



TOWN OF GROTON
Affordable Housing Trust



Becky Pine, *Chair*
Carolyn Perkins, *Vice Chair*
Cynthia Lane-Hand, *Clerk*
Richard Perini, *Member*

AGENDA
Regular Session

Date: Thursday, June 3, 2021

Time: 7 pm

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

Trust members in attendance: Cindi Lane-Hand, Rick Perini, Carolyn Perkins, and Becky Pine

Diversity Task Force members in attendance: Raquel Majeski, Amy Degen, Tim Manugian, Deb Dowson, Michelle Collette, Nii-Ama Akuete, and Deirdre Slavin-Mitchell

Others in attendance: John Sopka, Judy Anderson

Handouts: Agenda, Housing Summit Planning document

Both the Diversity Task Force and the Affordable Housing Trust were called to order at around 7 pm.

Becky Pine announced that there is a proposed development related to the state's encouragement for MBTA communities to adopt by right districts for multi-family housing. The Town may call a Special Town Meeting to consider passing a new zoning bylaw on July 26, 2021. The Select Board are expected to discuss the matter at their June 7, 2021 meeting and all housing committees have meetings posted for June 9th to discuss a possible Special Town Meeting. Proposed zoning is included in the Select Board's meeting packet.

1. 7 pm. Meet jointly with the Diversity Task Force at their regularly scheduled meeting to discuss Housing Summit.

Members of the Affordable Housing Trust joined the Diversity Task Force in their meeting. As co-sponsors of the Housing Summit, the committees will hear about the working group's efforts and hopefully finalize next steps for the Housing Summit. Committee members were emailed the two-page Housing Summit Planning document that summarizes the working group's proposal (reproduced below).

Nii-Ama Akuete said that the working group has been able to firm up a number of details. The current plan is to have a Housing Summit event on Sunday, June 27, 2021 at 2 pm at the Center (163 West Main Street). Ed McNierney has agreed to moderate the event. Karen Chapman, Senior Planner with the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission will be reviewing the Housing Production Plan information and findings. There will be a round robin of introductions from each committee associated with affordable housing. Deirdre Slavin-Mitchell will work on advertising for the event. Fran Stanley said that this event is for the Housing Summit Part 1 and that Part 2 will receive more planning once feedback has been received from residents in Part 1. Carolyn Perkins noted that speakers for each committee will need to be identified.

Feedback received included:

- Suggest to add the Community Preservation Committee as a committee who will introduce itself and speak about its affordable housing role. Carolyn Perkins will check with the CPC on June 7, 2021.
- An indoor meeting will allow use of screens which can be helpful.
- A dry run to ensure that Center technology is ready was advised.

Nii-Ama Akuete asked how does this Select Board announcement might match or conflict with the Housing Summit plans. Becky Pine said that she did not see a conflict but that after next week it may be that aspects of this proposal could be discussed in the Housing Summit. She added that the proposed zoning is 40R zoning.¹

Raquel Majeski commented that she liked that all of the housing committees are coming together for this event.

Becky Pine announced that the free Massachusetts Housing Partnership Housing Institute is running for the next two consecutive Thursdays (June 10 and 17). Register at mhp.net.

Cindi Lane-Hand moved to approve the plans for the Housing Summit as described. Rick Perini seconded and the motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote of Pine – aye, Lane-Hand – aye, Perkins – aye and Perini – aye.

At 7:29 pm, the Affordable Housing Trust returned to its own separate meeting.

2. Continue discussion of Affordable Housing Trust’s part in the Housing Summit.

Group discussed adding photos of other affordable housing in the region. Cindi Lane-Hand agreed that pictures would help. Rick Perini offered to take photos of nearby properties as needed. Trust members agreed to revisit the ideas of having handouts and photos to increase awareness of what modern affordable housing developments can be.

Group discussed the substance of the Trust’s round robin introduction. Ideas included describing powers of the Trust and perhaps describing the LIHTC development model.

3. Hear updates on the May 24, 2021 CPC Kick-Off.

Rick Perini said that the information conveyed was as expected for a government undertaking. Carolyn Perkins commented that CPC funding is bound by state procurement laws and that both Mark Haddad (Town Manager and Chief Procurement Officer) and Patricia Dufresne (Town Accountant) are knowledgeable resources for the Trust. Carolyn Perkins added that Dan Emerson was assigned as the Trust’s liaison to the CPC for the \$75,000 Site Assessment funding. Also, Town Accountant Patricia Dufresne gave an excellent rundown on how to approach CPC spending.

