



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, March 11, 2021

Time: 7 pm

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

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

Groton Housing Authority members in attendance: Donald Black and Daniel Emerson

Others in attendance: John Sopka, John Maynard and Jack Petropoulos

Handouts: Agenda, March 3, 2021 draft statement on SFRP, February 4, 2021 draft regular session minutes

Becky Pine called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm. Becky Pine said that Colleen Neff has consented to stick with the Trust to get to the upcoming joint meeting with the Select Board.

1. Discuss 2021 Spring Town Meeting Warrant Article 19 titled "Transfer Tax Title Land to Groton Housing Authority" concerning parcel 227-135 the former North Middlesex Mutual Aid Association property on Nashua Road with the Groton Housing Authority Board. Roll call vote may be taken.

Becky Pine thanks Donald Black and Daniel Emerson for making time to speak with the Trust about the Groton Housing Authority's warrant article. Donald Black provided some background specifically that the Town took the property for unpaid back taxes in 2009. The Groton Housing Authority has another parcel almost directly across the street on Nashua Road. Donald Black said that the goal is to provide an affordable housing complex for seniors who live in Groton now. The idea is to put senior rental housing on the Mutual Aid grounds and family housing on the 14-acre parcel (parcel 227-93). Carolyn Perkins said that her only concern would be access. Donald Black said that he has established a relationship with an abutter for proper, legal access. Fran Stanley noted that the GIS map notes a 50-foot-wide easement.

Becky Pine asked why the housing authority wanted to transfer the ownership now. Donald Black responded that the Groton Housing Authority develops rental housing for people already in Groton and he understands that the Trust is looking to do projects not only for those in the town but also from outside of town and often ownership projects. Becky Pine said that this is not entirely accurate for the Trust in that we are interested in affordable rentals too. Donald Black said that if the project is done through the Groton Housing Authority and control of the property is transferred to them then the matter does not need to come back to Town Meeting. Becky Pine asked if public procurement laws need to be followed and 30B. Donald Black said that the Authority mainly follows state laws and regulations. The warrant article is drafted in a way to allow for the possible reversion to the Town in the event that the housing use is not commenced within 5 years from the date of conveyance. Donald Black said that the timeline of 5 years was recommended by Town Counsel during its review. Fran Stanley said that she would think that there would need to be RFPs put out to find a

developer. Donald Black says that he agrees with that but that there are preliminary pieces to be put in place ahead of time.

Becky Pine flagged potential issues mentioned at the Select Board meeting vis a vis any toxic chemicals remaining on site related to prior firefighting training. Is there a buried fuel tank on site? Not to Donald Black's knowledge of the prior use of the site if one is talking about foam. There was some training on oil fires by putting out fires set in a metal barrel. Donald Black said that there was an old gravel operation on site.

Rick Perini clarified which parcel the Groton Housing Authority already owns. Donald Black said that past engineering had shown that between 4 to 44 units could be sited on the 14-acre parcel within the housing authority's control. Donald Black said that the Groton Housing Authority would be working with the regional planning agency in Leominster.

Donald Black said that he would be interested in using tax credits to help fund the project. Becky Pine thanked Donald Black again for attending the Trust's meeting.

Rick Perini said that the Groton Housing Authority owns that parcel now and sounds like they could develop it now. Carolyn Perkins said that wetlands are an issue for both parcels. Becky Pine noted that the wetlands on the 14-acre parcel are wide and would make for a long wetlands crossing unless alternative access can be found. Carolyn Perkins said that she supports affordable housing rentals created by the Authority but baffled by property that they are interested in now due to the nature of the easement.

John Sopka commented that an easement through Charles Road might give access to the rear of Parcel 227-93. John Sopka said that it depends on what the existing easement for the mutual aid parcel allows. He thought that this transfer may be premature. Becky Pine said that if she relayed comments similar to what John Sopka has expressed for the mutual aid parcel, would that represent the opinion of the Trust. Yes from several Trust members. Carolyn Perkins said partially because she would really like to encourage an active partnership with the Authority to develop affordable housing. The Trust has put energy into learning about funding opportunities. She got the feeling that this the Authority was going it alone.

Fran Stanley commented that if it is to be a tax credit project then there will probably be an opportunity for the Trust to contribute especially if the application needs actual money rather than donated land. The Trust further discussed how the project might unfold.

2. Update on Emergency Rental Assistance program. Roll call vote may be taken.

Fran Stanley noted that there are 8 households are participating and a lot of outreach letters to landlords were mailed recently.

