



TOWN OF GROTON
Affordable Housing Trust



Becky Pine, *Chair*
David A. Wilder, *Vice Chair*
Colleen A. Neff, *Treasurer*
Stuart M. Schulman, *Member*

Regular Session

Date: Thursday, July 30, 2020

Time: 6:30 pm

Location: Virtual meeting to be held via Zoom pursuant to Governor's executive order concerning the Open Meeting Law

Trust members
in attendance: Becky Pine, Colleen Neff, Dave Wilder, Stuart Schulman

Other
Attendees: Larry Smith, Julie Dickinson, Cynthia Lane-Hand

Documents: Agenda, draft minutes for July 2, 2020, emergency rental assistance program documents

Becky Pine called the meeting to order and asked for a motion to enter executive session and later return to regular session. Becky Pine made the requisite declarations that there is a need for the executive session.

Colleen Neff moved to enter executive session to discuss the Mount Laurel Development investment pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, Sec. 21(3) to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares; and M.G.L. c. 30A, Sec. 21(6) to consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real estate, if the chair declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body. David Wilder seconded and the motion carried 3:0 by roll call vote: Pine – aye, Neff – aye and Wilder – aye.

At 6:56 pm, Becky Pine resumed the regular session meeting after having recently exited executive session.

Stuart Schulman joined the regular session meeting.

Discuss potential donation to the Affordable Housing Trust with the development team for the Sand Hill Road and Longley Road project.

Julia Dickinson, controller for Restoration Capital and long-term Groton resident, and Larry Smith, managing director for Restoration Capital, introduced themselves. Larry Smith explained that their business has built four plus 55 senior housing developments on the North Shore in towns such as Amesbury, Gloucester and Hamilton. Restoration Capital is looking to build fourteen (14) buildings with twenty-eight (28) units on a forty-five (45) acre site in Groton. Larry Smith said that he has met with some Town officials and spoken with the housing coordinator. This development will be permitted as a standard subdivision. As such, there is no requirement for affordable housing. Larry Smith stated that their business likes to be good corporate citizens and so they intend to make a donation to the Affordable Housing Trust. Larry Smith said that the expected amount is \$150,000 payable when the project receives their permits which should be in March of next year.

At this point of the process, Restoration Capital expects to receive its ANRAD (Abbreviated Notice of Resource Area Delineation) approval on August 11.

Larry Smith further described the project as providing tax revenue that goes to the Town's bottom line because nobody under the age of eighteen (18) can live there. The condominium development will plow their own roads. Additionally, town water will be brought to the project with laterals installed for future connections either via Breakneck and Longley Road or Sheple and Longley Road. Flow tests have already been done and project representatives have met with the Water Commissioners.

Stuart Schulman commented that Groton is a swamp so there are always issues but good luck. Julia Dickinson explained to the Trust members that this will be a standard subdivision. The housing coordinator shared links of the business's other developments with Trust members. The developers have made informal introductions to the Planning Board.

Becky Pine asked what is expected of the housing trust. Larry Smith replied that a letter of support would be helpful but that he had not anticipated this question. Larry Smith further described the development as having condominium sales expected in the low \$700 thousands and that there will be an investment of \$15 to \$17 million on the site. Becky Pine stated that she does not think it is appropriate to make statements in support as that is risky for the Trust. Julia Dickinson responded that this is understandable. She continued stating that Restoration Capital was asked about how we arrived at the \$150,000 amount and the answer is that it is budgetary, not mathematical. Restoration Capital principals think it is a meaningful amount. Larry Smith explained that Restoration Capital wants to be good corporate citizens and that they intend to put the offer in writing to the Trust. When asked about Department of Housing and Community Development affordability, Larry Smith explained that DHCD will not approve affordable units because the age restriction is believed to be biased against young people. Fran Stanley affirmed the DHCD stance on such age restricted units.

Becky Pine asked if there will be a common septic system. Yes. And, have you had contact with any abutters. Yes, they have met with Anna Eliot. Restoration Capital is planning outreach to abutters towards the end of August as part of community outreach. Larry Smith explained that there are certain things we can do like screening and traffic flow to minimize impact on abutters and that they want to do that.

David Wilder said it is a lovely project and he hopes that it is successful. David Wilder said that the company's other projects look wonderful. Larry Smith noted that about 60% of the land will remain open space. Stuart Schulman said a lot of boards have a say, we do not have a say and that he has no reason to object. Becky Pine thanked Larry Smith and Julia Dickinson for coming to the housing trust' meeting.

