

**Town of Lenox  
Affordable Housing Trust & Committee  
December 5, 2016 Minutes**

The Affordable Housing Trust & Committee officially opened at 4:10 PM

Affordable Housing Trust & Committee Members

Members Present

- Ellen Jacobsen .....EJ
- Jackie McNinch .....JM
- Mary Beth Mitts .....MBM
- Charlene Rosen .....CR
- Kate McNulty Vaughan .....KMV
- Olga Weiss .....OW

Members Absent: 1

- Debbie Burke .....DB

- Also in Attendance: Gwen Miller (Town Planner) .....GM
- Judy Barrett, Director of Municipal Services, RGB Associates .....JB
- Channing Gibson, Selectman, Lenox Board of Selectman ..... CG

Meeting officially opened at 4:10 PM chaired by GM

**Review of Housing 2009 Housing Production Plan (HPP)**

Did Lenox meet its goal of creating an affordable housing project at the Corner of Routes 7 & Housatonic St.?

There has been no development in Lenox as of the present date due to the housing recession. However, Lenox has completed its payments on the Sawmill property designated for affordable housing. The most successful affordable housing program has been the Trust program.

JM explained that this program has not increased Lenox’s Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) because the Trust has been unable to secure a deed restriction to keep the housing as affordable due to the relatively small amount the Trust contributes toward the purchase price. However there is a recapture agreement so that some of the Trust grant money can be recovered if the buyer sells the house within 5 years. Obtaining a recapture agreement is a feather in the Trust’s cap since Mass Housing Partnership has been unable to obtain recapture agreements on its grants. However there will be no more grants this year since the Federal Home Loan Bank Board is out of funding. KMV stated that the Committee doubts that Lenox wants to administer affordable housing programs and was also concerned that if future property is funded by the Trust alone it must meet all the required health and safety standards and might be a challenging task.

OW stated that Lenox could float a bond to obtain more affordable housing money. She also mentioned her conversation with the Rabbi of Chabhad who purchased a large house on West

St. The building has three stories and two apartments on each floor. The Rabbi expressed the desire to be involved with the community. However, MJM was concerned that the organization may want to limit the occupancy to members of the Chabbad religious group which would violate anti-discrimination laws. OW did not know if this was the case. The Committee wished to talk to the organization further about affordable housing options in the building.

MJM mentioned that Shakespeare & Co has land up for sale on the Old Stockbridge Rd. side containing a dilapidated house which is fenced off. She raised the possibility of the Town stepping in to purchase the property.

OW raised the idea of the Committee supporting the tiny house concept which is big in the Portland area. Perhaps Habitat for Humanity or Jamie Berg would discuss this type of housing. There is a successful affordable housing tiny house project in West Concord consisting of 10-20 houses.

Concerning the proposed Sawmill project GM stated that the Community Development Commission's (CDC) agreement with the Town has expired. She stated that the funding gap on the Sawmill project with home ownership would be 7-9 million dollars, whereas the funding gap for rental property would be \$1.3 million. KMV mentioned that the market has changed since the Committee did the 2009 HPP. In 2009 there was sufficient affordable housing rentals some owned by real estate agents. CG noted that Kevin McGuire is doing a plan on behalf of Mass Housing Partnership for a new project on the property. At some point GM stated that the Town can solicit bids for a new project.

As stated in the 2009 HPP, the Committee continues to support Community Development block grants for renovation. The benefits are that the program is a 0% loan with no payments and administered by the federal government. Thus the Town would not have to vet applicants. A downside is that property financed by this program would not be part of the Town's SHI. However, GM mentioned that using this program would fulfill other important goals.

GM mentioned the possibility of the Town funding a buy-down program whereby the Towns pays one/half the affordable housing purchase price. Possibly the Town could use funding no longer needed to repay the purchase price for the Sawmill property. CG stated that there is currently less state Community Preservation (CP) money available because increasing numbers of MA towns and cities now participate. CG recommended that the Committee do a formal presentation with a plan before the CP Committee in May. Ventfort Hall and the Mount have done good presentations.

OW recommended encouraging rental projects which provide an option to buy in 5 years similar to the Cable Mills Project in Williamstown. GM mentioned the Environmental Protection Agency's Building Blocks For Sustainable Housing and will explore this program further. Also the Committee hoped that the revised zoning plan's allowance of inclusionary zoning may spur development in the commercial downtown.

The Committee raised the issue of how to diversify funding for affordable housing projects. GM mentioned the possibility of requesting an earmark from hospitality/tourist income from the Select-board. CG thought it an interesting idea but stated that the demand for dollars is large but that the idea could be discussed with the Town Manager. CR raised the possibility of the Select-board including affordable housing as a criteria in the scoring matrix or as a super point toward gaining Town approval for a project. CG seemed interested in this idea.

## **Adjournment**

The Committee adjourned at 5:50 PM to set up for the 6:00 PM Open House. No minutes were discussed.

Respectfully submitted.  
Charlene Rosen