3. Update on pending CPC application titled Affordable Housing Site Assessment Study. Roll call vote may be taken.

Carolyn Perkins noted that on March 8, 2021 the CPC voted to send the Trust's application on to Town Meeting. The Trust's application scored the lowest of the applications. Carolyn Perkins recused herself from the scoring for this application. Bruce Easom also recused himself as he did from all of the projects. One CPC member gave the project a low score and is not supportive of the project. The Trust's funding through Community Housing was not directly competing with other projects. Carolyn Perkins commented that usually at this point of the process, the application already meets the criteria and we are just assessing them. Overall, people are pretty supportive of the application. That said, Carolyn Perkins concluded that the Trust would probably need to defend it to a certain extent at Town Meeting.

Joshua Degen asked to address the CPC that evening but the members did not allow him to address the meeting with the rationale that the time for public comment had passed.

Becky Pine asked what the objections were for the Trust's application. There were three concerns:

(a) repetitious. Response – explained that it is not repetitious since the new funding would be spend on work that build upon but does not duplicate previous work.

(b) Does the citizens petition for transfer of the Surrenden Farm Reserve Parcel obviate the need for the funding? Response – no, the application allows for the consideration of other sites.

(c) Lowest scored projects should not be funded. Response – the application did receive the lowest score but the CPC process is not set up to have this consequence for a project with the lowest score.

4. Discuss Massachusetts Housing Partnership Technical Support Application. Roll call vote may be taken.

Fran Stanley stated that she filed a technical support application and that the Town should find out soon if the Town has been selected as a recipient.

Becky Pine stated that she changed the wording of the site assessment summary in the warrant article and the other members indicated that they agreed with those changes.

5. Discuss 2021 Spring Town Meeting Warrant Article 21 titled “Citizen’s Petition – Transfer Control of Land” concerning Surrenden Farm Reserve Parcel. Roll call vote may be taken.

Becky Pine shared information that she learned from Olin Lathrop about the Forest Legacy program. The Forest Legacy program application for Groton and surrounding towns may want to use the Surrenden Farm Reserve Parcel as forested land that can count toward the totals needed to file this application. For those who want to use the Reserve Parcel for the Forest Legacy program, this may be a reason to not support the citizens petition since already protected land does not qualify for the Forest Legacy application. Becky Pine asked if the Trust wanted to take a position on the Citizen’s Petition and Carolyn Perkins said that she did not think that this was needed.

6. Consider issuing public statements regarding affordable housing efforts in Groton. Roll call vote may be taken.

Becky Pine said that related to the discussion of Surrenden Farm Reserve Parcel, she drafted a statement that the Trust will no longer consider it for affordable housing. Carolyn Perkins said that the Trust may make a statement that it is not considering affordable housing on the site now due to obvious issues around access and for other reasons. Fran Stanley asked if the Trust was speaking about its present intentions not develop versus a position that a future Trust might take. Currently, the project lacks sufficient community support and, ideally, a development plan would have Groton School support too so that you would not need to reroute the road.

Becky Pine said that we should say we as in the Trust as this time will not pursue development. Becky Pine said that her sense is that the primary impediment is the cost and complexity of the road issue rather than Fran Stanley’s point about community support. It would take several Town Meeting votes with super majority votes in order to resolve the road issues. There may be legislature approval, also permission from the head of the Commonwealth’s department of environmental affairs and other nontrivial hurdles.

Rick Perini said that he agreed with Becky Pine’s assessment and simply state that we do not intend to pursue the parcel for development and not talk against the development assessment. Cindi Lane-Hand agreed that the Trust will not develop now and the question is how to phrase that position so that the perception is not that we were caught out doing something improper. Colleen Neff said that she can’t believe that a deal [original Surrenden Farm purchase] that was so important and well thought out will be changed with this warrant article. Colleen Neff agreed that the timing for development is not right now.

Becky Pine read out the short three paragraph statement she drafted. Trust members agreed with the statement. Fran Stanley suggested replacing phrase “neither wise or fiscally responsible” with “lacks community support and has complicated access issues. That specific wording had some support from the members. Rick Perini suggested “lacks community support at this time”. Becky Pine said that a goal is to have the community embrace affordable housing in the same way that it has embraced conservation.

Jack Petropoulos addressed the group. He spoke in support of not transferring the parcel precisely because the original Surrenden Farm purchase allowed for some development potential. It is hard to find other land for affordable housing. If the affordable housing push is removed now, then the urgency for transferring the land is lessened. The Trust might note that it has future development potential.

