



TOWN OF GROTON
Affordable Housing Trust



Becky Pine, *Chair*
Cynthia Lane-Hand, *Member*
Colleen A. Neff, *Treasurer*
Richard Perini, *Member*
Carolyn Perkins, *Member*

Minutes
Regular Session

Date: Thursday, December 3, 2020

Time: 7 pm

Location: Virtual meeting broadcast on Zoom and the Groton Channel pursuant to Governor's executive order concerning the Open Meeting Law

Members

Present: Becky Pine, Cindi Lane-Hand, Colleen Neff and Carolyn Perkins

Others: Richard Perini, John Sopka, Sara Withee, Sean W.

Handouts: Agenda, \$240 KP Law, P.C. invoice dated November 24, 2020

Becky Pine called the meeting to order at 7 pm.

Item #1: Update on the Emergency Rental Assistance program. Votes may be taken.

Fran Stanley shared that she had completed most of the planned outreach but for the letter to landlords. The Groton Herald will be publishing an advertisement. The area food pantry has been notified and the Groton Dunstable Regional School District is sharing information about the rental assistance program in several forums. The Groton Electric Light Department (GELD) will be sending a notice out with the December bills. John Sopka pointed out that he had just received his November bill from GELD. Since the application deadline for the lottery will be December 18, a date that will have passed by the time electric customers receive their next bill, the GELD notice should remove any references to a deadline.

Fran Stanley stated that program administrator Metro West would estimate the funds needed to make the first set of assistance payments after December 18. Metro West's invoices for its own fees will be submitted separately and will be exact and not estimates. After three months of fund disbursement, Metro West will true-up the account so that the estimate will match actual disbursed amounts.

Fran Stanley stated that she had fielded a couple of questions about one aspect of program eligibility. The question was if the household rents an apartment where the housing authority is the landlord, are they excluded from this program. In Groton, our older subsidized rentals have income sensitive rents and the rental units added more recently tend to have fixed rents. After some discussion, Trust members confirmed the following:

1. If a household has an 'income sensitive' rent, then that household is not eligible. The rationale is that if the tenant is in an apartment where the rent goes down when the tenant's income falls, then that tenant does not need this program because they are already protected by those favorable rental terms.

2. If a household is in an apartment and their rent is fixed even though their income may fall, then that household is eligible even if their landlord is a housing authority or other provider of affordable housing.

Item #2: Consider recommending Rick Perini for appointment to affordable housing trust vacancy. Votes may be taken.

Becky Pine introduced this agenda item by noting that the application period set for the position in Town advertising had expired and that Rick Perini is the sole applicant. Although Rick Perini has introduced himself to the Trust before, Becky Pine asked him to speak since some members of the public may not have heard his prior remarks. Rick Perini stated that he works as a general construction supervisor and is a civil engineer. He recently completed a large multi-unit apartment complex comprised of eight buildings with amenities and 20% affordable units. He is licensed in 20 states. He recently moved to Groton and, as he is interested in affordable housing, read materials that showed that the Town is behind by a staggering amount. It would take 173 or so units to reach the recommended 10% level of affordability.

Rick Perini said that he has noticed that many Groton properties are single families and not apartment complexes. As for the Surrenden Farm Reserve Parcel, he has walked it several times and per David Hedison's October 22, 2020 suggestion, it may be good to make a master plan for the use of this land. Becky Pine agreed that there is a lot that the housing trust is sorting out but stressed that the Trust has not decided yet to proceed with this parcel. Groton has made some progress on affordable housing.

Colleen Neff said that she welcomes Rick Perini's input as she thinks it would be super helpful to the Trust. Becky Pine ascertained that Rick Perini has not had a prior experience of volunteering on a Massachusetts town board or committee. Becky Pine said that most of the housing trust's business must be conducted in public and we must follow the agenda, under the Open Meeting Law. And everyone must follow the state conflict of interest law because committee members are considered special municipal employees. Carolyn Perkins repeated Colleen Neff's welcome. She said that Rick Perini brings a broad range of experiences to the committee. Cindi Lane-Hand also endorsed Colleen Neff's welcome and support. Becky Pine said that Groton is fortunate to have high quality volunteers.

Cindi Lane-Hand moved to nominate Richard Perini to the vacancy on the Affordable Housing Trust. Colleen Neff seconded and the motion carried 4:0 on a roll call vote of Lane-Hand – aye, Neff – aye, Perkins – aye and Pine – aye.

Item #3: Discuss pending CPC application for Surrenden Farm Reserve Parcel. Votes may be taken.

The CPC deadline for Complete Draft Proposals (CDP) is by 4 PM on January 14, 2021. Since the Trust has not decided to focus on the development potential of the Surrenden Farm Reserve Parcel (SFRP) and exclude consideration of all other parcels – whether Town owned or in private ownership – Trust members discussed whether they wanted to proceed with this CPC application whose scope is SFRP only.

The Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP) may supply free to Groton engineering services to explore feasibility of SFRP and other parcels. It is conceivable that a MassWorks grant could pay for needed road infrastructure to access the SFRP. One thought was the CPC application could be drafted to have CPC money spent on areas that MHP's professionals consider to be needed after MHP's work is completed. The advantage to this plan is that it would result in a prudent use of CPC funds. The disadvantage is that a SFRP only focus may not allow the Trust to sift out the other affordable housing development options that may present elsewhere in Town. The recent Groton Herald editorial recommended that the Trust explore other options before selecting the Surrenden Farm Reserve Parcel as its main focus.

The group discussed that separate noncontiguous properties would probably require separate permitting under state law. The group agreed that having CPC funds that could be spend at the Trust's discretion on various sites would be welcome flexibility and better suit the Trust's needs.

John Sopka commented that the Trust needed a specific plan and that it needed the ability to create a reserve for itself that could be built up for future use. Carolyn Perkins shared her understanding that the property evaluation and feasibility study envisioned in the Trust's initial two-page application cannot necessarily be morphed to an entirely new application that supplants the current application. She said that next time the Trust could submit a general application for funds that would be spent on creating units that would be affordable in perpetuity.

Becky Pine reminded the group that the Trust could spend some of its own unrestricted funds. Becky Pine noted that the Trust has not eliminated the SFRP and that the Trust has not chosen it either.

For evaluating parcels, Becky Pine stated that the Commonwealth's Natural Heritage office is willing to provide the Trust as it would any applicant with free of charge endangered species looks/evaluations of properties. The Trust cannot ask for a global evaluation of all of Groton, but it can submit Town owned properties and other select parcels to Natural Heritage in order to help determine the development potential of the parcel. Trust members plan to meet on December 17 at 7 pm to discuss the CPC application and other matters. GIS maps on the Town's website (grotonma.gov) are helpful for evaluating parcels.

Becky Pine stated that the Trust is hoping to build affordable housing in Town and that the townspeople should know what affordable housing resembles. Becky Pine gave examples of some current Groton affordable housing: Petapawag Place (Lowell Road), Winthrop Place (Main Street), Groton Commons (Willowdale Road), Squannacook Hill (condominiums on Townsend Road), Groton Residential Gardens (condominiums on Main Street), Sandy Pond Road (rentals), and other units sprinkled in to any large subdivision like Academy Hill, Reedy Meadow Estates. RiverCourt (assisted living facility on West Main Street). At 78 units, RiverCourt provides the largest number of affordable units to the Town's subsidized housing inventory. This is explained by the fact that the Commonwealth gives credit for the total number of units in a rental project.

Item #4: Review draft minutes from October 22, 2020 and November 5, 2020. Votes may be taken.

Carolyn Perkins moved to approve the October 22, 2020 regular session minutes as corrected. Colleen Neff seconded and the motion carried 4:0 on roll call vote of Lane-Hand – aye, Neff – aye, Perkins – aye and Pine – aye.

Cindi Lane-Hand moved to approve the November 5, 2020 regular session minutes as corrected. Carolyn Perkins seconded and the motion carried 4:0 on roll call vote of Lane-Hand – aye, Neff – aye, Perkins – aye and Pine – aye.

Item #5: Consider \$240.00 special counsel invoice for David Doneski's legal services. Votes may be taken.

Trust reviewed the invoice and discussed that the funds for paying the invoice would be drawn from its unrestricted funds that were received by the Town as mitigation in connection with the Squannacook Hill development. The Trust has not delegated its authority to approve such invoices. And, once voted, Fran Stanley will need to collect three Trust member signatures (a quorum's worth) on the invoice in order to get payment issued. The Town will accept electronic signatures. As the pandemic continues, the Trust may want to explore whether to authorize the chair to sign for invoices one the Trust has voted to approve payment.

Colleen Neff moved to approve payment of the KP Law invoice for \$240. Carolyn Perkins seconded and the motion carried 4:0 on roll call vote of Lane-Hand – aye, Neff – aye, Perkins – aye and Pine – aye.

Item #6 & 7: Executive Session

Cindi Lane-Hand moved to enter executive session and not return to open session pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws, c.30A, §21(a), Clause 7 – “To comply with, or act under the authority of, any general or special law or federal grant-in-aid requirements.” – Purpose – Review, Approval and Potential Release of Executive Session Minutes and also pursuant to 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, specifically, potential land acquisition. Becky Pine as chair so declared. Colleen Neff seconded the motion and the motion passed 4:0 on a roll call vote of Lane-Hand – aye, Neff – aye, Perkins – aye and Pine – aye.

Regular session adjourned at 8:25 pm. Notes by Fran Stanley