

Sturbridge Affordable Housing Trust
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, May 16, 2023

Present:

Diane Trapasso
Margaret Darling
Wally Hersee
Ed Goodwin
Jamie Goodwin
Kathy Neal
Jean Bubon, Town Planner
Robin Grimm, Town Administrator
Jeneé Lacy, Administrative Assistant
Judi Barrett (Virtual), Barrett Planning Group
Will Downie (Virtual), Barrett Planning Group

K. Neal called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM.

Approval of Minutes of March 21, 2023

Motion: To approve the minutes of March 21, 2023 as written.

By: E. Goodwin

2nd: M. Darling

Vote: All in Favor (6-0)

J. Bubon announced that Bob Lucier has resigned from the Housing Trust and that there is another person who applied initially that will be appointed at the end of June. She also stated that the next Housing Trust meeting will be June 20th. E. Goodwin stated that he would not be able to attend that meeting.

Overview of interviews with Town officials, businesses and other community and religious leaders

W. Downie introduced himself and presented a slideshow to the Trust with the following information.

- Stakeholder Interviews
 - Who knows about the Housing Trust?
 - Most respondents were not aware of the Trust.
 - Most had positive thoughts and felt the community would as well.
 - Many were interested to know about the roles of the Trust.

- Most were interested in the Trust as a mechanism for assisting in the creation of affordable housing and as a resource for people with housing needs.
- Housing Trends in Sturbridge
 - Housing Market
 - Almost all respondents reported that development in town is very limited.
 - There is a limited amount of developable land.
 - What brings people to Sturbridge? What makes people leave?
 - Pull Factors: school district and transportation location.
 - Push Factors: price and housing availability.
 - Housing needs
 - Groups of residents who live permanently in hotels and motels, lack of shelters and other low-income opportunities.
 - The most needed housing is for 'missing middle' housing.
 - Housing challenges
 - There are a number of residents who approach aid organizations for rent and utility assistance.
 - Housing coming into the market is typically high-end apartments with rents over \$2,000 for a 2-bedroom unit.
- Housing Affordability
 - Interview highlights
 - Indicated that there is not enough affordable housing in town.
 - Long wait times for the limited affordable housing.
 - Recognized needs
 - Seniors and families with children have the greatest shortage of affordable housing.
 - A need for both affordable homeownership and affordable rental opportunities.
 - Residents fear a change in the Town's character, some cited a stigma that might cause opposition to new development in regards to accepting more affordable housing.
- Older Adults
 - Recognized needs
 - Older adults are a major underserved community in Town.
 - Only one 55+ affordable housing development and wait lists are long.
 - Long wait lists make downsizing for seniors on a fixed income difficult.
 - Accessibility is a key issue for seniors who need one-floor living.
- Development Barriers

- Recognized impediments
 - Town has a shortage of developable land.
 - Very strict environmental protection rules, which the community support, but makes development more expensive.
 - Concern that the community might not be supportive of large-scale affordable housing development.
 - Regulatory and site review process is arduous.

J. Bubon stated that what was presented seemed consistent with what has been heard from the community. K. Neal agreed and discussed a neighbor who is experiencing many of the issues discussed in regards to affordable housing.

J. Goodwin discussed people moving to town for the school system but finding it is too expensive to live in town, but it is expensive because the schools are good.

W. Hersee discussed developable land, alternative housing ideas and deed restrictions.

Review of projects undertaken by other Housing Trusts

W. Downie presented the following:

- What should a strategic plan do for the Sturbridge Housing Trust?
 - Clarify the purpose and goals of the Trust.
 - Build relationships between AHT and other boards and commissions.
 - Build awareness of needs and support.
- What are housing trusts doing in Massachusetts?
 - Provide financial support for developers.
 - Rehabilitate existing homes.
 - Increase affordability.
 - Develop surplus municipal property.
 - Preserve properties faced with expiring affordability restrictions.
 - Create programs to help low- and moderate-income homebuyers.
 - Educate the community.
 - Advocate for initiatives.
- Easton Affordable Housing Trust
 - Most funding is from CPC.
 - Has a 5-year Strategic Plan.
 - Sample Projects:
 - Partnership with BAMSCI to build a group home for people who cognitive disabilities.
 - Acquired tax title land, transferred to Habitat for Humanity and provided \$30,000 in financial support.
 - Has clear 5-year goals.
 - Has clear 5-year priority initiatives.

