



September 1, 2020

Zoning Board of Appeals
Town of Amherst
4 Boltwood Avenue
Amherst MA 01002

Re: Local Preference at the Proposed Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Supportive Housing at 132 Northampton Road, Amherst MA

Dear Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals,

The Amherst Town Council voted 9-4 to recommend approval of the Local Preference as the Zoning Board of Appeals reviews Valley Community Development Corporation's (Valley CDC) Comprehensive Permit Application per M.G.L Chapter 40B for the Proposed Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Supportive Housing at 132 Northampton Road, Amherst MA.

We understand that "local preference" is prioritizing affordable units for 'local residents'. Furthermore, we understand that prioritizing means that when tenants are selected at initial lease up, applicants who qualify for local preference are placed in a lottery pool that is drawn first. Once this lottery pool is exhausted, the remaining local preference applicants are placed in the open or general lottery pool with the remaining applicants.

On August 31, 2020, the Amherst Town Council voted 9-4 to recommend the following:

That "local resident" according to local preference is an applicant that

- 1) lives in the community,
- 2) is a municipal employee,
- 3) works at a business in the community, and/or
- 4) has children in the schools of the community.

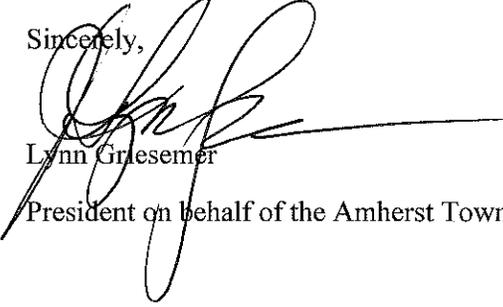
The ZBA can determine the 'local resident' categories to use for local preference. However, we understand that the ZBA cannot put requirements on these categories, such as 'having lived in the community for 10 years'.

Furthermore, we recommend to the ZBA that "local preference" not exceed **70%** of the affordable units, the maximum allowable under state law.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments during your review of the Valley Community Development Corporation's (Valley CDC) Comprehensive Permit Application per M.G.L Chapter 40B for the Proposed Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Supportive Housing at 132 Northampton Road, Amherst MA.

Consistent with the previous actions of various governing and advisory bodies of the Town of Amherst, the Amherst Town Council, through its own actions, continues to strongly support the proposed Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Supportive Housing at 132 Northampton Road, Amherst MA, submitted by Valley Community Development Corporation (Valley CDC). We continue to encourage residents to share their support and concerns during the Zoning Board of Appeals hearings.

Sincerely,



Lynn Griseemer

President on behalf of the Amherst Town Council



TOWN OF
AMHERST
MASSACHUSETTS

Town Council
4 Boltwood Avenue
Amherst, MA 01002
(413) 259-3002
towncouncil@amherstma.gov

February 24, 2020

Rebecca Frawley Wachtel, Director
Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program
Department of Housing and Community Development
100 Cambridge Street, 3rd Floor
Boston, MA 02114

Re: Proposed Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Supportive Housing at 132 Northampton Road,
Amherst MA

Dear Ms. Wachtel,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the application for Project Eligibility for the Proposed Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Supportive Housing at 132 Northampton Road, Amherst MA, submitted by Valley Community Development Corporation (Valley CDC). Valley CDC is proposing to develop approximately 28 units of affordable housing at 132 Northampton Road. The project is seeking a Comprehensive Permit per M.G.L Chapter 40B for the development of affordable housing. The Comprehensive Permit allows all local permitting to take place with the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Valley CDC is a local non-profit corporation formed in 1988 that addresses the growing needs of low and moderate income people through developing and preserving affordable rental and ownership housing and providing economic opportunities through small business assistance (summarized from Valley CDC's website: (<http://valleycdc.com/about-us/>)).

The project on Northampton Road is in response to the local need for small affordable rental units for extremely low- and low-income individuals. The Town of Amherst Master Plan (2010) and Housing Production Plan (2013) identify the severe lack of this type of housing, and recommend the creation of these types of units. The project would be one building that includes 28 small studio apartments as well as a multi-purpose common room, a laundry room, and office space for the part-time Resident Services Coordinator and part-time Property Management. The project also includes the provision of support services for tenants.

Prior to Valley CDC's neighbor meeting on April 24, 2019, discussion of Valley CDC's Supportive Housing Project had taken place mainly at three board/committee venues—the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Advisory Committee, Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust (AMAHT), and the Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC). At the 2017 Annual Town Meeting the Planning Board also supported, and Representative Town Meeting passed, a

zoning change to allow an affordable project with the same unit type, such as small studio apartments.

As background on the topic of housing for low-income and homeless people, we include the following:

- The Town of Amherst has long recognized the need for housing for low income and homeless people. This is identified in the community's Master Plan (2010), Housing Production Plan (2013) and the Comprehensive Housing Market Study (2015).
- Craig's Doors at the First Baptist Church opened 8 years ago as a seasonal behavior-based overnight shelter for homeless people; in 2018, it housed 172 individuals during the months of December through April.
- In July of 2016, the town held a public forum on homelessness that was attended by over 100 people. Representatives of several service providers spoke about the region-wide need for shelter and housing for low-income people. Residents came together to address issues related to housing for low-income and homeless people. Similar Amherst housing forums including these topics have been held annually by a variety of groups.