For the emergency rental assistance CPC proposal, review project elements and plan outreach to promote. Votes may be taken.

Becky Pine stated that she noticed that Cynthia Lane-Hand was briefly on this virtual meeting and then she went away. Becky Pine said that she spoke with her about joining the housing trust. Colleen Neff said that she is on two other boards with Cindi.

Trust members discussed various elements of the proposed emergency rental assistance program and how that meshed with non-local rental assistance provided by the Commonwealth in the form of RAFT. RAFT helps renters earning up to 50% of the area median income. Groton's program would help renters earning all the way up to 80% of the area median income. The governor's eviction moratorium is due to expire in October, 2020.

David Wilder performed some quick math on the \$200,000 size of the program and its capacity to meet potential need. With 13% of Groton households as renters and there being about 4,000 households, there are approximately 520 renter households in Groton. With an estimated average assistance amount of \$4,000 per household, approximately 50 households could be helped with this amount of funding. Some households will be over income, not have need, or will be tenants in subsidized apartments that have income sensitive rents. With that in mind, \$200,000 could make a good contribution toward meeting renters' immediate needs. As a new program, specific information on need is sparse but statistically the amount of Groton unemployment should drive a certain amount of need.

Overall, David Wilder commented that Groton's proposed program reads like a landlord assistance project.

On the possibility of a lottery if the program is oversubscribed, Trust members thought that it was unlikely that there would be a rush on funding. Instead, Becky Pine thought that staggered demand would be seen over time. Fran Stanley agreed.

On the question of administration, in-house administration is less expensive as there are fees charged by outside administrators if the program is contracted out. If contracted out, the administrator should have the ability to run a lottery if the volume of initial applications show that this is needed. Fran Stanley noted that there are several good outside entities who could administer the program capably and that Groton's program documents were drawn from two well established nonprofits.

Colleen Neff suggested that program documents could be written to allow the Trust the option of a lottery and the option/discretion to on how to administer the program.

Trust members discussed the amount of information requested for income verification, current rent and whether that would be sufficient to deter false claims. Trust members discussed that their preference is to make the program available to current Groton renters but not prospective renters.

Becky Pine thought that it was unlikely that there would be enough demand to spend out the entire \$200,000. Generally, she said that she is reluctant to spend everything for rental assistance. Trust members discussed possibility of ending the program on December 31, 2021 and for the Trust to retain the unspent funds. This change would allow the Trust the freedom to revise the emergency rental assistance program to meet evolving needs or to repurpose the unspent funds for other CPC approved priorities if demand has ebbed.

Colleen Neff moved to approve the emergency rental assistance program with the four changes as discussed; namely, program end date, lottery if needed, discretion to decide on administration, and program open to current renters only. David Wilder seconded and the motion carried unanimously (4:0) by roll call vote: David Wilder – aye, Colleen Neff – aye, Stuart Schulman – aye and Becky Pine – aye.

David Wilder left the meeting in order to attend to a prior commitment.

Review draft regular session minutes from July 2, 2020. Votes may be taken.

Colleen Neff moved to approve the July 2, 2020 regular session minutes as written. Stuart Schulman seconded and the motion carried 3:0 by roll call vote: Becky Pine – aye, Colleen Neff – aye, and Stuart Schulman – aye (David Wilder absent).

Discuss housing trust vacancies. Votes may be taken.

Becky Pine noted that she has been making efforts to get the word out about the existing vacancies on the housing trust. Cynthia Lane-Hand joined the meeting and introduced herself. She is a social worker with a practice in Town. She was involved in affordable housing when her family lived in Virginia. She also serves on two other local boards.

Stuart Schulman moved to recommend the appointment of Cynthia Lane-Hand to the Affordable Housing Trust. Colleen Neff seconded and the motion carried 3:0 by roll call vote: Becky Pine – aye, Colleen Neff – aye, and Stuart Schulman – aye (David Wilder absent).

Becky Pine provided an update on recent Select Board discussions. The Select Board set affordable housing creation as a goal, but several Select Board members shared their impatience with Groton's slow pace in recent years.

Becky Pine then turned the discussion to the Surrenden Farm reserve parcel and asked about a practical next step to explore feasibility that can be taken at the August 26th meeting to move the matter along. The housing trust may have a guest speaker at the August 26th meeting and Becky Pine will follow up with Fran Stanley outside of this meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 8:24 pm.

Notes by Fran Stanley