- Has a 5-year program budget.

J. Barrett stated that Easton is the poster child for Affordable Housing Trusts.

J. Bubon stated that she will check existing group homes to see if they count as individual units.

J. Barrett presented the following:

- Brewster Affordable Housing Trust
 - Most funding is from the CPC.
 - Has a 5-year Strategic Plan.
 - Has a Mission Statement and One-Year Projects List.
 - Sample Projects:
 - Affordable housing on town-owned land.
 - Evaluate CDBG as a funding source for housing rehab.
 - Assess Brewster Buy-Down Program.
 - Public education.
 - Fair housing forum.
 - Has a program budget.
- Sudbury Housing Trust
 - Role in forming and continuing support for Regional Housing Services Office.
 - Publishes annual financial report.
 - Sample projects:
 - Runs small grant program (home repairs).
 - Mortgage payment assistance program.
 - Rent relief program.
- Hingham Affordable Housing Trust
 - Activities consistent with the Hingham Housing Plan.
 - Sample projects:
 - Rhodes Circle: acquisition, rehab of duplex, and sale of units as affordable housing.
 - Acquisition of single-family homes and condo units, sold as affordable housing.
 - Outreach and education about available affordable units.
 - Referrals to training resources.
- Key elements of successful housing trusts.
 - Mission, goals, activities or initiatives available to the public.
 - Transparency.
 - Relationships with other Town boards.
 - More than one initiative underway.
 - Funding.
 - Public education and awareness.
- Sturbridge Housing Production Plan Goals
 - Build local capacity and advocacy efforts to achieve housing production goals.

- Preserve and maintain existing affordable housing.
- Enable a greater diversity of housing choices through regulatory action.
- Leverage resources to advance housing production and programs.
- Provide housing opportunities and associated services to support diverse populations.

Discuss Action Plan

W. Hersee discussed opportunities for the Town to acquire a building or property and not having to wait for Town Meeting for funding.

J. Bubon discussed her first attempt to try to get funds and stated that they need an action plan so it can be shown what the funds will be used for. She stated that the Planning Department wouldn't be able to take on a more labor intensive program.

R. Grimm stated that if there are small projects they could be done in house, but larger labor-intensive programs would need to be shared with other towns.

J. Goodwin asked about residents who were in arrears, if taxes could be forgiven and a deed restriction put on the home. R. Grimm discussed State laws regarding tax liens and deed restrictions. J. Goodwin discussed finding ways to get other funds.

E. Goodwin discussed Habitat for Humanity and stated that he would like to see more details about what other towns did to get funds.

The Trust discussed ways to get funding and needing to get additional data from other towns with a successful Trust.

J. Bubon stated that the CPC did approve more funds going forward for a Housing Consultant.

E. Goodwin asked what the easiest basic housing project that would give support to people in the Town; what could gear up the Trust, what do people need? J. Barrett stated that collaborating with Habitat for Humanity since people love those types of projects, working with non-profits that create group homes. She also suggested putting public education materials on the Town's website.

The Trust discussed Veteran non-profit rehabs.

J. Bubon asked what the next steps would be, process for the framework. W. Downie discussed the next steps of the process. J. Bubon discussed the latest and future Habitat for Humanity projects. She also stated that she will work with Becky Gendreau and E. Goodwin to go through tax title properties.

K. Neal asked if there was a way to subsidize buildable lots. J. Bubon discussed past Habitat for Humanity projects. R. Grimm stated that Habitat for Humanity is a great way to get support but it is expensive and a lot of work for very little pay off. The Trust discussed Habitat projects.

J. Bubon discussed Venture and Center of Hope.

E. Goodwin stated that the CPC has funds available to purchase land/houses. J. Bubon discussed the first right of refusal process.

W. Downie discussed maintaining affordable units that the Town already has and stated that education is very important.

The Trust discussed current 55+ affordable housing and Housing Authorities.

Old/New Business

K. Neal asked if there was any old or new business. There was none.

Next Steps

J. Bubon stated that the next meeting would be Tuesday June 20th at 4:30 pm but that they would need to end by 6:00 at the latest because there is a Board of Selectmen meeting at 6:30pm.

Adjourn

Motion: To adjourn.

By: J. Goodwin

2nd: W. Hersee

Vote: All in Favor (6-0)

Meeting adjourned at 6:03 pm