the revenues from which would be directly deposited into the Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust, thereby creating a new revenue stream to address our affordable housing crisis in Town.

A copy of the bill and its status as it moves through the legislature is available at <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/SD565>

VOTE to empower the Chair to pen a letter of support S. 868, An Act Empowering Cities and Towns to Impose a Fee on Certain Real Estate Transactions to Support Affordable Housing and send to state legislative delegation as well as the Town Council for their own consideration, requesting they resolve to support the legislation.

MOTION: John

SECOND: Will

VOTE PASSES unanimously, 6-0-0 (Clark – Y, Crowner – Y, Hornik – Y, Lewis – Y, Piedade – Y, Van Heuvelen – Y)

Secondly, Will turned to legislation affecting evictions. No-fault eviction happened during COVID. One item that was stripped from the Economic Development bill was eviction sealing for no-fault eviction. A second item, a provision that would extend core elements of the pandemic-era eviction moratorium was also withdrawn from that bill.

VOTE to empower the Chair to pen a letter of support for no-fault eviction sealing and to extend certain provisions of the eviction moratorium and send to state legislative delegation as well as the Town Council for their own consideration, requesting they resolve to support the legislation.

MOTION: John

SECOND: Will

VOTE PASSES unanimously, 6-0-0 (Clark – Y, Crowner – Y, Hornik – Y, Lewis – Y, Piedade – Y, Van Heuvelen – Y)

6. Report from Committee on Locating a Permanent Homeless Shelter (Allegra)

Allegra reported our on the formation of a task force led May Beth Ogulewicz, Kevin Noonan, Jay Levy, Kim Alli, and Lev Ben-Ezra.

She explained the two models co-operating during the pandemic – a congregate shelter and the motel conversion. With FEMA funding ending, she noted a pivot and long-term strategy must be developed quickly.

They have not identified a permanent location yet or funding sources. Kevin Noonan was doing some initial searching, but a location has not been identified. They have a July 31st self-imposed deadline for finding a location for this winter with a preliminary report on a permanent site to Town Manager for December 31, 2020.

Trust members raised the question of how many people are we trying to house? Allegra explained that Craig's Doors had a record season of people housed than ever before, housing more than 40 people this season overnight.

Erica, a public health expert, stressed homelessness as a pandemic of its own, severely impacting public health and the dire need to address homelessness in our region.

Chad Fuller commented as a member of the public.

7. Discussion and Comments from Housing Forums: Homeownership, Racial Equity and Housing, and Climate Change, Sustainability & Affordable Housing

John prefaced the discussion with the guiding questions: *What have we learned? What do we do next?*

John suggested the Trust invite Craig's Doors Executive Director Kevin Noon to report to the Next month's meeting. Providing context Nate noted that when the Trust was expanded to nine members it was to accommodate the responsibility of sheltering in its charge.

Suggesting another future topic to address John raised the quality of existing rental housing. Highlighting some elements that arose from both the forums on racial equity and housing and the environment, noting heating and cooling costs and quality of life issues.

Nate pointed out the legacy of discrimination over several years resulting from de-facto segregation as a topic the Trust may want to investigate in more detail saying it could be a topic of a future landlord forum (everyone on the rental registration invited). Additionally topics that would be relevant raised were advice and information for renting to low-income people and resources on the Mass Saves program.

Erica stressed the accessibility of materials and access to services wondering whether people know that there is help out there for them. She hoped the subcommittee that was working on expanding access to affordable housing resources be revived. She also commented that the Amherst- specific history included in racial equity and housing form was new information to her and really powerful.

Susan DeGrave, a member of the public suggested a practical workshop on how to access government services sending the messages you are entitled to support and assistance navigating bureaucracy.

8. Next Steps for East Street School and Belchertown Road

Nate noted that the combined East Street School and Belchertown Road RFP was finalized and sent to procurement and legal for review and should be formally issued by the end of this month.

VOTE use of up to \$5,000 Trust funds for property maintenance at Belchertown Road site.

John, Erica. Unanimous.

John posed the question, what's next in the pipeline and how can the Trust play a role in continuing to move projects forward. Nate provided an update on the status of the Strong Street property and the need to complete some predevelopment work.

VOTE to authorize contracts to a maximum of \$30,000 for the purpose of evaluating the Town property on Strong Street as a site that would be appropriate for development of affordable housing including but not limited to the following:

- **Wetlands assessment**
- **Soil analysis**

- **Road access**
- **Available and needed utilities**
- **Land survey**
- **Architectural/engineering study to determine possible types of housing on the site**

MOTION: John

SECOND: Erica

VOTE PASSES unanimously, 6-0-0 (Clark – Y, Crowner – Y, Hornik – Y, Lewis – Y, Piedade – Y, Van Heuvelen – Y)

9. Public Comments – None.

10. Items Not Anticipated Within 48 Hours – John prompted a discussion of Trust member recruitment and leadership of the Trust, expressing his desire to pass on the chair role at the end of his term.

11. Upcoming Meetings

- a. Housing Coalition, Tuesday, June 29
- b. Housing Trust, Thursday, July 8

Adjourned at 9:13 PM

DRAFT