Implementation of PA 21-29 Subcommittee

Minutes

September 8, 2022

4:00 p.m. Main Level Meeting Room

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mrs. Gorra, Mrs. Hill, Mr. Solley, Mr. Woodroofe MEMBER ABSENT: Mrs. Andersen

Mr. Solley called the meeting to order at 4:10 p.m.

Mr. Solley referred to Mrs. Hill’s document entitled, “Possible Standards to Consider for Multifamily Housing,” and suggested the meeting begin with a review of potential standards. Mrs. Hill explained the purpose of this list; that although Atty. Zizka had recommended that the first decision to be made was where multifamily housing would be permitted, at the last meeting the subcommittee members seemed to be in disagreement about where in Town that would be. She thought the review of standards that could be imposed would help the subcommittee to decide on appropriate locations. She also said her list did not include some standards like architecture and site design, because these were detailed in Mr. Martin’s 2005, “Specific Multi Family (MF) Standards.” A general discussion included the following points:

* Although the goal of PA 21-29 is the creation of “affordable” housing, the Commission can require that a percentage of the approved units be Affordable per CGS 8-30g.
* It was noted Atty. Zizka did not favor the implementation of multifamily housing (MFH) floating zones because doing so adds a layer of bureaucracy and makes the approval of multifamily housing a two step process. Mr. Solley did not favor the creation of distinct zones where MFH would be permitted because it could be considered discriminatory and surrounding property owners would most likely object.
* It was suggested that access to a state highway should be made a required standard.
* It was understood that the density permitted under soil based zoning (SBZ) would have to be increased in order to build MFH.

Regarding specific standards, Mr. Woodroofe thought density and building size and height were two of the most important to consider. Mr. Solley added lot size and said he was not sure density should be increased over three times what is currently permitted under SBZ. Mrs. Hill noted that the village centers, where both the Plan of Conservation and Development and the Housing Plan recommend MFH be located, have smaller sized lots available and so she thought the subcommittee should be wary of setting too large a property size as the minimum standard, especially considering modern improvements in septic system technology. Mrs. Gorra had researched Roxbury’s MFH regulations and reported Roxbury required a minimum of 6 acres excluding wetlands, watercourses, and steep slopes, and the maximum number of units permitted was three per acre. She noted the Roxbury Zoning Regulations include a separate section for Elderly Housing. It was noted Roxbury’s regulations might generally be similar to what Washington might want to adopt to govern MFH.

Density was discussed. Mr. Solley reviewed the Town’s current SBZ regulations and thought Washington might adopt a specific regulation similar to Roxbury’s section 19.4.4, which sets maximum density at 3 units per acre. While she thought that might be OK for affordable single family houses, Mrs. Hill questioned whether 3 units per acre would be the most appropriate density for MFH. It was the consensus that while being sensitive to public opinion re: MFH, the Zoning Commission should do more than just the minimum required to comply with PA 21-29. Mr. Woodroofe asked if there were any sections of Town where housing was already so dense that MFH should be exempt there. Several densely developed sections of Town such as New Preston, Sandstrom Road, East Shore Road, and the R-3: Lake Waramaug Residential District were noted and the Zoning District map was reviewed. Mr. Solley suggested New Preston, the R-3, and The Green districts be exempt. It was noted, however, that some older, larger houses in The Green district were eligible or had already been converted to smaller units under Section 13.10. Mr. Woodroofe said the size of the property as well as size of the proposed building and the number of trees and natural features that could provide screening should all be considered when determining what density would be acceptable proportionally to the surrounding neighborhood. Mr. Solley agreed building size and height were important factors and said he favored maintaining the Town’s maximum building height of 40 feet. He added that building locations within a project, scale, and keeping MFH developments as hidden or screened as possible were important considerations. Mrs. Gorra pointed out Roxbury’s regulations have a maximum MFH building height of 35 feet and 2.5 stories.

Several additional points were made prior to the end of the meeting.

* In this area the cost of both building materials and land as well as soil based zoning contribute to the unaffordable housing prices.
* As there are relatively few jobs in the area and no public transportation developers have not had much interest in building MFH in Town.
* Although it is not yet known how the Court will rule on the Woodbridge affordable housing appeal, that appeal lists many grounds for appeal, several which could pertain to Washington depending on what MFH regulations it eventually adopts. These could include permitting MFH only by special permit, allowing it only in the village centers, having many more standards for MFH than for single family housing, etc. Mrs. Hill will forward the complaint to the subcommittee to read before the next meeting.

Mrs. Hill had drafted zoning regulations for development flexibility with the goal of providing housing diversity in subdivisions, which she based on Washington’s current section 11.9. She will send the draft section to the subcommittee for review.

Mr. Solley asked the subcommittee to review Roxbury’s MFH regulations so they could be discussed at the next meeting.

Mrs. Gorra announced there would be a housing presentation sponsored by the Housing Commission on Tuesday, 9/13 at 7:00 p.m. the subcommittee was invited.

The next subcommittee meeting was scheduled for Thursday, 9/22 at 4:00 p.m. in the main level meeting room.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:40 p.m.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,

Janet M. Hill