

Minutes Washington Housing Commission Meeting
March 8, 2022

1. Hybrid Meeting was called to order at 5:37 P.M.

Present: members - Judie Gorra, Shane Mongar, Lindsay Larson, Robert Woodroffe
Also present - Michelle Gorra, meeting facilitator, Chris Charles, Joan Lodsins, Jay Hubelbank, Ted Bent, Leslie Anderson, Linda Zukauskas

2. The Minutes of Feb. 8, 2021 were accepted with two corrections. Virginia Risley's name was corrected and the grant that Bill Fairbairn referred to was corrected to read \$450 K.

3. Old Business

a. The Commission was reminded that the Town Meeting scheduled for March 24, 2022 will consider raising the spending threshold to \$10,000 from \$5,000. Shane agreed to attend and speak to the issue if necessary.

b. Michelle gave a report on the printing and the distribution of the flyer on the Down Payment Assistance Program. After reviewing the flyer, the Commission agreed to make some changes to make it clearer to read and to change the number of training hours 8 to 6-8. The house that had been on the market that met the criteria had been sold so its distribution was not a rush. Michelle will make some changes, print a handful, and distribute to the realtors. Additional printing will have to wait until the budget is approved at the Town Meeting in May.

c. The Commission reviewed changes that Michelle had made to the website. The information and link about the Washington Community Housing Trust was added and will be revised with current members of the Trust listed and making sure the reader understands that it is a local initiative not a regional initiative. Jay Hubelbank will work on the link to the CT Dept. of Housing so that it does not take the viewer away from the Town website. Michelle will be contacting Habitat for Humanity in order to come up with a link to their Washington project. The Commission thanked Michelle for her work on the flyer.

4. New Business

a. The Commission discussed the value of submitting an article for the summer Town newsletter. Various subjects were offered: The Down Payment Assistance Plan, Donating land to the Washington Community Housing Trust, Habitat for Humanity. It was agreed that this was a worthwhile endeavor and will be discussed further at the next meeting. Writing several articles for a Housing newsletter was brought up but will have to be deferred until approval of the Commission's budget in May.

b. Judie reported on a conversation she had with Kate Briggs Johnson, President of The Foundation for Norfolk Living.

Kate is an architect who tied for first place in 2015 for net zero design. Kate has done a good amount of designs for affordable and environmentally friendly housing. However, she did not design the homes that will be built for Haystack Woods. They were designed by Shadlers-Selnau Architects in Farmington.

The Foundation for Norfolk Living is a 5019c(3) organization which was founded in 2005. Kate became involved in 2010. The property was owned by a for profit builder. The Foundation is the developer. The intention was to build a super-efficient house but not be super sophisticated.

LISC Local Initiative Support Corporation provided the technical support to get the money. Kate said the Washington Housing Trust has worked with David Berto of Housing Enterprises before.

He puts together what needs to be done. LISC provided bridge loans. They had a predevelopment loan and were wondering if they could use the money for something else. She said if there were 6 units or more the Dept. of Housing would give them money which they put toward the town center rentals.

It took quite a while to get the project through zoning. Ultimately, they got the proposal through zoning having to make the road a town road which reduced the number of homes that could be built. The homes will cost \$500,000 to build and they plan on selling for \$200,000. So, the Foundation will have to fund the gap. The square footage ranges from 1000 sq. ft. To 1600 square feet. One of the homes is on one floor and will be accessible. There are carports and storage areas. There will also be car chargers. They are deed restricted. The town has been told that at least 30% will be affordable but will try to have all of them affordable.

The Foundation has a short waiting list but Kate said it will not be a problem filling the homes. The hope is that the project will begin this summer.

Commission members were enthusiastic about the project and the possibility of having Kate and/or the architect present the information to an audience in Washington. The Commission discussed including the Sustainability Committee, the Planning Commission, The Zoning, Commission, The Conservation Commission, the Board of Selectmen, WEC and the public. At this point WEC is working to present a lecture on climate change or some other environmental issue in April.

c. Other topics brought forth by the members

1. Shane brought up the difficulty of working people in Washington finding affordable rents in town and having to move to other towns. A discussion ensued regarding encouraging owners of retail units with unoccupied second floors to convert the second floor into an apartment. There was a question as to whether there might be incentives for renting to people working in town and the Commission was reminded that the Fair Housing Act is very strict and might prevent that. It was suggested that encouragement for such a thing might be good. Michelle will contact Pels Matthews who does much of the commercial property rental and see what the situation is.

2. Woody reminded the Commission that Bill Fairbairn in his presentation last month talked about the need for zoning changes if we were going to be able to meet the need for affordable housing. PA21-29, a zoning enabling act, requires that zoning regs be in compliance with that act. The Commission members were encouraged to read the act and perhaps even the multitude of Washington zoning regulations currently in effect. Shane will bring up the issue to the Zoning Commission as he is an alternate member. [DesegregateCT.org](https://desegregatect.org) has a good summary of the act. Michelle alerted the Commission to the public hearing for HB 5205 - An act concerning needs assessment and fair share plans for municipalities and increase affordable housing which will take place on Thursday, March 10 at noon on zoom.

5. Visitors were invited to bring forth any concerns. None were brought forth.

6. The meeting was adjourned at by 7 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Judie Gorra
Chairman, Housing Commission

<https://youtu.be/PzSAeQmnsD4>
Link to meeting recording