Cindi Lane-Hand liked the transparency of acknowledging future development potential. Colleen Neff asked why the Trust is going in this direction now. Becky Pine said that there are two reasons. One is to increase the likelihood of the CPC application being funded since it no longer plans to develop this parcel. The other reason is to decrease the likelihood of its development potential being removed.

The group continued working on the wording of the last sentence of the first paragraph until it read “At this time, we therefore have decided not to continue our attempt to develop this land.”

Carolyn Perkins moved to accept the statement as edited by Becky Pine concerning the Surrenden Farm Reserve Parcel. Cindi Lane-Hand seconded and the motion carried 5:0 with roll call votes of Perini – aye, Pine – aye, Lane-Hand – aye, Neff – aye and Perkins – aye.

Becky Pine said that she would send this statement to the Select Board, the CPC, and the Groton Herald. Becky Pine passed along Bruce Easom’s observation and request that the Trust fully document its findings on the Surrenden Farm Reserve Parcel. Becky Pine and Fran Stanley will write something up and bring it back to the Trust for its review.

7. Continue discussion of process and possible sites to build affordable housing, including previous reports and guidance provided to the AHT. Roll call vote may be taken.

List of publicly owned parcels listed in the Housing Production Plan as having development potential:

LOCATION	PARCEL ID	ACRES	ZONING DISTRICT
145 Main Street	113-43-0	3.6	RA/TCOD
Bridge Street	248-9-0	34.7	RA
Hoyt's Wharf Road	249-51-0	10.4	RA
Nashua Road	227-135-0	7.1	RA
Nashua Road (owned by the Groton Housing Authority)	227-93-0	14	RA
Shirley Road (portion of Surrenden Farm)	220-35-0	14.5	RA
Townsend Road	205-9-1	16.9	RA

If we subtract the Reserve Parcel, Prescott School as well as the two Nashua Road properties, then this leaves three or so parcels that need investigation. Becky Pine asked if members could divvy up these parcels and learn more about the development potential for each. Rick Perini offered to take the Townsend Road parcels (actually along Fieldstone Drive). Carolyn Perkins will do Bridge Street. Cindi Lane-Hand will do Hoyts Wharf.

Fran Stanley will ask about town sewer and town water for each of the considered properties.

Becky Pine investigated a property known as Brown Loaf which is approximately 50 acres of town owned land. It turns out that this is prime turtle habitat and significant wetlands.

Becky Pine discussed the Heaton Reports from 2007 and 2008. Prescott School was highlighted as a location for affordable housing and it is presently being used for community uses. The Tarbell School in West Groton was also called out and it has since been sold. The Hoyts Wharf parcels were called out and these parcels were noted in the Housing Production Plan and are being investigated now.

Carolyn Perkins noted recent news from CHAPA about state block grants and Boston is spending \$33 million on affordable housing.

Cindi Lane-Hand offered to reach out to Jack Petropoulos regarding the community benefits of affordable housing.

Becky Pine said that the Diversity Task Force wants a housing summit. Becky Pine asked whether the Trust wants to co-sponsor this event and the Trust members agreed that they would like to do so.

Becky Pine was perturbed by the *Groton Herald* editorial last week. She said that we need community support and consensus to build affordable housing in the community. Carolyn Perkins said that maybe we can think about this a little more and observed that the *Groton Herald* seems focused on getting money back from Mr. France. Maybe the Trust can write an article.

Becky Pine thanked Colleen Neff for deciding to stay on the Trust a little bit longer. She asked Trust members to look for other volunteers to serve on the Trust. Becky Pine said that the executive session that we asked to have with the Select Board is likely to be 6 pm on Monday March 29, 2021.

8. Review regular session draft minutes from February 4, 2021. Roll call vote may be taken.

Trust members reviewed draft minutes.

Cindi Lane-Hand moved to approve the February 4, 2021 regular session minutes. Carolyn Perkins seconded and the motion carried 5:0 with roll call votes of Perini – aye, Pine – aye, Lane-Hand – aye, Neff – aye and Perkins – aye.

Carolyn Perkins moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:49 pm. Colleen Neff seconded the motion. No vote taken.

Next meeting: Thursday, March 25, 2021 at 7 pm

Annual Town Meeting: Saturday, May 1, 2021 at 9 am

Notes by Fran Stanley