



TOWN OF GROTON
Affordable Housing Trust



Becky Pine, *Chair*
Cynthia Lane-Hand, *Member*
Colleen A. Neff, *Treasurer*
Carolyn Perkins, *Member*
Stuart M. Schulman, *Member*

Minutes

Regular Session

Date: Thursday, September 10, 2020
Time: 7:30 pm
Location: Virtual meeting to be held via Zoom pursuant to Governor's executive order concerning the Open Meeting Law
Members present: Cindi Lane-Hand, Becky Pine, Colleen Neff, Carolyn Perkins and Stuart Schulman
Handouts: Agenda
David Doneski, Esq. invoice dated August 27, 2020
draft regular session minutes from July 30, 2020 and August 20, 2020

Becky Pine opened the meeting at 7:32 pm. All members present.

Review David Doneski, Esq. invoice for \$320 dated August 27, 2020. Votes may be taken.

Stuart Schulman moved to approve payment of the David Doneski, Esq. invoice dated August 27, 2020 for \$320 only. Colleen Neff seconded and the motion carried 5:0 by roll call vote with Becky Pine – aye, Colleen Neff – aye, Carolyn Perkins – aye, Cindi Lane-Hand – aye, Stuart Schulman – aye.

Consider contracting out administration of Emergency Rental Assistance program. Votes may be taken.

Fran Stanley explained that Town Counsel reviewed the final proposal that the Trust approved for submission to the CPC. Town Counsel strongly recommended that the Trust contract out the administration of the program. Hearing this, Fran Stanley and Mark Haddad recommend that the administration be contracted out.

Town Counsel expressed concern that in-house administration would increase the Town's liability. If administered by the housing coordinator who is a municipal employee, then the Town might be subject to a claim of discrimination, malfeasance, favoritism based on decisions made in the administration of the program. Also, Town Counsel cautioned that release of personal information was more likely with in-house administration due to the requirements of the Massachusetts public records law. Specifically, even if the Town of Groton decides not to disclose certain requested information because it is of a personal nature, then the appeal of this decision goes up to the Commonwealth and the Town would have limited recourse if ordered to release such information on appeal. By contrast, if the Town contracts out the program, then decisions are made by the outside administrator and the program information is largely held by the outside administrator as well. This distance the municipality and the operation of the program can act as a shield to the disclosure of personal information.

Fran Stanley stated that the personal information reason seemed more significant to her. Carolyn Perkins stated that the fact that would sway her opinion would be the liability issues and that this seemed like the stronger argument to her. Cindi Lane-Hand noted that in her experience, people are sometimes reluctant to share personal information in a small town and that applicants may prefer the experience of applying to an outside agency. Regarding the issue of liability, Stuart Schulman commented that no good deed goes unpunished. Becky Pine stated that she found this additional layer of bureaucracy that will erode some of the funds set aside for rental assistance was annoying.

Fran Stanley said that Groton's program documents were based in part on the program materials used by two experienced regional agencies. Those agencies are running programs for other municipalities. There is also a for profit business in the area with experience in lotteries and income verification. The Town can monitor the contract and the administrator will be expected to provide the robust reporting that was an important factor for the CPC when that Committee reviewed the Trust's proposed program.

The Trust must follow procurement laws and for the amount of expected fees, the process will be sending a written request to at least 3 entities. The responding agency will put its price and other terms in writing back to the Trust. The Trust will pick the lowest price vendor who can provide the requested service. This process can be started in advance of Fall Town Meeting. The Town is not obligated to sign a contract with a responding vendor just because a request for proposals has been made.

Colleen Neff moved that the Affordable Housing Trust elect to outsource the administration of the emergency rental assistance program in accordance with relevant procurement laws. Stuart Schulman seconded and the motion carried 5:0 by roll call vote with Becky Pine – aye, Colleen Neff – aye, Carolyn Perkins – aye, Cindi Lane-Hand – aye, Stuart Schulman – aye.

Fran Stanley will notify the CPC that the Trust has decided to contract out administration of the program.

Discuss any preparations for October 3, 2020 Fall Town Meeting. Votes may be taken.

