

May 8, 2006

[Minutes received July 1, 2006]

The meeting was called to order at 5:12 p.m. by Chairman Wayne Hileman. Commissioners Jean Suddaby, Don Brigham and Sue Werkhoven, as well as First Selectman Dick Sears were in attendance. The minutes of the April meeting were approved as written.

Wayne reported that our letter to the First Congregational Church (regarding the Ellsworth and Woodruff rentals) was referred to the Finance Committee (of the church). They will make a recommendation to the Church Council who will then refer it to the Annual Meeting (of the congregation) on June 22. We hope to have a response by our July meeting.

The deadline to apply for an Economic and Community Development grant is already past for this year. Wayne suggested that we might want to have a proposal "ready to go" when the next opportunity to apply arises. Dick Sears suggested a joint meeting, possibly in the fall, with the Washington Housing Trust and members of the public. One goal would be to learn about other sources of money.

Wayne received an e-mail from Mike Santoro of the DECD regarding "intent" of housing use. For example, in the case of private schools which provide housing for teachers, the market value of their properties may or may not be a factor in determining the Town's overall affordable housing points.

Wayne handed out copies of an article about a developer in nearby Sharon. Essentially, that developer is now in a position of "bullying" the town, in part because the various commissions in Sharon did not work with him at the early stages of his plan. Dick Sears pointed out that the developers of the Myfield project in Washington have been very willing to work within our various commission guidelines. The lesson from the above mentioned examples is that we need to beware of less concerned (less cooperative) developers.

Wayne presented his drafts of letters to the other five churches in town, each of which owns at least one potential affordable housing unit. Dick advised us that earlier contacts with these churches confirmed that some of the properties (mostly houses for the clergy) would not qualify as affordable because of the income levels of the current occupants. Discussion followed about the necessity of working toward the required 75 points; we are currently at 47.5 points. The previously used percentages no longer matter. The DECD sent out statistics which are organized by type, not by points. Before sending the letters to the five churches, Wayne will revise them to indicate points rather than percentages.

Jean asked if this (attempt to accumulate 75 points) is a "moral issue." We need to be prepared to answer questions (about affordable housing) from people in the community. We agreed that we are currently on "step one," which is figuring out what (affordable housing) we have. Later, we can look for other options including limited equity homes. Wayne urged us to contact the heads of the private schools next. A positive response from them could contribute to our goal of 75 points and ultimately improve Town/Gown relations. Jean cautioned that there may be people in Washington who "don't care about a moratorium."

Regarding the Depot Study, we are interested in Senior Housing. Dick and Pam Collins, Municipal Agent for the Elderly, have prepared a questionnaire to assess the wants and needs of our senior citizens. Although the last survey was done before River Woods was built, it may be helpful to look back at that survey. It was suggested that the new survey be "more professional" so that the feedback will be more useful. Dick said that we should "establish a need" before trying to promote additional senior housing or assisted living. Data from the new survey should indicate what kind of senior housing would be desirable. Don suggested that we approach the Planning Commission so that they become the eventual implementers of future senior housing in the Depot.

There was a brief discussion about the necessity of funds for the administration of affordable housing. For example, Bob and Sally Futh have offered to deed-restrict a caretaker's cottage on their property so that it can be counted toward our 75 points. However, they should not have to incur further costs. Don suggested that we direct our current funds toward administrative costs and not toward acquisition of

further properties. Wayne will look at the ordinance to establish the housing fund with an eye toward covering the administrative costs.

The meeting was adjourned (per motion by Jean) at 6:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Sue Werkhoven
(not the secretary)