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Town of Lenox  
Affordable Housing Trust/Committee  
April 9, 2018

The Affordable Housing Trust/Committee meeting opened at 4:30 PM

Members present: 5

Carol Haythorne .....CH  
Mary Beth Mitts .....MBM  
Charlene Rosen .....CR  
Kate McNulty Vaughn .....KMV  
Olga Weiss .....OW

Members Absent: 2

Also in Attendance: Gwen Miller .....GM, Director of Land Use/Town Planner

### **Brief Orientation and Background**

For the benefit of CH, a new member of the Affordable Housing Trust, GW gave a summary of what had happened with the Sawmill project which has no current affordable housing project in development. The expired plan proposed a development of 40 owner occupied units on 19.5 acres. However, when the recession occurred there was no financing for the project. GM will be drafting a new request for proposals (RFP) which she will circulate to the members. After it is issued, there will be approximately 60 days for developers to submit proposals. Proposals will be evaluated according to scoring criteria, which could take an 18 month period. Pros and cons of purchased versus rental property were discussed. GM stated that there is more flexibility about combining levels of income in the project originally financed with Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding. She advised the Committees to take a wait and see view based on the submissions.

There was a discussion about the approved HPP which states the goal of producing 12 affordable housing units for the next 5 years. Lenox currently has 7.2% affordable units. MA state law chapter 40B requires 10%.

GM stated that Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP) will be conducting affordable housing trust training in April and June. She will send the information to the members by e-mail.

### **Trust Update, State Requirements, and Vote**

There is also a requirement that MA affordable housing trusts meet quarterly.

GM explained that there is one likely qualified home buyer eligible to receive the federal grant of \$10,000 which would be matched with trust funds. There is \$40,000 in town funds left for this year, and the current balance of funding is less than \$100,000. The town accountant administers the funding for the trust. GM explained that because Lenox uses the eligibility requirement of 80% of the AMI (area median income), it is difficult to match available Lenox properties with eligible recipients. Williamstown uses 100% which brings in more recipients. The Lenox trust could vote to raise the amount to 100%. KMV requested GM to find out from Jackie McNinch whether many applicants had narrowly missed eligibility because of the 80%

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figure. The Trust voted 4 in favor, 1 abstention (by CR, a non Trust member) to raise the amount to 100% contingent on the additional information showing the need. GM will get in touch with the four banks which are part of the program.

GM brought up the state requirement under MGL c. 44, section 55c that a member of the Board of Selectman (BOS) must be a voting member of the trust. Channing Gibson who was the BOS liaison is not running for reelection. MBM stated that there will be one or two seats open. The Trust will obtain a voting BOS member after the election.

GM explained that the current trust program does not count as part of the 12 units because there is not a sufficient investment to require a deed restriction to keep the property as affordable housing. Therefore, it is not included in the town's subsidized housing inventory (SHI). However, if the town were to provide a buy down grant for 1/2 the purchase price it could be counted in the SHI if a deed restriction is obtained.

GM has met with Carolyn Valli from the Pittsfield Habitat for Humanity. They stated that they are eager to work in Lenox and would provide their expertise to do so. There is additional expertise in the town's Building Department. B.J. Church has worked in housing rehabilitation, and Jeff Clemens is also knowledgeable. More Lenox volunteers may be needed. However, GM stated that contribution of sweat equity would decrease the purchase price.

Members discussed possible additional properties for affordable housing. Members asked if the Schoolhouse senior rental project is fully occupied. There was a state tour of the property and a ribbon cutting. GM believed that the property is not totally occupied. Members opined that the 55 and over age restriction for rental property may not be addressing the town's current needs. Members agreed that the town needs more family units since there are only 8 which are part of the town's SHI.

### **Update on CPA Funding and Town Meeting Request**

The town's Community Preservation Committee (CPC) voted to give the trust \$250,000 of the requested \$500,000. To obtain the funding the allotment must be approved by Town Meeting on May 3, 2018. It is Article 10 of the warrant. KMV explained that the CPC vote was not unanimous. The opposition stated that the Trust's plans were more abstract than practical. Members discussed a way to present the funding article in a favorable light. MBM will write a letter to the editor on this issue. She has also met with stakeholders including the Chamber of Commerce Director to get support for affordable housing.

The town will be requesting an additional \$100,000 from the general fund. This is Article 13 of the warrant.

### **Next Meeting**

Members set the next meeting for April 30, 2018, at 4:30 PM. The meeting adjourned at 5:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Charlene Rosen