4. Hear updates on the May 24, 2021 Can We Talk Event.

Carolyn Perkins said that there were at least four participants from the Town. This discussion group originated from Groton’s Civil Discourse project. Groton Housing Authority Executive Director Lisa Larrabee was there and she spoke about Groton’s rental housing. There was a discussion about whether affordable

¹ Some characteristics of 40R housing:

- Districts must be overlay and not base zoning.
- While all residential and mixed-use development must be as-of-right in a smart growth zoning district, communities can use design review to regulate the physical character of the development as long as requirements are not unduly burdensome.
- 20% percent of the housing in the district must be affordable to those earning 80% or less of the median income and be deed restricted for at least 30 years.
- The district must provide a minimum allowable density of eight units per acre for single-family homes, 12 units per acre for two and three family buildings, and/or 20 units per acre for multi-family dwellings.
- Smart growth zoning districts must provide a range of housing opportunities for a diverse population including households with children.
- State approval required.
- State provides financial incentives to municipalities. (see <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/smart-growth-smart-energy-toolkit-modules-chapter-40r-and-chapter-40s>)

housing should be allowed to be isolated versus integrated with market rate housing. This commentary may have referenced the new Maple Avenue subdivision that is under current Planning Board consideration.

5. Continue review of town-owned parcels, including evaluation and reporting on each parcel, and decisions on next steps.

Rick Perini has been researching the two Townsend Road parcels [parcel 204-13.1 (7 acres) and parcel 205-9.01 (16.89 acres)]. Rick Perini has spoken with staff in the Assessors office and the conservation agent. The smaller of the parcels may be the most likely for development. There may need to be access via an easement to cross a narrow ten-foot strip of land that appears to separate the parcel from Fieldstone Drive. Rick Perini asked about next steps. The site has utility availability of both natural gas and underground electric. Next steps might involve taking a site walk, approach nearby landowner regarding an easement, or perhaps perform a perc test (related to septic feasibility). Carolyn Perkins commented that an easement might be negotiated to be contingent upon perc test results.

The group agreed that a site walk can be a way to increase one's understanding of a site. The group discussed whether a development with 30 to 50 units would need two access points. Carolyn Perkins said that the Planning Board's decision may be contingent on the length of the road and the number of units. Also, she said that 50 units on 7 acres may be tight for septic.

Becky Pine noted that Fran Stanley had previously raised the idea of the Trust engaging specialized legal counsel and asked whether this should be done now. Becky Pine added that the Select Board's interviews for new Town Counsel will be on June 14, 2021. Fran Stanley said that the Trust could wait to see who the Town chooses for its new Town Counsel and the delay may result in an easier choice. Becky Pine concluded that the Trust could wait for the Town Counsel selection process to play out. Becky Pine added that the site walk could be scheduled after the June 27 Housing Summit.

Cindi Lane-Hand did not have more information on the Town owned Hoyts Wharf parcel at this time.

The group revisited the housing summit topic and discussed handouts. Carolyn Perkins thought that the combination of the Becky Pine/Michelle Collette letter to the editor, the Town Meeting handout and some of Shelly Goehring's slides might provide relevant material. Regarding photographs, Carolyn Perkins said that she wanted to show people what is possible rather than pointing out existing Groton housing for reasons of stigma and the fact that the Winthrop Place development for example has received tenant complaints.

6. Discuss Affordable Housing Trust vacancy and interview Jennifer Nassimos provided that she is available.

At 7:51 pm, Jennifer Nassimos joined the meeting. Jennifer Nassimos provided some background information about herself. She works as licensed recreational therapist for the Bedford VA Hospital and has previously worked with homeless populations in Los Angeles. She thinks that there is a need for affordable housing. Here, she has heard people say that they cannot afford to live in Groton anymore. Becky Pine explained that the process of working on affordable housing for a municipality can be slow and frustrating. Jennifer Nassimos responded that she has some experience with this as she works for the federal government.

Cindi Lane-Hand said that she has known Jennifer Nassimos for the previous four years and that she is good at public relations and marketing. She has good connections in the community and is particularly good at advocacy. Cindi Lane-Hand added that she is still learning about affordable housing herself.

