

Affordable Housing Trust/Committee meeting 4/2/20 at 5pm

Included in these minutes is the email from Gwen Miller to all members of the AHT/C regarding preparation for this meeting (4/2/20 at 11:14am).

Attending by Zoom: Gwen Miller (Town of Lenox Land Use Director), Jackie McNinch, Olga Weiss, Charlene Rosen, Frederick Keator, Julie DiGrigli, Jon Gotterer, Marybeth Mitts, Mindi Morin, June Wolfe (Construct), Jane Ralph (Construct)

Absent: Kate McNulty-Vaughan, Donna Lefkowitz, Chris Fenton

The meeting was called to order at approximately 5:04pm by the chair, MMitts who read the recommended open meeting statement referred by KPLaw as this meeting was conducted during the COVID-19 stay-at-home order called by MA Governor Baker.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the possibility of using Town of Lenox Affordable Housing Trust funds to administer an emergency rental assistance program targeted to Lenox residents at or below 100% of AMI during an initial 90 day period from May1, 2020 to July 31, 2020 to alleviate tenant distress and to ensure local landlords would continue to receive rent payments during this emergency time frame, the duration of which is currently unknown to all.

On the call were June Wolfe and Jane Ralph of Construct, Inc., a nonprofit organization in south county specializing in affordable housing rental assistance programs among other programs assisting low and moderate households in Berkshire County.

In the current COVID-19 environment; the state of MA has initiated a moratorium on evictions as well as the fact that any court proceedings related to evictions are suspended until the Governor reverses the moratorium.

A proposal from Construct, requested by MM and GM, was circulated by GM prior to the meeting. The proposal identified \$45,000.00 as the cost. The benefits would be \$40,000 and the remainder of the cost would cover administration and management.

JW and JR briefly laid out the marketing of the program, program design and Construct's administration and management of the Lenox C-19 ERAP (emergency rental assistance program).

CR asked if a person like a housekeeper, who works for many households, would be able to access this program.

JR said yes, by asking for records confirming records of employers and revenues, people like this will be assisted. Construct works to ensure that all other forms of assistance are being applied to a household's needs before the Lenox ERAP would be applied.

Each eligible household in the program would be required to apply 35% of their monthly income toward rent, then all other state, local and federal assistance programs would be applied, then Lenox ERAP would be applied as the final gap.

How would Construct level the playing field in terms of access to the program? The program would be advertised through newspaper, radio, Town of Lenox and Lenox Chamber websites as well as Construct's contacts in the affordable housing community.

JD & FK asked about timing and need for ERAP. FK expressed that landlords may be reimbursed by the federal gov't.

JR stated that smaller "Mom & Pop" landlords won't be eligible for federal assistance. Only landlords currently in the federal system will be eligible for fed assistance.

FK stated there are known and unknown needs. JW stated that there are 954 Lenox households who rent. 80% of those (763 households) are at or below 100% AMI and would be eligible for this program. Of those living in subsidized housing (Lenox Housing Authority), they would be assisted by federal/state vouchers and increased rental subsidies if they lost their jobs, etc. The total remaining pool is not insurmountable given that other state, federal, local resources will be applied first, leaving Lenox ERAP funds to be the last funds in to make the rental payment whole to the landlord.

JMcN stated it was way too soon for these funds to be offered. She encouraged a 3 month deferral to start the program on July 1.

MMorin, JMcN and JD all agreed that May 1 is too soon to start the program. JD thought there should be legal language in any agreement with landlords that payments should go back to the Trust if payments are made and they are able to get funds from other resources.

JW and JR said that seemed like a reasonable request and would like to see some language that they could include in the program guidelines.

JW stated that usually no agreement is drawn up between Construct and landlord. Income determination is done by Construct staff, confirmation of rent amount done with the landlord by getting a copy of the lease. Construct makes gap payment in the form of a check directly to the landlord.

JD/JMcN stated that while mortgage relief is sought by landlords for payments to banks, all mortgage and interest payments must still be made. Banks will be imposing balloon payments (interest payments) with regard to prior forbearance.

OW made a motion to move forward with the funding for Lenox ERAP for a 90-day temporary program starting May 1 to be evaluated monthly and reviewed by AHT/C on June 30 (after 60 days) to discuss program extension after initial 90 day initial authorization. Seconded by CR. Roll call vote of Trust:

JMcN:	No	MMitts:	Yes
OW:	Yes	JD:	No
CR:	Yes	MMorin:	Yes

The vote passed 4 to 2.

OW made a motion to accept Construct's proposal to run the Lenox C-19 ERAP. Seconded by CR.

JMcN:	Yes	MMitts:	Yes
OW:	Yes	JD:	Yes
CR:	Yes	MMorin:	Yes

Vote passed 6 to 0.

Additional questions regarding program design, marketing materials/distribution and potential language additions to program administration and management should be directed to GM.

GM will make marketing materials available to AHT/C as soon as available.

Demographic data on landlords and program participants will be collected to help AHT/C make informed decisions about this and other rental programs in the future. Additional demographic data points members would like collected should be noted to GM in an email for her to share with Construct.

OW moves to adjourn meeting at 6:12pm. CR seconded.

JMcN:	Yes	MMitts:	Yes
OW:	Yes	JD:	Yes
CR:	Yes	MMorin:	Yes

Vote passed 6 to 0.

Respectfully submitted:

Marybeth Mitts 4/3/20