

**Washington Housing Commission
Minutes**

Tuesday, August 8 2023, 5:30pm

Member present: Judie Gorra, Robert Woodroffe, Henrietta Small, Charles Jackson

Staff: Michelle Gorra

Public: Chris Charles

- 1. Meeting is called to order 5:35 by Judie Gorra, Commission Chair**
- 2. Review of the Minutes from July 11, 2023. Motion to approve minutes by Robert, seconded by Henrietta, all in favor**
- 3. Old Business**
 - a. Report on Zoning subcommittee re: Multi-family housing, PA 21-29**
 - i. Robert and Judie continue to go to meetings and attended meeting last Thursday. The process is wrapping up, then will go to the Zoning Board.
 - b. Report on marketing the Housing Commission and the Washington Community Housing Trust agenda**
 - i. Judie reports that Robert came to First Cong. Church and did a great job sharing. Next up is Salem Covenant and St. Andrew's. New Preston Congregational Church, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and the Episcopal Church on the Green have not responded.
 1. After the service at First Cong. Church, Robert was approached about a financial donation. Who would these gifts go to? What are the tax implications?
 - a. Michelle clarified that the town is non-profit and there is a fund that money can be designated towards; however, money must be used in an equitable way that benefits all.
 - b. She suggests the Trust is the best option.
 2. Robert was also approached by another church attendee with connections to potential land donors. He asks what the best way forward is. Judie suggests Bill Fairbairn would be the best person to convene with.
 3. Henrietta suggests we should have the answers to these questions and next steps for similar conversations before Robert attends the next church service in two weeks.
 4. Judie will speak to Jim Brinton and Linda Gomez
 5. Michelle is going to connect with the Trust about a platform for online donations and will ask about these questions as well. She also suggests Robert make a connection between the person offering and Michelle, Judie, or another party.

c. Baldwin Hill Project report - consider action to request financing additional engineering that needs to be done by Ken Hrica Associates.

- i. Chris mentions that the Baldwin Hill renderings are unclear as to whether there will be one or two houses. Judie clarifies that the second is possible, but would be extraordinarily expensive.
 - a. Single family house lot would cost \$375K and the average selling price is \$180K meaning \$195K needs coverage.
 - b. Michelle says choosing to go for one house over two has to do with the bandwidth of the Trust. Chris adds that access to capital is an issue as well. Permits and paperwork require immense time.
 - c. Judie says that Bill has said they might consider splitting the lot up for future development. Michelle raises question as to land ownership v. house ownership (Trust maintains some control over the land).
 - d. Brad Sedito is a developer and has questions, this will be a topic at the next Trust meeting on Thursday. Ken Hrica will also need more studies and engineering, but this could not be done between the last meeting and today's meeting. The money for this is not needed up front.

d. It has been decided that Community Day will not take place.

- i. Harvest Fest is the next community event to consider representation, and it will be held Sunday, October 8th
- ii. Michelle spoke with Missy Brown about a grant Warren received that funded a community party to raise awareness for their Housing Trust.
- iii. Robert cited statistics to back up marketing initiative (Deveraux has 152 employees and only two live in Washington, price of housing is a hiring obstacle for local schools). These could be used on a marketing piece to accompany the last version.
 1. A meeting of the five schools in early summer highlighted how this issue impacts not only businesses, but also education which is an industry in this town.
 2. Of note, the schools are strategically including the town in communications about plans and development, and students have been increasingly involved in the life of the town.

e. Consider beginning to write letters to the editor regarding our agenda and need for donations of land and money.

- i. Judie asked the Commission to consider writing letters to local papers (Voices, Waterbury Republican, Danbury News Times/Spectrum) to get the message of the Commission out there in another way. Judie and Henrietta volunteered to write the first letters
- ii. Michelle asked if Robert's sermon could be a submission for the "Sermon of the Month" in Voices. Robert agrees to explore this.

f. Report on how much the town collects through conveyance fees.

- i. Every time a house is sold, some of the money goes to the state (.75%) and some to the town (.25%). A higher percent is taxed on houses over \$800K.
- ii. Since June 2012, the town averages over \$200,000 per year via the income stream.
- iii. Big jump in fees in 2021, this is due to COVID sales
- iv. Judie proposes asking if this money be designated to the Housing Commission and used for Affordable Housing.
- v. Henrietta agrees that if the town is committed to Affordable Housing, then this should be an acceptable ask.
- vi. Next step is to bring this to a town meeting. Henrietta states that this is a good example of why marketing is so important.
- vii. Questions raised: Can a portion of sales be redirected for those houses over \$800K as the rate is higher? Would this be received well by those who fall into this category?
 1. Consensus is yes, there is a good argument for this, but why not ask for a portion of all sales?
 - a. Michelle suggests the perception is better. Henrietta counters that if the tax is coming out anyways, it should benefit the town in this way.
- viii. Judie suggests next steps should be to approach the Selectmen and see where it goes from there (likely a Town Meeting).
- ix. There don't seem to be other local examples, but it is a discussion.

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

- a. No new business was raised.

5. Motion to adjourn made by Robert and seconded by Henrietta.

Respectfully Submitted,
Carrie Loyd, Secretary

Link to meeting recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hT_MjidLhY