

Winchester Housing Partnership Board
Minutes for the meeting on February 20, 2019

Present: John Suhrbier, Zeina Marchant, Lisa Matrundola, Marty Jones, David Miller, Felicity Tuttle, Naomi DeLairre, Laura Fitzgerald

Absent: Allan Rodgers, Diab Jerius, Michael Bettencourt, Jerome Garciano, Cathy Boyle

The primary purpose of this meeting was to discuss the status of the 416 Cambridge Street appeal, the results of the January 23, 2019 presentation on Municipal Affordable Housing Trusts, the status of efforts to re-start planning for the redevelopment of the Waterfield parcel, and the rejection by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development of Ron Bonvie's proposed locations for the two Winning Farm affordable housing units.

416 Cambridge Street - The trial on the appeal by The Ledges of the ZBA's approval decision was held at the end of January. Both sides have 30 days following the hearing to submit written documents, and then the Judge likely will take 90-120 days to issue a decision, implying possibly in June. This is more than three years after the April 2016 ZBA approval decision.

Municipal Affordable Housing Trust (MAHT) - An informational session was conducted on January 23 by Shelly Goehring of the Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP) that was televised live by WinCam and is now available on-demand on both the WinCam and YouTube web sites. Following this session, Select Board member Michael Bettencourt initiated preparation of a warrant article for consideration by Spring Town Meeting for Winchester to adopt a MAHT under the provisions of MGL Chapter 44, Section 55c. Questions to be decided include the size and composition of the Board of Trustees, the proposed sources for funding, and the role of the Town Manager Lisa Wong. After discussion, the Housing Partnership Board voted unanimously to support this warrant article.

Waterfield Parcel - Following the January meeting, the Chair spoke with Susan Connelly of MHP, Town Engineer Beth Rudolph, and Town Planner Brian Szekely; reviewed Susan Connelly's slides from last July; and coordinated with Marty Jones in an attempt to answer two questions 1) What are the areas where there is agreement and remaining disagreement, and 2) what are some recommended next steps and their timing?

These discussions indicated three important areas of uncertainty: 1) Is a mixed use development containing some kind of commercial development on the first floor financially feasible?; 2) Given the existing easement on the right side of the property, can a new building even fit within the space available along Waterfield Road; and 3) Would the owners of the abutting property be willing to give up or sell their easement or alternatively sell their existing buildings, thereby enabling a larger development to be undertaken?

Regarding the status of the re-design of Winchester Center Commuter Rail Station. Beth Rudolph's recommendation is that the re-design is far enough along that work on Waterfield can proceed simultaneously as long as efforts are coordinated with the MBTA. The major remaining uncertainty involves the availability of capital funding, but this should not affect the proposed station design.

After discussion, there was general agreement to wait until after the March 26 town election when a new Select Board will be in place and the results of the operating budget override will be known before attempting to re-engage the Select Board. There also was agreement that even though the owners of the

existing properties have stated that they are not interested in either selling or expanding their properties, it still would be useful if Town Manager Lisa Wong would introduce herself to the owners of the abutting properties given that it apparently has been a few years since the previous Town Manager, Richard Howard, spoke with them.

Winning Farm - There has been no change in the status of the two affordable units since last month's reporting. Ron Bonvie's proposal is to locate both of the affordable units near the entrance to the development. DHCD's Legal Counsel, though, has determined that this location does not satisfy applicable legal provisions and therefore is not acceptable if the town's desire to include the two units in the town's Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). Ron Bonvie has not yet responded to either this decision or the request for the remaining information necessary to submit a formal Local initiative program (LIP) application to the State.

The Board discussed how to proceed; specifically whether to just continue to wait or to act proactively. With no clear consensus, the Chair said that he would coordinate with Select Board member Michael Bettencourt.

The meeting concluded with updates on the following matters:

First Time Home Buyer (FTHB) Real Estate Tax Assessments - The Chair examined the new tax assessments for the 14 FTHB properties and determined that while problems existed, they were not as large or significant as originally reported. The compiled information was provided to both the Town Manager's and Tax Assessor's Offices. In response, the Assessor's Office has agreed to review the tax assessments for all of the FTHB properties and make adjustments as necessary. However, this will be for next year's assessments since requests for abatements to current year taxes had to be submitted no later than Feb.1.

Master Plan - A Community Forum will take place at the Jenks Center on Tuesday evening, Feb. 26, starting at 7:30 PM. Members were encouraged to participate. The plan is still to devote roughly 45 minutes of a HPB meeting in the March-May period to a guided discussion that is more housing and land use oriented than the Community Forum's planned small group discussions.

Council on Aging's Community Needs Assessment - The Recommendations phase of the CoA's Needs Assessment is reported to be in the early stages of getting started, with a stakeholder discussion possibly taking place at some point in the April-May period. Allan Rodgers assembled and submitted to Town Manager Lisa Wong all of the Fletcher Fund background materials that had been prepared by the HPB. The desire is to revive the conversation on how the Fletcher Fund could be used going forward. Michael Bettencourt has indicated that this a continued interest of the Select Board.

Housing Production Plan - The primary change made by the Select Board in the final version submitted to DHCD was to introduce the concept of "naturally occurring affordable housing" (NOAH) and to differentiate between "lower case" affordable housing and "upper case" Affordable Housing. Rather than taking an inclusionary approach that provides for housing over a continuum of income levels as the town has done in the past, this new wording differentiates lower and moderate income households from other residents of the town. The Chair mentioned that Washington Street, Harvard Street, and Cross Street are examples where multiple income levels are served simultaneously in the same building. DHCD has recommended approval of the Housing production Plan conditional on the addition of a sentence stating that the town recognizes that NOAH housing units are not eligible to be included as part of the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI).

Operating Budget Override - As part of the February 7 informational session held at the Jenks Center, multiple attendees blamed multi-family housing in general and Chapter 40B in particular as underlying causes for the need for an operating budget override, despite the fact that a Chapter 40B project has yet to be built in Winchester. The Chair pointed out households who choose to live in multi-family housing have far fewer school age children per living unit than those living in single-family homes.

20 Glenwood Avenue - An initial staff meeting recently was held regarding the preparation of a Request For Proposals (RFP) to provide at least one unit of affordable housing on this small parcel, but work has not yet begun on the drafting of an RFP. In separate conversations, both Assistant Town Manager Mark Twogood and Procurement staff member Meg White stated that they are looking for the HPB to be actively involved in this process. They want to make sure that this procurement will result in affordable housing units that will satisfy state requirements for being included on the SHI.

Foreclosure Auction for Washington Street Land - The scheduled and subsequently delayed foreclosure auction has now been officially cancelled. Ownership of this land apparently has been transferred to one of the children of the family trust, who is now in negotiations with a developer. The currently proposed plan is to build 59 units of housing, including 44 market rate and 15 affordable.

735 Main Street - The initially proposed design is being refined, with a ZBA continuation hearing scheduled for February 25.

248 Cross Street - Multi-family housing is being proposed for a roughly 20,000 sq. ft. parcel of land located near the Conant Road entrance to The Willows. The land currently contains a single family house.

Small Site Multi-Family Developments - The Planning Board is considering undertaking an examination of sites where small scale, multifamily housing may be possible. Outside technical assistance would be used to inventory and assess this potential.

Next Meeting - After discussion, a decision was made to next meet on Wednesday, March 20.

Minutes prepared by John Suhrbier, Chair