

Affordable Housing Trust
September 2, 2021
Meeting held via Zoom videoconference

Roll Call

Present were:

Victoria Petracca, Chair
Frank Streeter, Secretary
Jay Moody
Carolyn Read
Debra Williams
Marilyn Largey, ex officio

Chair Victoria Petracca called the Affordable Housing Trust's (AHT) meeting to order over Zoom at 7:04 PM and called the roll of the Trustees.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

None

Monitoring of Lancaster's Existing Affordable Housing Inventory

Trustee Read updated the Board on the status of 32 Carter St., noting that she had still not heard back from DHCD. She will ask Lancaster's Town Administrator, Orlando Pacheco, to see if he can help get a response out of DHCD.

Chair Petracca briefed the Board on the Harbor Homes project now being built at 2038 Lunenburg Road. Apparently they have a storm water violation from the recent flooding. Their IPOD special permit was issued a year ago but so far there has been no apparent progress on any of the required affordable units. Chair Petracca has reached out to Atty. Campobasso for an update, but so far without response. After discussion the Board agreed that if she does not receive a response from Atty. Campobasso by September 15 she would bring the matter up with the Planning Board as the permit granting authority.

Scheduled Appearances

Mark O'Hagan of MCO & Associates

Mr. O'Hagan was pleased to announce that he now had the former Jones Crossing development under agreement, for which the Board congratulated him. He gave a PowerPoint presentation showing his plans for the site, including both layout of units and renderings of what they will look like. At the moment he still needs Board of Health (BoH) approval for the existing septic system, which may or may not have Title V issues. He hopes not to have to upgrade it. He also needs approval from the Conservation Commission for work in wetland buffer zones. The project will need to be approved by the ZBA and by Mass Housing/DHCD as well.

Trustee Largey asked if the development would have a community center. O'Hagan replied in the negative stating that in general there was little to no demand for them.

Chair Petracca commented approvingly on the selection of designs for the various units, noting the lack of a “cookie cutter” effect. She also asked about the speed limit on the road going through the development. O’Hagan clarified that this is designed to be a pedestrian friendly neighborhood and automobile speeds will be controlled by a combination of curves in the road and signage, and there will be several clearly marked crosswalks. O’Hagan stressed the improvements in landscaping the site and how they will be used to define walkways and the like in addition to providing shade.

The Board discussed various Area Median Income (AMI) levels for the affordable rental units given the Board’s stated preference for units of 60% or less AMI whenever possible. O’Hagan stated that he could make the project finances work with 80% AMI units, but that converting some of those units to 60% units could threaten the viability of the project. Given the smaller size of the project, the Board was pleased to support having all of the units at 80%.

The Board then discussed recent flooding of Goodrich Brook in the vicinity of the project. In closing Secretary Streeter asked O’Hagan if he would give the Board notice of all his upcoming hearings so the Board could have the opportunity to participate.

Continued Discussion of 40R Zoning in North Lancaster

Chair Petracca updated the Board and the viewing public on the current status of the proposed 40R zoning district, including recent changes in the drafts. Particularly the calculation of affordable units section was changed to state that any project of fewer than 13 units would be subject to Lancaster’s new Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw. She also added a clear reference to the fact that votes under the 40R bylaw are by a simple majority, unlike the supermajority requirements for the IPOD.

Chair Petracca briefly updated the Board on the status of the EDC and brought up comments she had received concerning air quality at the site and speed limits on Route 70 near the site. Secretary Streeter noted these might be valid issues but they were not within the Trust’s mandate and should be addressed by the relevant authorities.

Public Comment

Select Board member Alix Turner, making it clear that she was not deliberating in any way and just providing history, recounted her experiences with lowering the speed limit on Route 70 when she was previously on the Select Board. The Town lowered the speed limit on the section of Route 70 closest to Route 2, but the State required reinstatement of the previous speed limit and reminded the Town that the State sets the speed limit on State Routes.

Chair Petracca wanted to see the speed limit reduced in the area around the intersection of Route 70 and McGovern Blvd., and Trustee Moody agreed. Secretary Streeter disagreed and again noted that setting the speed limit on Route 70 is well outside the Trust’s authority, even through a proposed 40R rezoning. Trustee Read agreed with Secretary Streeter that setting speed limits is not the Trust’s mission.

Chair Petracca then brought up the issue of air quality due to increased truck traffic. Secretary Streeter pointed out that the diesel trucks that are at issue will not be in the proposed 40R zone beyond traveling on McGovern Blvd., and that the regulation of air quality was well beyond the Trust's purview and would be serious "mission creep". Trustee Read again agreed, noting that no matter how desirable air quality is (something all in attendance agreed is true) its regulation is not within the Trust's powers. She pointed out that the Trust is limited to making sure all of the housing it helps to create is safe, and even though air quality is a safety issue writ large, its regulation is still not something the Trust can accomplish.

The Board then had a long discussion of what optimal speed limits on Route 70 might be, and how that might be done. Trustee Williams pointed out that, while the Trust could not dictate speed limits, just the fact of having a traffic light and crosswalks at the intersection with McGovern Blvd. would reduce the speed of traffic in the area. There was no consensus on speed limits on Route 70 but all agreed that the 40R zone could specify speed limits on roads solely within the zone, although none were proposed.

Lancaster resident Kathy Hughes, who lives on Fire Rd. 11, feels that the speed limit on Route 70 is dangerous at present and recounted numerous close calls turning into and out of Fire Road 11. Chair Petracca noted that she is still waiting to receive the Town's peer review report on the Capital Group's traffic study, and that she will circulate and post it when she does.

New Business

None

Communications

Trustee Moody recommended a webinar, "How to Bring Affordable Housing to Your Town". Secretary Streeter asked him to circulate a link, which Trustee Moody said he would do.

The next two scheduled Affordable Housing Trust Meetings will be held on Thursday, September 16, 2021 at 7 P.M. via Zoom, and on Thursday, October 7, 2021 at 7 P.M. via Zoom.

Adjournment

There being no further business to consider,

Secretary Streeter moved to adjourn the meeting; Trustee Moody seconded the motion, and the motion passed on a 5-0 vote.

The meeting adjourned at 8:53 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Frank S. Streeter, Secretary