

Washington Housing Commission
Minutes
Tuesday, December 12, 2023 6:30 pm
In Person at Town Hall and on Zoom

Members present: Judie Gorra, Carrie Loyd, Charlie Jackson, Henrietta Small, Robert Woodrooffe

Staff: Michelle Gorra

Public: Ann Jamieson (from *Voices*), Chris Charles, Richard Wolf

1. Meeting called to order by Chair Judie Gorra at 6:32 p.m.

2. Judie thanks Shane Mongar for his service to the Commission as he steps off. Charlie Jackson will be stepping in as a member.

3. Review of Minutes of November 14, 2023

- a. **Robert moves to accept the minutes, Henrietta seconds. All approve.**

4. Old Business

a. Report on Multi-family housing, PA 21-29 regulations in Washington

- i. Judie and Robert have been members of this subcommittee.
- ii. Judie asks that all members plan to attend the hearing on January 8th.
- iii. Robert shared his letter with Ms. White, head of the Land Use Commission, and will ask that the letter be read into the record.
 1. Robert reads aloud his letter, and Judie confirms she will read the letter at the hearing in Robert's absence.
- iv. Charlie inquires about the purpose of the upcoming meeting. Judie confirms this will be a public hearing to discuss draft eleven of the Multi-Family Housing Regulation. There will be an opportunity for concerns to be voiced. The Zoning Commission will then ratify, change, or reject the regulation. There will be no vote, the Zoning Commission will make the final decision.
 1. Charlie underlines the consequential nature of this decision.
 2. Michelle clarifies the current situation: state law requires that multi-family housing is allowed. Current regulations do not allow, so Zoning must act. What this regulation looks like is up to each community. There is a one-page summary available highlighting the town's proposed changes.
- v. There were concerns around language being limiting and making it cost prohibitive. Planning must weigh in to ensure this regulation is consistent with the Plan of Conservation and Development.
 1. Planning Commission issues: environmental concerns specific to the area around the lake, affordability requirement (10% or at least one unit), and requirements are more apt for larger builds and would prove cost prohibitive for small projects.
- vi. Charlie asks if it is correct that the goal is the regulation adheres to the state law. Is there someone who will review compliance?
 1. Michelle confirms that lawyer Mike Ziska reviewed the draft for this purpose.
- vii. Judie confirms that there used to be multi-family regulations, but they were removed to avoid large developments. Some of the multi-family units in town exist because they were built under previous regulation.

b. Baldwin Hill Project report

- i. Still in progress, Segalla gave a cost for their construction (\$350,000), but Brad Sedito and other members plan to make amendments to the plan that will bring the cost up to (\$450,000). Bill expects to sell the house for \$250,000. This difference must be made up through grants or donations.
- ii. A new property will be donated to the Trust in the new year. Bill will be coming to the Commission to cover site plans and other fees.
- iii. If the Baldwin Hill project gets funded by the state, the money in the fund can go towards the next project.

c. Report on Desegregate CT training for Housing Commissioners.

- i. Judie attended this training. It had a lens towards affordable housing making the state more equitable. This work will be done regionally, not by town.
 - 1. Aim to bring all residents into the process with an awareness of who is not in the room. There is a “missing middle” that multi-family housing would address. There are economic, equitable, and environmental benefits to affordable housing.
- ii. Henrietta asks if there is a reason other builds, in this case Baldwin Hill, are not multi-family.
 - 1. Michelle answers that multi-family is complicated. In the case of limited equity homes, the Trust owns the land and homeowners’ own houses and can sell. Multi-family means multiple owners. This financial model (rentals or condos) is easier for the Trust to work with.
 - 2. Chris adds that this is what Bill said, and that Jocelyn shared that with two buildings totaling ten units, it was possible for funding there, but Baldwin Hill will be more complicated.
- iii. Training emphasized the need for patience throughout the process.

d. Update on request for money from town conveyance fees being transferred to the Housing Commission.

- i. Judie and Bill will attend the next Finance Board meeting to speak to the need for money for affordable housing.

5. New Business - topics that Commission members wish to pursue.

a. Consideration of marketing strategies -. Commitments to address different groups.

- i. Judie spoke with Jenn Pote to engage seniors and on January 24th will host a lunch and learn on affordable housing. She hopes another member of the Commission might join her.

b. Woody’s proposal re: a feasibility study for funding for affordable housing.

- i. Robert summarizes: Through no fault of our own, the commission is more passive than active. Creation of thirty units has not been speedy, idea: a feasibility study: survey through conversation 20-30 key players (people or institutions) to gauge their interest and willingness to be involved in any capacity.
- ii. Judie spoke with Jocelyn, she doesn’t think we need a consultant, but she is willing to attend the next meeting to speak about this.
- iii. Henrietta asks if and how data has been gathered. Michelle answers that the housing plan included data collection. Robert and Ted Bent also solicited information from local business owners more recently. Information can also be seen in the waitlists that exist. Jocelyn will be sharing the regional lists as well. Partnership for Strong Communities has lots of data as well. Michelle will share this.
 - 1. Henrietta underlines the need for personalized information and an accurate picture of the housing market in Washington in order to make the case to the town.

c. Habitat update

- i. Habitat project #1 closing soon, the other two do not have buyers. Michelle will circulate flyers in places that may benefit from the opportunity.

d. Southbury Affordable Housing Alliance

- i. Michelle attended a talk last month to learn more about other groups. Speaker may not be the right fit for Washington, but the format could be.
- e. Robert shares a NYT opinion piece highlighting Pad Split and geared towards those downsizing. Concept is an interesting idea, more prevalent in the South. Michelle will circulate the article.

6. Motion made to accept the 2024 meeting calendar, Robert makes a motion, Henrietta seconds. All approve.

7. Visitors

- a. Chris raises that the Housing Trust was created as a stopgap when nothing was being done. Considered to be the main force to create housing. Judie sees this commission as a support for the Trust.
- b. Chris revisits the topic of the 31 acres in New Preston, purchased with Open Space Funds. He thinks there is a way of reworking things to build housing there.

8. Motion to adjourn made by Henrietta, Robert seconded. All approved. Meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Carrie Loyd, Secretary

Link to meeting recording: <https://youtu.be/IYE3q708CUk>