

March 3, 2006

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

Visitors: Dick Sears, First Selectman; Rebecca Ransom, Litchfield County Times reporter

Chairman Wayne Hileman called the meeting to order at 5 pm.

The February 13 minutes were accepted unanimously.

Selectman Dick Sears informed the Housing Commission that, if it approved of continuing an allocation for the housing fund in the town budget, it needed to make a formal request to the Board of Selectmen. Last year, the amount of \$50000 a year over 5 years was acceptable to the Board of Finance and the Selectmen. Wayne Hileman moved to make a written request to put the amount of \$50000 in the housing acquisition fund for the 2006/2007 budget year. Don Brigham seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

Wayne Hileman reviewed the point system used by the state for its calculation of affordable housing. Housing units where residents make 80 percent of the median area's income are allotted one and one-half point, while units with residents making 60 percent of the median area's income receive two and one-half points.

Discussion ensued regarding the various ways the point system might be applied to the Myfield Project, depending on how it was configured. Wayne Hileman felt the Housing Commission has a responsibility to keep the point count up to date. He suggested that, since there is now an official Housing Commission, it should request information via written responses from relevant parties in order to insure a thorough count. Every town must justify their affordable housing count yearly. Currently, 1.7 percent of Washington's housing stock is counted as affordable. Two percent is needed to qualify for a four-year moratorium on large scale developments which are defined as being over 40 units.

One avenue that might be explored for increasing the town's count could be through deed restrictions. For example, the Washington Congregational Church's Council could be approached with a proposal for deed restricting some of the apartments in Ellsworth and Woodruff House, which the Church owns. Currently the former has six units and the latter has seven. Dick Sears added that the flexibility achieved by restricting some as opposed to all units would allow for making adjustments when there were changes in tenant status. He said the Selectmen's Office has letters written in the past to the Congregational Church regarding Ellsworth that the Commission could use as prototypes when developing their own generic letter for contacting relevant parties. The members discussed the various agencies and methods used to determine tenant qualification and insure that tenant information are handled discretely. For example, the Congregational Church has a Management Agent for this process.

Dick Sears described the efforts being made by representatives from the small towns to convince the State to rework the formula it uses to assign points to meet the Affordable Housing Appeals Act. He felt it would be helpful to this effort if the Housing Commission write a letter to the appropriate state officials in support of this change, thus showing the concern that exists at the grassroots' level.

Wayne Hileman went on to the next agenda item: Parcel Program/ Limited Equity Housing. This approach allows for a young family of moderate means to participate in home ownership. The house under the auspices of a governing body such a housing trust remains moderately priced in perpetuity. The consensus in town seems to be most supportive of this type of affordable housing. However, these houses receive only one point per house. Also, Wayne Hileman has heard some concern expressed about such houses looking "affordable" but he does not believe that, done properly, they would stand out as such.

Liddy Adams said that the limited equity approach offered the Housing Commission a great opportunity to work with and support the Housing Trust, since this approach is one of its highest priorities. She noted that the Housing Trust meets the last Tuesday of every month at 5 pm at 16 Church Street in New Preston. Dick Sears mentioned that the town had recently received two Federal grants.

Such grants are available and, through public hearings, decisions could be made on how to use them to attain some limited equity housing. Liddy Adams said she would talk to the Housing Trust about these various ideas. She added that the Housing Trust has been asked to have management oversight for the Myfield Project's 3 affordable units.

Wayne Hileman proceeded to the next agenda item: Depot Study. Don Brigham gave a copy of the Depot Study he had made for the Commission to use. Senior housing was referenced in this study. Wayne Hileman asked Jean Suddaby what she had found out so far about waiting lists for senior and affordable housing. Jean reported that she had gone to see Lisa Martineau of Elderly Housing Management. There are 14 units at Doge Farm with a waiting list of 16. Two people on this list qualify as having local preference which puts them first. "Local" is defined as someone who has lived in town a certain number of years or who has a family here. Riverwoods has 12 units with a waiting list of 13, one with local preference. Church Street has 11 units with 19 on a waiting list. Four of these have local preference. She added that requests for one bedroom units are high. Jean noted that Pam Collins, who is in charge of the Senior Center, noted in her 2004 annual report that there were 22 inquiries for housing, with 13 inquiries in 2005 and 6 so far this year. All these figures represent only a current snapshot since situations are constantly changing.

Jean Suddaby wants to look an array of senior housing options. She has collected some examples of applications used in various towns for types of affordable housing. She suggested the Commission consider developing a survey of the town's seniors about their housing concerns. This survey could help answer questions such as whether seniors want to downsize to smaller houses or to some kind of congregate housing. For the next meeting, Jean will do more research on types of senior housing to determine which ones might be included in this survey.

Wayne Hileman reminded members that the information they collected was welcomed by the Planning Commission, especially when it had implications for the Depot Study. Don Brigham said that ultimately, it would be at future community forums and town meetings that items in the Depot Study would be prioritized and/or removed.

Jean Suddaby made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Wayne Hileman seconded it. The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 pm.

The next scheduled meeting is April 10, 2006, at 5 pm in the Land Use Room, Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Patte Doran