**Affordable Housing Trust Meeting**

**Thursday, July 16, 2020**

Virtual “Zoom” meeting at 4pm

Hosted by Gwen Miller, Lenox Land Use Director/Town Planner

Trust Members Present: Chair MaryBeth Mitts

Donna Lefkowitz, Jackie McNinch, Kate McNulty-Vaughan, Mindi Morin, Charlene Rosen

AH Committee: Fred Keator

Also attending: Jane Ralph, Exec. Dir. Construct: managing Lenox Rental Assistance Program;

Linda Shafiroff, Sarah Stiner, CarlyJane Shafiroff: 100 Housatonic St. & Hynes St. affordable hsg opportunities

Documents available or shared during meeting: Assessors’ map and descriptions of Housatonic & Hynes St. parcels

**Minutes: June 15, 2020 meeting:** review delayed to next meeting. KM-V will try to provide Minutes for meetings.

**Update on Rental Assistance Program**:

Jane Ralph presented information available through early July on the total of 22 households now receiving assistance from this program: 13 landlords and 19 households utilizing the Lenox program, with some details as follows: 4 additional or new HH’s, 3 HH’s on their 2nd month, and 1 new landlord. She noted that the Commonwealth had made $60,000 in additional funds available through the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation (BTCF), so no funds are being used from the Lenox Aff. Hsg.Trust. Micro-loans are available for HH’s within the 80% to 120% of median income limits from Berkshire United Way and BTCF, and 10-12 HH’s are working with Greylock Federal Credit Union at 2% interest rate with the possibility of deferment. A total of 95 households received assistance in So. Berkshire for May and June: $85,000 expended with an average grant of $900. Lenox houeholds receiving assistance are primarily 1 to 2 person households. MB Mitts asked whether those are elderly single households, but Jane clarified that retired people on Soc. Security are not affected, and HH’s receiving assistance are working folks, now unemployed, needing some rent subsidy.

MB Mitts indicated that Construct is doing a good job, and redirecting HH’s for help has been well-done. There is concern over the Aug. 18 expiration of the moratorium on evictions, but statewide housing folks are advocating for continuation of that moratorium through the end of the year. [Recent Gov. Baker announcement that moratorium on evictions and foreclosures would continue through Oct. 17, 2020.]

C. Rosen noted that the MHP newsletter also mentioned additional funds available through Berkshire Regional Housing, and Jane agreed with the recommendation that HH’s below 50% of the median go through the RAFT program. Jane Ralph will continue to provide updates to the Lenox Aff. Hsg. Trust in the coming months.

**Opportunity for Affordable Ownership: 100 Housatonic St. & 6, 8, 9, 10, 11 Hynes St.:**

Linda Shafiroff informed the Trust that she and her project partners have begun meeting with Lenox boards to move ahead on making these homes affordable, and needed some direction from the Trust on how that works. This is a group of 6 houses (2 duplexes and 4 single family) on 4 lots. They plan to apply to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) and have informed the Planning Board of a need for an ANR (Approval Not Required) to assist in their attempt to separate houses onto their own lots from their current condition of “nonconformity.” The houses -- built early in the 20th century on joint family lots – can’t be marketed in their current lot configuration. One house is empty and work is almost complete so they have begun to look into the “affordability” aspect of the project. While keeping the houses affordable, they are also interested in keeping many of the same tenants as owners, if possible.

Gwen Miller explained that for housing to be on the Lenox SHI (Subsidized Housing Inventory), potential owners have to meet certain income limits and the units must be affirmatively marketed beyond current tenants, though there may be a mechanism for First Time Homebuyers and Lenox residents to receive consideration first. Members discussed and understand Linda’s desire not to displace current residents and her need for information on the steps to take towards affordability. She wants to go before the ZBA in August. MB Mitts offered to write up documents that would get this process going in Lenox, and KM-V suggested partnering with Berkshire Housing or Construct for this first foray into setting up a housing affordability process, which would enable the town to maintain the housing affordability “in perpetuity.”

The challenge – from Gwen’s perspective -- is how to meet the requirements for state and federal regulations/subsidies for affordable housing. For Linda, finding out what she and her partners need to do. C. Rosen suggested reaching out to Barbara Heaphy ( Dir., Lenox Housing Authority) for help with the marketing process. A suggestion was also made to contact Shelly Goehring (MHP) for assistance.

The Trust agreed to meet in a week (Gwen will send Doodle options) for further discussion.

Many Trust members signed off Zoom, but the discussion continued without a quorum:

F. Keator continues to express concern that the Trust has not yet addressed the question of what an affordable housing deed restriction on a property is worth to the town, but doesn’t feel that he can offer any substantive help answering that question. Members agree that in all fairness there needs to be a clear formula that will ensure the “same deal for all” properties and potential owners.

Submitted by: Kate McNulty-Vaughan