

Winchester Housing Partnership Board
Minutes for the Meeting on Wednesday, April 13, 2021

Present: Chair John Suhrbier, Allan Rodgers, David Miller, Diab Jerius, Felicity Tuttle, Michelle Bergstrom, Lisa Matrundola, JiFeng Liu, Michael Bettencourt, Catherine Boyle, Marty Jones as Clerk Pro Tem.

Absent: Naomi DeLairre, Edward Martin

Guests: Steve Campbell, Rich Rohan

Next Meeting: May 11, 2022

The meeting was called to order at 7:35pm.

The March 16, 2022 meeting minutes were unanimously approved by roll call vote.

Purchase of small properties to create homeownership units

Allan Rodgers reviewed the current inventory of existing properties that have been purchased for Winchester or affordable housing purposes. Many years ago, several two and three family properties were purchased by the Town, Winchester Housing Corporation, or the Winchester Housing Authority. For those purchased by the Town and the Winchester Housing Corporation, small two and three unit condo associations were created, thereby providing first time homebuyer opportunities. The Housing Authority properties are being used for rental purposes. Experience with these properties has shown there are issues associated with maintenance and monitoring. The small scale makes it expensive, difficult to administer, and provide oversight of units. Many of the condos associations have not done a consistent job of creating internal reserves or addressing maintenance and rehabilitation needs.

The policy level question, given the recent large growth in housing purchase costs, is whether the Town should continue to pursue more of these small scale ownership opportunities? Is this still a useful strategy? What is the cost/benefit?

There was a discussion about whether rental is a better strategy so as to be able to tap into the expertise of the Housing Authority, Housing Trust, or other professional property management organizations. Homeownership in larger condo complexes is different and may be a better strategy for assuring reserves, etc.

The Housing Partnership Board will continue to track the status of the current inventory and consider whether this small scale homeownership model is viable if new possibilities become available.

36 Elmwood

Marketing for the 36 Elmwood two bedroom affordable unit currently is underway. May 2nd is the due date for applications, with a lottery at Town Hall scheduled for May 9 at 6 PM. Based on the attendance at the two information sessions and the open house, there does

not seem to the same high level of interest as there has been for other projects. Possible reasons may be that this building does not have open space or to be as conducive to families from a design perspective.

Potential New Smaller “Friendly” 40B’s

Two potential new and smaller Chapter 40B Applications are being discussed, each of which would be undertaken as a “Friendly” Chapter 40B process in which the developer would work on a cooperative basis with the town.

87 - 89 Cross Street - Mario Covino is proposing to build nine townhouse style housing units at this location, replacing a large older house now containing two rental housing units. Mr. Covino is proposing to use DHCD’s Local Initiative Program to file an application for a 40B comprehensive permit. Following a presentation of the proposed new building and a subsequent discussion, a motion was made by Michelle Bergstrom and seconded by Felicity Tuttle “to encourage the developer, Mario Covino, to begin the LIP process with DHCD and continue to refine the design. The Board looks forward to working with the developer to bring more affordable units to Winchester.” The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote. The Chair will report the results of this discussion and vote to the Select Board.

Abby Road. The lawyer for the owner of three of the Abby Road subdivision parcels has submitted a letter to the Select Board requesting a discussion about the possibility of using Chapter 40B that differs on design from the one already approved. This Abby Road land is located between Highland Avenue and North Border Road, and is adjacent to Town land. It is not yet clear exactly what the 40B development might entail, and there also may be land ownership questions/disputes within the Abby Road subdivision. The submitted letter also indicates an interest in exploring the opportunity to construct as a part of this same 40B process the replacement affordable housing already agreed upon on the town owned land located on North Border Road. This would replace the previous town owned affordable rental housing that was torn down to allow the access road to this new subdivision to be built.

Following discussion, Housing Partnership Board members were reluctant to take a position on this proposal given the many current unknowns. The board, though, did support the idea of the developer meeting with Town Planner Brian Szekely to discuss possible development alternatives for this land and to explore the possible use of a “Friendly” Chapter 40 process.

Waterfield Site

Revised LDA and Ground Lease documents currently are being negotiated with Civico. When completed, these then will go to a Special Town Meeting, either late in May or early in June, to be held following completion of the regular Spring Town Meeting.

Current plans are for the Select Board to have a public information session and perhaps also to have meetings at a precinct level prior to this Special Town Meeting. The redesign and associated financial plan correspond to the information presented at the special Select Board meeting held in February.

Washington/Swanton Street Site

The Select Board continues to move forward with an RFP for re-development of the Washington and Swanton Street land acquired by eminent domain, and is finalizing the weighting of various evaluation criteria. The most important factors will be purchase price and affordable housing units. It was not clear whether the HPB and other town boards would have an opportunity to comment on the updated RFP. The Town Meeting vote requiring that all units be counted on the town's Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) will be a condition of the RFP, even though this affects whether condominium ownership housing can be proposed since any market rate ownership units are not eligible for the SHI. The Select Board's desire is to see what developers propose and how this affects the purchase price.

Partnership Board Report to Town Meeting

The Chair circulated a draft of a report to this Spring's Town Meeting and asked members to provide comments to him by April 15. This report will be distributed in print form to Town Meeting members with an electronic version placed on the town's web site.

Meetings with Town Officials

The practice of the Housing Partnership Board, prior to the onset of COVID, had been to meet with newly elected members of the Select Board and Planning Board to share information about the work of this housing board, its activities, and priorities. Members agreed it would be a good idea to re-start this communication with Winchester's newly elected as well as recently appointed town officials.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Marty Jones, Clerk pro Tem