

February 12, 2007

Present: Liddy Adams, Wayne Hileman, Jean Suddaby, Sue Werkhoven

Guests: None

Visitors: Chris Charles, Valerie Andersen, Dick Sears, Bill Fairbairn

Call to Order

Chairman Wayne Hileman called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

Minutes of January 8, 2007

Sue Werkhoven moved to accept the minutes as submitted. Liddy Adams seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

Items Added to Agenda

Wayne Hileman asked for a budget item to be added to the end of the meeting agenda. This item was added by unanimous consent of the commission.

Public Comment

Valerie Andersen asked the Housing Commission whether they would consider using some of their exploratory funds to research what could be done with the Washington Primary School, should a consolidated school be built. She wondered if this old school building could be converted to senior housing, leaving the central office and the gym as is.

Sue Werkhoven said that, until the school building issues are resolved, it would be out of place for the Housing Commission to initiate a study on this topic. Jean Suddaby said she agreed with this.

Valerie Andersen said that, if the time were appropriate, she would like to see some of the \$5,000 allotted to the Housing Commission for research used for estimating the costs of converting the primary school.

Jean Suddaby said that considering such research right now could give people the impression that something is in the works that really isn't and that certainly hasn't been aired publicly.

Chris Charles said he had read Valerie Andersen's letter describing her proposal to consider buying some houses in the lower price ranges for affordable housing. Chris Charles felt that this model had some serious flaws in it. Most of the houses in the lower price ranges need dramatic repair work. Given escalating energy costs, the retro fitting with proper insulation reduces the money available for mortgages.

Wayne Hileman said the Housing Commission needed time to fully consider Valerie Andersen's affordable housing proposal.

Bill Fairbairn said the Washington Community Housing Trust would meet with the Housing Commission in March. Wayne Hileman asked the Housing Commission members to have ready a list of items and questions that they would like to put before the WCHT and invited the WCHT to do the same in return.

Updates

Affordable Housing Appeals List: The town has lost two points from its affordable housing inventory. Two mortgages were removed by CHFA (CT Housing Finance Authority). The town gets a point for each house that has a CHFA mortgage. This places the current total at 45.5 points.

Area Median Income: Wayne Hileman informed members that HUD and DECD have reassigned the Town of Washington from the "Danbury Metro Area" to the "Litchfield County Non-Metro Area" for purposes of determining our Area Median Income. This means that our AMI has been adjusted downwards from \$96,500 to \$82,000. Thus a family of four with an income of \$75,000 can no longer

qualify for affordable housing. Now, in Washington, "affordable" housing would require a maximum annual family income of \$65,600 and "very affordable" \$49,200 ("affordable" is 80 percent of the area median income and "very affordable" is 60 percent of the area median income). New houses built under C.G.S. 8-30g must use the lower State median income (\$81,000) as a base line, while existing houses may use the higher of the two median incomes.

Meeting with WCHT: (see above)

Deed Restrictions: Wayne Hileman said the deed restriction paperwork for Ellsworth hasn't been completed. The Selectmen will email the appropriate party to check on its status.

Senior Housing Survey

Wayne Hileman said the draft has suggestions for the purpose and rationale section of the Survey report as well as for the method used in its development. Assisted living facilities were omitted from the survey because this topic was thought to be too complex and has been left for future study. Wayne Hileman asked members to email suggestions on the draft to him.

Jean Suddaby said she was surprised by the survey's strong support for rental apartments. Liddy Adams felt an explanation could be that rentals are more cost effective for older people who are downsizing from home ownership. She also suggested that the Housing Commission make a recommendation to the Planning Commission that the survey data be incorporated into the next Plan of Development. Also, the Planning Commission might come up with a process for addressing the needs expressed in this survey.

Dick Sears felt the return of 284 survey responses was quite good. Jean Suddaby said some survey comments referred to the use of village centers as being advantageous for higher density housing. She also said that there were two pages of non-supportive comments and eight pages of supportive and qualified supportive comments. Liddy Adams felt that representative comments could be interspersed throughout the report.

The Board of Selectmen has suggested featuring a summary of the survey results in the March town newsletter. Eventually, the full report could be placed on the town web site and copies made available at the Senior Center and the Town Clerk's office.

The members discussed an article in an AARP publication that described a new form of congregate living where there were 8 to 10 people in a house. This would be a model that would be on a scale and aesthetically appropriate for a small rural town.

Other Business

Members of the commission discussed having an informal workshop to work on writing the survey report.

After the March meeting, there would be consideration for a change of time and day for the Housing Commission's monthly meetings.

Wayne Hileman has been working on clarifying terms such as "affordable" for a glossary sheet. He felt it was important to stick to the definitions given by the state. Liddy Adams felt that the proliferation of terms used to describe affordable housing (moderate, workforce) only serve to confuse people and obscure the issue.

Wayne Hileman will write a formal request to the Board of Selectmen regarding the Housing Commission's operating and capital expenditures for the 2008 budget and submit it to the commission for approval at the next regular meeting.

The commission held a brief discussion regarding granting a tax abatement for the portion of a property upon which an owner has enabled an affordable housing deed restriction. Currently the only means of approving this is through a town meeting. The commission feels that there needs to be a procedure for protecting the privacy of such owners by holding their names from public discussion. Liddy Adams said there might be ways to accomplish the above by doing something along the lines of a payment in

lieu of taxes. Wayne Hileman agreed to consult Mike Santoro of the DECD regarding any options.

Adjournment

Wayne Hileman moved to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Jean Suddaby. The meeting adjourned at 6:45.

The next scheduled meeting is Monday, March 12, at 5:00 p.m. in the Land Use Room, Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Patte Doran