

Washington Housing Commission
Minutes
Tuesday, September 12, 2023- 5:30 pm
In Person at Town Hall and on Zoom

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

Staff: Michelle Gorra

Public: Chris Charles, Ann Jamieson (from *Voices*), Linda Frank

- 1. The meeting was called to order at 5:34 by Judie Gorra, Commission Chair; Charlie was made a member in Shane's absence.**
- 2. Review of Minutes of August 8, 2023**
 - a. Robert moved to adopt the August meeting minutes, Henrietta seconded. All in favor**
- 3. Old Business**
 - a. Report on Zoning subcommittee re: Multi-family housing, PA 21-29**
 - i. A tenth draft of the Multi-Family Housing Act was written and presented to the full Zoning Commission. Judie and Robert were unable to be at the meeting, but Judie reports that Janet says it went well. There were questions about wording and an issue regarding property being divided. This will be brought to the attorney especially around the use of *lot* versus *property*.
 - ii. Another subcommittee meeting will be held next week. If the Zoning Commission approves, it will then go to the Planning Commission and the Council of Governments then a public hearing.
 - iii. Michelle suggests that a concise summary of the highlights and any proposed changes may be beneficial as the length and language may be prohibitive to some reading the document.
 1. Judie agrees to bring this idea to the subcommittee with the understanding that the details are important and intentional.
 - b. Report on marketing the Housing Commission and the Washington Community Housing Trust agenda**
 - i. Robert has placed a call to Ellen at the New Preston Congregational Church with no response. Judie is going to follow up.
 - ii. There is going to be a Faith Community Forum on September 22nd on Zoom.
 - iii. Harvest Festival is October 8th from noon to 5pm, and volunteers are needed to sit at the table and for set-up. The Trust can be a part of this as

well. Robert offered to be there from 3-5pm. Henrietta and Carrie will set up and be at the table from 12-3pm.

1. The posters, brochures, housing plan, and a summary of the plan will be displayed along with Judie's house cookies.
- iv. The Housing Trust has not created an online donation link, but it is in the works.
- v. Michelle proposes the Housing Commission visit other local groups (for example the Rotary Club, Lions Club, and Senior Center) and commissions (especially regarding PA-2129) to discuss the Commission's work.

c. Baldwin Hill Project report

- i. Judie shares that there is not much to report. Waiting for the HTCC, to whom a grant application has been submitted, for the next step.

d. Dept. of Housing/CHFA Housing Developer Forum - Robert and Michelle

- i. Michelle reports that the Forum felt discouraging as the commissioners don't understand the challenges of the Northwest Corner. All of their selections recently have been larger scale projects. It was suggested that they look for projects of ten units or more.
- ii. A Time to Own session: \$1.5M invested in the program to go to buyer in subsidies; this program could be partnered with the Down Payment Assistance Program.
 1. In tangent, these could be a significant help to homebuyers.
- iii. The Commission needs to update the flier as some of the information is out of date, and Time to Own needs to be added.
- iv. Michelle shares a thank you note from Linnea, the recipient of a Down Payment Assistance check.
 1. Judie suggests this may be an effective marketing piece if shared publicly and suggests the Commission ask the recipient to submit a Letter to the Editor.
- v. Michelle suggests the balance of the Down Payment Assistance program should be reviewed as \$100,000 was initially earmarked and six gifts have since been made. None of the homes have been sold, so no money has been returned to the fund.
- vi. Michelle reports that the Commissioner of the Dept. of Housing shared that money needs to move faster than most affordable housing projects do. As a result, much of the money is earmarked for developers; 20% of what they build has to be affordable, the rest is unrestricted.

e. Report on NWCT Regional Housing Council Meeting

- i. Judie attended the Zoom call this morning. There was not much to report, David Burto is a resource to the group.
- ii. Michelle shares that the Housing Summit will be held on October 23rd at Warren Town Hall and followed up online forums.
 - 1. The Housing Dept. Commissioner and Chris Murphy are invited, but attendance is unconfirmed.
- iii. Judie shares that there is hope of creating a waiting list for affordable homes that will include the area towns, a compiled list would better illustrate the need in the area and help to redirect to places with availability.
- iv. Michelle adds that Mary Oppenheimer (*Lakeville Journal*) has a collection of articles being published as a collection thanks to a grant and a digital version available. She will share this out in hopes it will be helpful.

f. Letters to the Editor - Henrietta's letter

- i. Judie shared the text of Henrietta's Letter to the Editor/s, and offers that she plans to write a letter as well this month.
 - 1. Michelle adds that when there are upcoming actionable items/dates/times, the letters can be reused.
- ii. Robert shares that he sent his homily into *Voices* and has not heard back yet. Ann offers to look into it. Robert also plans to continue his outreach to other faith organizations.

g. Judie is unavailable for the scheduled October meeting date. The Committee agrees to move the meeting back a week to precede the Habitat for Humanity workshop on October 17th.

h. Continue conversation re requesting diverting some of the Town's conveyance fees to the Housing Commission

- i. Judie reminds that this is a good thing, but requires caution. Michelle ran the concept by Jim Brinton, and he was open to it. Unclear if this would be an ordinance or a Selectmen decision.
- ii. Charlie asks if we know where the conveyance fee goes now. Judie reports that it goes to the General Fund, and the total amount received was \$216,844.48 last year.
- iii. Michelle shares that these types of line items are the best way to make the budget balance, and earmarking the conveyance tax is a great idea as the transfer would be automatic instead of needing to request it in the budgeting process every year.

- iv. Judie proposes a discussion about what percentage the Commission should ask for:
 - 1. Charlie suggests that 100% of the fee be requested, Henrietta agrees.
 - 2. Robert asks if we would strengthen the argument by broadening its benefits. Michelle suggests the income be added to the fund that is already established and maintained by ordinance.
 - 3. Charlie suggests going in with no conditions and asking for it all.
 - 4. Chris asks what the Commission needs to achieve the set goals, and suggests having a target number would be beneficial in creating the argument for why this money is needed.
 - 5. Judie agrees to move this forward and take it to one of the next Selectmen's Meetings with the Commission's support.
 - 6. **A motion for Judie to write a letter is made by Charlie and seconded by Robert. All in favor.**

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

- a. Robert suggests, along with Chris, that the Commission would benefit from a model plan that could be used to expedite the building/development process.
 - i. If the Housing Commission had stock plans, this could be beneficial to the builder, developer, and homeowner.
 - ii. Judie asks how we get these plans in hand, Chris suggests there are a number of ways to achieve this, including consulting with local architects or sustainable developers.
 - 1. Could partner with Sustainability to purchase a plan.
 - 2. Judie suggests each committee member look into this and share their ideas.
 - 3. Michelle suggests speaking with Bill Fairburn could be helpful to find out what his committee uses and what builders are comfortable with using.
 - 4. For the Baldwin Hill project started with a modular builder and adapted a plan from there. Brad Sedito then made changes.

5. Motion to adjourn made by Charlie and seconded by Henrietta. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Carrie Loyd, Secretary

Link to meeting recording: <https://youtu.be/CDacd5keIJg>