

# January 10, 2005

## HOUSING DIVERSITY COMMITTEE

**Present:** Jeff Andersen, Bill Fairbairn, Marty Meyers, Matt Murgio, Simone Rourk, Dick Sears, Dave Werkhoven

**Guests:** Dan Scherr

**Approval of Minutes:** The December 13 minutes were approved unanimously.

Chairman Bill Fairbairn called the meeting to order at 7 p.m.

Selectman Dick Sears reviewed the results of the December 2004 Town Poll. 70 people were polled live at the November 17 Town Forum, 53 polled via the Internet, and 277 through the mail. In the category **Very Important to the Quality of Life in Washington**, the vote was: 20% Community Projects; 57% Open Space; 36% Housing; 37% Schools; 42% Minimize property tax increases. Now the committees need to consider what the results mean for future planning. The Housing Committee was formed to address the following:

1) The Connecticut Housing Appeals Act which requires towns to have 10% of its housing stock affordable. 2) The belief that a town is a more creative, productive, and vital place if people of varied means can live there and that 3) young and elderly people who have lived in Washington for a long time can find housing that allows them to stay.

Bill Fairbairn reported on some zoning assumptions that could help reach the goals of diverse and affordable housing. The Zoning Board is aware it must deal with the Housing Appeals Act. By being proactive, the Zoning Board could preempt developers from "calling all the shots". The Board could control such matters as setbacks and avoid the overriding of soil based regulations. He specifically recommended the following:

Develop special permit processes to allow development of more condominiums and congregate housing, assisted living facilities or skilled nursing facilities

Amend Section 13.15 of the Washington Zoning regulations to allow private initiatives to develop affordable housing

Amend zoning regulations to allow mixed commercial/residential uses in village areas

Selectman Sears said it behooves the Town to get permanent tax abatements on the Church Street and Ellsworth properties if they are to continue to be counted as affordable housing. The River Woods Senior Housing already has this.

Jeff Andersen reported on scenarios for keeping the 2% affordable housing moratorium in place even while the town housing stock continues to grow. His handout's figures are based on housing permits reports, assumptions regarding the current building and zoning climate and the assumption that building will slow in town, given that land best for building has been used. (A copy of this Handout is available in the Selectman's Office.)

Marty Meyers speculated that perhaps the most effort should be put into condos as this would save land and be a less expensive approach.

Selectman Sears wondered if the apartments owned and operated by the private schools in town might be counted as affordable if they are rented below market rates.

Simone Rourk reported on whether accessory apartments could play a role in meeting affordable housing criteria. Evidently, there are some of these apartments where exchange for services is used in lieu of rent. There might be some owners of accessory apartments, if there was an incentive of a lower property tax, who would be willing to have a ten year restriction on the rent charged.

Don Brigham was to report on the pros and cons of a Housing Trust versus a Housing Commission as oversight providers. He will give this report at the February meeting.

Selectman Sears delineated possible interactions between a Housing Commission and a Housing Trust. The former can make policy and exert leadership and oversight while the latter can carry forth on the project once they were set up.

David Werkhoven used the example of how the Parks and Recreation Commission came about and suggested a similar voluntary Housing Commission.

Phil Markert, who is on the Open Space Committee, sent a handout outlining how allowing cluster housing on specific large tracts of land could generate income from house and land sales as well as tax benefits from permanently preserving open space. Of the total housing units, 20-25% would be affordable and price-subsidized by the high priced luxury units. This approach illustrates how transactions can be totally funded privately.

Dan Scherr, Chairman of the Open Space Committee, discussed ways Open Space and Housing might work together. The Open Space Committee advocates and facilitates for open space. It does research and offers recommendations to the Conservation Commission, whose members are appointed and whose mission is defined by state statutes. The Housing Committee needs a similar commission to provide for accountability and oversight. The Open Space Committee, in discussions with property owners and the community, can advocate a role for diversified and affordable housing.

Bill Fairbairn gave the Committee the task for next month's meeting, which is to agree on what should be included in the report to the Selectmen, due in March.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

THE NEXT MEETINGS WILL BE: MONDAY, FEB., 21 AND MONDAY, MARCH 14, 2005 7P.M.  
TOWN HALL

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

PATTE DORAN