



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 17, 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 in attendance: Cindi Lane-Hand, Carolyn Perkins, Becky Pine, Colleen Neff and Rick Perini

Handouts: Agenda, CPC spreadsheet showing current available funds

Becky Pine called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

Item #1: Discuss desired elements of full CPC application including funding amount and scope of the application. Roll call vote may be taken.

Becky Pine stated that she called Bruce Easom, chair of the CPC, to ask about what amount of flexibility the Trust will have in terms of scope as it moves from the already submitted preliminary draft application to the complete draft application due January 14, 2021. As Becky Pine explained the situation to Bruce Easom, the preliminary application is for work on the Surrenden Farm Reserve Parcel (SFRP) but that the Trust is increasingly interested in engaging in predevelopment work for other parcels in addition to SFRP that may become of interest. Becky Pine stated that Bruce Easom thought that the Trust could broaden its application.

Becky Pine's second question for Bruce Easom was how might the Trust build up its reserves so that it can respond to affordable housing opportunities outside of the annual CPC process. Bruce Easom suggested that a request for funds to remain with the Trust and become available reserves could be made as a part of its current application.

Rick Perini said that the Trust would be looking for site analysis design services such as soils analysis. Cindi Lane-Hand noted that reserves could be used for the acquisition of land. Carolyn Perkins said that CPC funding that the Trust could retain as reserves could be spent to pursue multiple projects including possible acquisition of housing. Fran Stanley commented that the application can provide a broad description of the ways that the Trust could use CPC funding reserves to try to explain the full range of possibilities. Colleen Neff noted that setting aside funds to preserve an at-risk but already existing affordable housing unit is another potential purpose for the use of Trust reserves.

Carolyn Perkins cautioned that if the Trust expands the initial application too much, then it may run into problems. And, that yes, the CPC members could vote down the Trust's application. The group discussed the fact that its goal is to expand affordable housing and that it needs a certain amount of money to look into opportunities to expand affordable housing as such opportunities arise. The Trust can always pull back a little if needed in the final proposal.

Carolyn Perkins said that more money is coming into the CPC's state coffers since the legislature allocates a portion of property transfer fees to the CPC and home sales have been brisk. Becky Pine said that people should be prepared to speak up to retain the 3% local tax surcharge if the matter comes up again at the Select Board level.

Becky Pine noted that the Trust will want to be very careful about spending the Town's money and not commit to larger dollars if the groundwork in the form of predevelopment and other investigations is not done.

Colleen Neff asked if there were any numbers in the application now and commented it appeared that the CPC spreadsheet showed that the community housing bucket has about \$410,000 [note: the \$200,000 for the emergency rental assistance program has already been subtracted from the community housing total]. Becky Pine asked for the application total dollar amount. Rick Perini suggested \$25k to \$50k. Carolyn Perkins suggested \$150k as the Trust can always come down later if necessary. Carolyn Perkins said that the Trust can ask the CPC to give it a sense of what it will support.

Fran Stanley stated that the CPC will have a greater amount of unallocated reserves this year as the 2022 fiscal year will be the final year of repayment for the Surrenden Farm debt and the last payment will be about \$250k less than usual. So far, no community housing projects have been funded out with unallocated reserve funding. Historic projects and Open Space/Recreation projects have drawn from the unallocated reserve.

Becky Pine said that Marlena Gilbert from the School Committee will be approaching the Select board on December 21st with the purpose of asking for CPC funding for paying for a new track at the elementary school. Colleen Neff said that the Groton Dunstable Regional School Committee's role for the Groton elementary school is complete.

Rick Perini will review Fran Stanley's draft of the complete draft proposal and the Trust will plan to meet again on Thursday, January 7 to review the final wording.

Item #2: Discuss potential Request for Proposals (RFP) seeking suitable sites for developing 30 to 50 units of affordable housing. Roll call vote may be taken.

Becky Pine and Colleen Neff attended a Massachusetts Housing Partnership presentation on financing of affordable housing projects. Becky Pine said that financing is complicated and the unit count is an important consideration. So, perhaps the Trust's RFP should be for 30 to 60 units. Fran Stanley has requested examples of other RFPs used by municipalities and hopefully, the Trust can take a good RFP that has already been vetted by Town Counsel, then tweak it and use it for our purposes. Carolyn Perkins asked what happens after the Trust puts out an RFP. Fran Stanley said that you may learn about a previously unconsidered site and hear from a developer who has a good idea that you could support. Even a small amount of money contributed to a project could be meaningful to a developer. Also, the Trust has been asked to consider other parcels and other areas of Town. Issuing this RFP is a way to answer that process concern because the Trust will then have used the RFP process to ask that question and seek that input.

Becky Pine noted that the RFP process would need to have a way for the Trust to lay out evaluative criteria that it intends to use to evaluate and rank each proposal. Fran Stanley said that setting the unit count at 30 to 60 units is apt to narrow the possible sites that could be used. Becky Pine said that, on the other hand, she looked at the Groton Housing Authority's Petapawag Place that has 1.8 acres and 25 housing units and so the site does not have to be huge.

Rick Perini said that if you look at other neighboring towns, they have put in local zoning that encourages the development of affordable housing without the use of the state 40B zoning. Rick Perini gave the example of the B'nai B'rith 56-unit tax credit project in Sudbury on 6 acres. If local zoning is used, then the developer does not have profit limitations even if they might still need to find tax credit financing. Fran Stanley will look into Sudbury's zoning for that parcel. Fran Stanley said that this appears to be what Shirley may have done at Shirley Meadows with its Notice of Availability. Becky Pine agreed that this was a great idea and that the Trust should hang on to this idea as a possibility for the future.

Rick Perini said any developer is going to want the basic things of sewer, water, access. Sewer is a big thing but you can still do a septic system. Access is important and town water is especially important these days as some towns do not want developers drilling into the aquifer. But then, you have to go on and do the other things like the environmental reviews. Rick Perini concluded by saying that he thinks it is good to get the Town involved and say that we want to produce affordable housing in Groton and we want your help. Then, you cannot say that we are not be honest with them up front.

Item #3: Review regular session draft minutes from December 3, 2020. Roll call vote may be taken.

Cindi Lane-Hand moved to approve the December 3, 2020 regular session minutes as corrected. Colleen Neff seconded and the motion carried 4:0:1 with Pine – aye, Lane-Hand – aye, Colleen Neff – aye, Rick Perini – abstain, and Perkins – aye.

Becky Pine said that there was some mention of a public information session and if the Trust puts this together, then might want to use photographs of newer, larger developments like B'nai B'rith's Sudbury project, Village Green in Littleton or Benfield Farms in Carlisle. Some Groton residents may not have a sense of what a 50-unit project could resemble.

Colleen Neff 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. Carolyn Perkins seconded the motion and the motion passed 5:0 on a roll call vote of Perini – aye, Lane-Hand – aye, Neff – aye, Perkins – aye and Pine – aye.

Regular session adjourned at 8:03 pm. Notes by Fran Stanley