Becky Pine was designated as the main speaker for the Trust at the Fall Town Meeting. Fran Stanley will be available to assist with any questions from the audience. Since this will be an outdoor meeting, no slideshows are expected. Trust members discussed whether handouts would be a part of the Fall Town Meeting and whether to prepare one for the rental assistance program. Based on the recent Spring Town Meeting experience where few handouts were picked up by Town Meeting attendees, the thought was no.

The Trust directed Fran Stanley to ask the Groton Housing Authority board for a vote of support for this program. Becky Pine noted that a letter of support is not needed since the CPC and the Select Board have already voted to put the funding article on the warrant for Fall Town Meeting. However, it would be helpful to have a representative of the Groton Housing Authority stand up and announce the GHA's support for the program at Town Meeting.

Becky Pine asked if there was any pushback about this program. Fran Stanley said that she had not heard of any pushback. A comment was made that this program has taxpayer dollars staying in Groton to help people. Becky Pine said that she thought that the political climate is right and Carolyn Perkins agreed with that statement.

Discuss future potential Community Preservation Committee applications. Votes may be taken.

Carolyn Perkins explained that with the regular cycle, the CPC accepts applications starting in January with final approval in March in advance of the Spring Town Meeting.

Becky Pine asked what future applications the Trust might bring. Fran Stanley named two:

1. Request about \$75,000 or \$100,000 to hold in reserve to be used to rescue existing affordable housing units that are at risk of dropping off the Town's subsidized housing inventory. A new unit of affordable housing can take years of planning and sometimes hundreds of thousand of dollars. Occasionally, a homeownership unit's maximum resale price will rise beyond the affordability of an eligible buyer. Or, a needed repair might also drive away potential eligible buyers. The terms of the deed restrictions used for

older homeownership units do not survive foreclosure and sometimes have other terms can trigger an exit from the affordability restrictions. Some of Groton's units have those older deed riders.

2. Request feasibility studies and other predevelopment work to prepare the Surrenden Farm Reserve Parcel for an affordable housing development.

Becky Pine thought that the first idea, while it may have merits, was convoluted which may make it difficult to explain to Town Meeting voters. She noted the further drawback of tying up community housing funds that the Trust may prefer to spend on the creation of new affordable housing.

Colleen Neff asked whether Larry Smith and the Restoration Capital received the ANRAD approval on August 10, 2020 as expected. Becky Pine thought no, not as of August 10th. Fran Stanley noted that the preliminary subdivision plan for the Longley Road/Sand Hill Road development had been filed recently with the Planning Board.

Colleen Neff toured the open house at Shirley Meadows, a LIHTC 58-unit senior development that has just opened up on Hospital Road in Shirley. At the open house, she met with Connie Donahue, Deputy Director for the Chelmsford Housing Authority. Connie Donahue has 20 years of experience in affordable housing and has worked on several tax credit funded projects. Colleen Neff invited Connie Donahue to speak with the Trust about developing the Surrenden Farm Reserve Parcel. Colleen Neff will follow up with Connie Donahue and see if she can join the Trust either on October 8th or October 22nd.

Review regular session minutes from July 30, 2020 and August 20, 2020. Votes may be taken.

Stuart Schulman moved to approve the July 30, 2020 regular session minutes as corrected. Colleen Neff seconded and the motion carried 4:0 (Carolyn Perkins abstained) by roll call vote with Becky Pine – aye, Colleen Neff – aye, Cindi Lane-Hand – aye, Stuart Schulman – aye.

Becky Pine moved to approve the August 20, 2020 regular session minutes. Cindi Lane-Hand seconded and the motion carried 5:0 by roll call vote with Becky Pine – aye, Colleen Neff – aye, Carolyn Perkins – aye, Cindi Lane-Hand – aye, Stuart Schulman – aye.

Carolyn Perkins and Colleen Neff will be attending the CHAPA training on rental assistance programs on September 15, 2020. Becky Pine mentioned that both CHAPA and MHP run interesting programs on various affordable housing topics.

Meeting adjourned at 8:26 pm.