

Washington Housing Commission
Minutes
Tuesday, February 13, 2024, 6:30 pm
On Zoom due to weather

Members present: Judie Gorra, Carrie Loyd, Darryl Wright, Charlie Jackson, Robert Woodrooffe

Staff: Michelle Gorra

Public: Ann Jamieson (from *Voices*)

1. Meeting called to order at 6:31pm

2. Review of Minutes January 16, 2024

- a. Charles moves to accept the minutes, Robert seconds, all in favor

3. Old Business

a. Update on Baldwin Hill Property

- i. The property has been included in scattered-site home ownership initiative through the Northwest Housing Association, David Berto putting in a request
- ii. Judie heard from Bill Fairburn who is meeting with the Wetlands Commission to sign off on a permit and will then meet with the Zoning Commission.

b. Update on additional property being donated to the Washington Community Housing Trust

- i. Date keeps moving, but the owner will be closing on April 12, 2024. We can then start moving on funding the pre-development issues that need to be addressed.

c. Habitat for Humanity Update - April 6 event at Town Hall 11A.M.-1 P.M. welcoming new homeowners

- i. The event will not be happening as planned, A homeowner will be out of town so the date is being rescheduled.
 - 1. This event is a home dedication for two (maybe three) new homeowners hosted at Town Hall. Marty's will be doing food as will Anne Low and a few students. The Housing Commission has been invited to share information about the goals of this group
- ii. Charlie asks when individuals buy or rent the properties that this commission is a part of, if there is any stipulation that they are and/or remain employed in Washington. Michelle answers that there are employment requirements, but none that require the place of employment to be in Washington. Ties to the community factor into the application process, however, and work in the favor of the applicant as decisions are made.

d. Update on Lunch and Learn event at Senior Center on January 24

- i. Judie visited the Senior Center and reports attendance was around ten, mostly older couples, including one couple who have lived in town for a longtime but have struggled to find anything

affordable. One person was interested in Habitat's ability to make upgrades to accessibility in already-owned homes

e. Update on multi-family regulations being mulled over by the Zoning Commission

- i. Zoning is having another meeting next Tuesday, February 20 at 7:30pm. One of the issues being discussed is the Planning Commission's want for affordable housing to be in the town centers, this was echoed by the attorney.
- ii. The affordability requirement is still an issue with conversation around whether or not this will hinder developers. Janet Hill recommends that the two needs be spelled out more clearly in the regulations. Would small projects still need to meet the 10% affordability requirement?
- iii. Michelle adds that the Commission is considering adding language that allows any project with nine or fewer units to be exempt from the 10% requirement.

f. Update on budget meeting with Board of Selectmen 2/12/24

- i. At last meeting it was decided to request \$350,000 for pre-development costs. Judie and Michelle attended Selectmen's meeting. The Selectmen plan to approve \$250,000 as well as the funds from a \$100,000 sale (non-developable land on railroad bed). This will go to the Housing Fund, which required any expenditure over \$10,000 be approved by the Selectman then Finance Board, then a Town Meeting.
 1. Charles clarifies that this will be added to what is already available to the Commission
- ii. All three Selectmen understand the need, and the meeting felt optimistic.
- iii. Charles asks if this Commission can purchase property. Judie answers yes.

4. New Business

a. Consideration of requesting a change to the Housing Commission ordinance requesting the ability to purchase land and structures for affordable housing projects.

- i. Michelle met with Jim to advocate for furthering the work of this Commission (Michelle shares the ordinance on screen)
- ii. Jim felt that the ordinance didn't cover buying pre-existing buildings, but gave Michelle the go ahead to get the appropriate language from the town's attorney.
 1. At the end of section 1, it is suggested that the following language is added:
 - a. *Improved land eligible for acquisition shall include, without limitation, property on which a house, building, or other structure is situated whether or not habitable at the time of acquisition.*
- iii. Charles asks if it is determined if the town or the Trust would be the owner, Michelle says it has not yet been decided.
- iv. Next steps: this Commission makes a motion to add the language, then ordinance goes to Selectmen and a Town Meeting to make a change to the ordinance.
- v. **Darryl makes a motion to accept a change to the ordinance, Charles seconds, all in favor.**
- vi. Charles voices his support for this change and the ways in which it would impact the work of this commission

b. Northwest Connecticut Housing Association met this morning, February 13

- i. This association is a valuable source of information and has recently been reconfigured. Today's meeting included a memorandum of understanding that we must join the association to participate.
 - 1. Memorandum talks about meeting requirements, including how many members may attend (no more than two from this Commission plus Michelle may attend).
 - 2. It is decided that the memorandum will be shared, discussed, and voted on at the next meeting.
 - 3. This is a great opportunity to learn from other towns and individuals who are doing the same work.
 - 4. Michelle strongly advocates for the Commission considers membership.
- ii. Center for Housing Opportunity has a playbook for funding projects, this will be sent to the Commission. Jocelyn will then come to a future meeting.
 - 1. Judie will invite Jocelyn to attend
- iii. Michelle adds that Kent's Housing Trust is partnering with the fire department to do a survey. This is a new partnership and could be interesting to follow.
 - 1. Full details were not provided.
 - 2. Darryl is going to inquire with contacts about how this is set up.

c. Charles asks for an elevator pitch for this Commission, in particular if we know how many people work or volunteer in town.

- i. Judie says we do not fully know, but a version exists through the Department of Labor. Michelle adds that some of this is included in the housing plan and we have survey data (2021) from those who work in town (whether they do or do not live in town). Other known information is anecdotal from the school leaders or fire department.
- ii. Other statistics to highlight are the age of the population. This reflects the demographic who would like to live and work here, but don't currently, which is complicated to capture in a survey.

5. Motion to Adjourn made by Darryl, seconded by Charles, all approved. Meeting adjourned at 7:20.

Respectfully Submitted,
Carrie Loyd, Secretary

Link to meeting recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JH7VLdWiCCo>