The timeline below indicates when Valley CDC's supportive housing project was discussed at a public meeting or hearing, and when there was local media coverage of the project. *Please note that the Town of Amherst adopted the Town Council/Manager form of government, which became effective on December 3, 2018.*

January 2017

- Valley CDC submits a request for \$51,000 in CDBG funds for site assessments and feasibility studies to help identify a site for a supportive enhanced small studio apartment development.
- Valley CDC discusses small studio apartments with Planning Board's Zoning Subcommittee to February 2017 □ CDBG Advisory Committee holds public hearing and votes to recommend funding for Valley CDC.

March 2017

- Planning Board holds a public hearing to discuss the zoning amendment related to allowing the same size units if all affordable, and votes to recommend the zoning amendment to Town Meeting.

April 2017

- Daily Hampshire Gazette article describing Valley CDC's efforts to find a site for supportive housing project.

April - May 2017

- Planning Board presents Article 35 Report to Select Board, Town Meeting Coordinating Committee and League of Women Voters.
- Annual Spring Town Meeting approves Article 35: Zoning – Apartment Bedroom Mix (Planning Board) VOTED Yes 145, No 25 with 10 abstaining to amend the Standards and Conditions of Section 3.323, Apartments, by adding the language in bold italics, as follows:

“... No more than 50% of the total number of dwelling units shall be of any one size (i.e., # of bedrooms). For projects in which all dwelling units provided, other than those occupied by resident manager(s), are Affordable (see Article 12, Definitions), the Permit Granting Board or Special Permit Granting Authority authorized to act under the applicable section of the Bylaw for this use may waive or modify this requirement. “

A management plan, as defined in terms of form and content in the Rules and Regulations adopted by the Permit Granting Board or Special Permit Granting Authority shall be included as an integral part of any application under this section. In all districts, the Permit Granting Board or Special Permit Granting Authority shall apply the provisions of Sections 3.2040 and 3.2041 to any construction, renovation, or expansion resulting in the creation of new dwelling unit under this section. Action taken 5/15/17.

November 2017

- The Town of Amherst and Valley CDC enters into a CDBG contract for site selection. The initial contract ended in September 2018 and was extended through February 2019.

June 2018

- The CDBG Advisory Committee holds a Public Hearing on current activities, including an update on the Valley CDC site selection process.

November 2018

- The Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust sponsors a public forum with Valley CDC that discusses the need for small affordable units, including SRO housing.
- Valley CDC discusses their planned CPA proposal for the project with the Housing Trust.

December 2018

- The Housing Trust votes to support Valley CDC's planned CPA proposal.
- Valley CDC submits CDBG proposal for \$200,000 to fund architectural fees and energy consulting for the supportive housing project.
- Valley CDC submits CPA proposal for \$500,000 for general costs of the project.
- Daily Hampshire Gazette Article describing Valley CDC's CDBG proposal.

January 2019

- CDBG Advisory Committee recommends funding Valley CDC's proposal.
- Daily Hampshire Gazette article about Valley CDC's project moving forward.
- Valley CDC purchases property at 132 Northampton Road.
- Location and number of units made public.

February—March 2019

- CPA Committee discusses Valley CDC's \$500,000 CPA proposal.
- The Housing Trust discussed progress and process of Valley CDC's project.
- The Town submits CDBG application to State, including Valley CDC's request for \$200,000.

April 2019

- Daily Hampshire Gazette Article about Valley CDC's FY20 CPA Proposal for \$500,000 for the project.

- Valley CDC holds a community meeting at the Bangs Center to hear comments from neighbors.

May-June 2019

- Town Council reviews and discusses Valley CDC's project and their CPA proposal.
- The Town receives comments from the community, including neighbors with questions and concerns about the project
- Town Council Community Resources Committee reviews CPAC request.
- June 24th – Town Council holds Open Meeting of the Residents
- June 25 – Finance Committee review of CPAC request
- July 1 – Town Council votes on CPAC request, approving it by a vote of 11 in favor with 1 abstention. One Councilor was absent from the meeting.
- January-February 2020
- January 6 – Valley CDC provides an update and answers questions at the Town Council
- January 31 – DHCD review period for comments opens
- February 10 – DHCD site visit attended by three Town Councilors

Consistent with the previous actions of various governing and advisory bodies of the Town of Amherst, the Amherst Town Council, expresses its strong support for the proposed Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Supportive Housing at 132 Northampton Road, Amherst MA, submitted by Valley Community Development Corporation (Valley CDC). We continue to encourage residents to share their views during the DHCD review period as well as at future Zoning Board of Appeals hearings.

Sincerely,

Lynn Griesemer on behalf of the Amherst Town Council