**Affordable Housing Trust Meeting**

**Monday, June 15, 2020**

Virtual “Zoom” meeting at 5pm

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

**Trust Members Present:**

Julie DiGrigoli, Kate McNulty-Vaughan, Mindi Morin, Charlene Rosen

AH Committee: Chris Fenton, Fred Keator

Also attending: Jane Ralph, Exec. Director of Construct, managing Lenox Rental Assistance Program

Documents available/shared during meeting:

**Update on Rental Assistance Program:**

Jane Ralph presented information available through June 2nd on the 12 landlords and 17 households utilizing the Lenox program, and remarked that the landlords have been fabulous in working with tenants. Gwen noted that 20 applicants were ineligible but Jane has been able to refer them to other agencies for help. The program guidelines have not been loosened at this point. Fred asked about the number of payment cycles: only 1 cycle so far for May rent: some supplemental, some needing the entire amount. Jane’s program spreadsheet showed a range in Lenox from payments of $123.55 to $1,145 for an entire household. Some households are more vulnerable than others: 6 have no income and have not yet received any stimulus assistance, for example.

Julie noted that MA does not allow eviction in this situation, and Jane agreed that the goal is to “keep everyone whole,” not adding increased homelessness to the pandemic crisis. While Construct does not collect/have health information on households, they have consulted with VIM (Volunteers in Medicine) and are aware of the loss of childcare, etc. for some households.

Jane noted that Construct intends to do follow-up calls, in response to Fred’s question about what the normal rent is, number of bedrooms, etc. for those households. She noted that getting the program up involved a lot of calls with applicants, sources of income, information (W-9s) from landlords, etc., so the process is ongoing. At issue is whether these programs are meeting the need, and, if folks are aware of this assistance. Members offered suggestions for getting the word out, ranging from press releases in local publications, engaging with Town **Eagle** reporter Clarence Fanto, local radio and TV, Lenox town and school websites, and other postings or contact with the Immigrant Center and MultiCultural Bridge organizations, food pantries and the Lenox Schools food prep program (Fran Sorrentino). Total cost of the program is $45,000 with $41,000 to grants and $4,000 for administration.

Members expressed concern that the real need may come later as the pandemic continues, and unemployment insurance and other sources of income dry up for renters. Hopefully more data on moving, rental and landlord collections, effect on hospitality industry and their workers, and housing needs/demand of remote workers will become available.

**Minutes**: recording on town website (Affordable Housing Trust) Previous meeting minutes also need to be available and accepted by Trust/Committee.

**Approval of Minutes: April 2, 2020 meeting**:

Fred Keator: motion to approve; Mindi Morin: 2nd.

Rollcall vote: Approve: J. DiGrigoli., F. Keator, M. Morin, C. Rosen

 Abstain (absent from meeting): C. Fenton, K. McNulty-Vaughan

F. Keator expressed 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, and how that would be set. He reiterated the need to get some formula in place. Other members also see a need for analysis and discussion of that question: buydown value? Assessors valuation? Different for homeownership or rental properties?

Submitted by: Kate McNulty-Vaughan