Cindi Lane-Hand moved for the Affordable Housing Trust to recommend that the Select Board appoint Jennifer Nassimos to be a member of the Affordable Housing Trust. Rick Perini seconded and the motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote of Lane-Hand – aye, Perini – aye, Perkins – aye, and Pine – aye.

In other business, Becky Pine announced that the Trust put out a press release for the Emergency Rental Assistance program extension. Fran Stanley sent the press release to the Groton Herald. The Town website is updated. Fran Stanley will ask for the extension information to be shared as a front webpage announcement on grotonma.gov.

Becky Pine raised the topic of whether Groton arrange for bus service to connect Groton to the Ayer commuter rail line. She said that she read that there had been an expansion of trains on the Fitchburg commuter rail line. Several towns have piloted ride share programs with fares of \$1 a ride. Judy Anderson commented that the Station Avenue bus company stores buses in Groton for bus routes run in Acton and other places. Could the bus company pick up Groton passengers either on Station Avenue or at a location with a large parking area like Shaw's grocery store at Four Corners.

Becky Pine described the Commonwealth's One Mortgage program that offers mortgages to first time homebuyers. These loans have advantageous terms. The loans can be used to purchase affordable units and also market rate homes. John Sopka suggested that the Housing Partnership work on increasing awareness of this program since that committee appears to have the time. Carolyn Perkins responded that the Housing Partnership has a more narrow focus by design.

7. Review draft regular session minutes from April 21, 2021, April 29, 2021, May 10, 2021 and May 20, 2021.

Rick Perini moved to approved the April 21, 2021 regular session minutes as corrected. Carolyn Perkins seconded and the motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote of Lane-Hand – aye, Perini – aye, Perkins – aye, and Pine – aye.

Rick Perini moved to approved the April 29, 2021 regular session minutes with no corrections needed. Carolyn Perkins seconded and the motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote of Lane-Hand – aye, Perini – aye, Perkins – aye, and Pine – aye.

Rick Perini moved to approved the May 10, 2021 regular session minutes with no corrections needed. Carolyn Perkins seconded and the motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote of Lane-Hand – aye, Perini – aye, Perkins – aye, and Pine – aye.

Rick Perini moved to approved the May 20, 2021 regular session minutes as corrected. Carolyn Perkins seconded and the motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote of Lane-Hand – aye, Perini – aye, Perkins – aye, and Pine – aye.

Carolyn Perkins announced the dedication of Georgie's Garden behind the Boutwell House to be held Saturday, June 12, 2021 from 2 pm to 4 pm. This garden was created in honor Georgianna Boutwell and is open to the public. The dedication will include a presentation on the life of Georgianna Boutwell.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Next meetings: June 17, 2021 - at Town Hall (7 pm at 173 Main Street)
 June 27, 2021 - Housing Summit (2 pm at the Center, 163 West Main Street)
 July 8, 2021 - at Town Hall (7 pm at 173 Main Street)

Notes by Fran Stanley

The following document was distributed to members of the Affordable Housing Trust and the Diversity Task Force.

Housing Summit Planning

The current thinking is to have a two-part summit with Part 1 being external facing and gathering public input while Part 2 would be a nuts-and-bolts event with the committees tasked with implementing Groton's housing plan(s). The original idea was to have a single Housing Summit event. Upon further reflection and feedback from experienced housing presenters (MHP), the decision was taken to divide the event since much of the part 2 effort with housing groups would involve a level of detail and intricacy that would be difficult to convey to a broad audience. And some of that content may not be of general interest. There is an excellent recorded MHP presentation titled nuts and bolts that is an example of the kind of information that the implementing committees would be asked to review in order to have a more meaningful conversation about action steps (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmMtKAQVpUY>).

PART 1

For Part 1, the aim is to have a well-attended public event that will hopefully attract residents who are interested in the topic but may not know all the ins and outs of existing municipal committees and recent planning efforts. Affordable housing has been a frequent topic of discussion. With this forum, it is hoped that that a structured presentation for the first part of the event will encourage a productive discussion where residents can offer their thoughts and register preferences for how they would like the Town to advance affordable housing goals.

Date/Time

The plan is to hold Housing Summit Part 1 on Sunday, June 27, 2021 at 2 pm.

The expected length is 2 or more hours. The alternative date is Sunday, June 13 in the afternoon. A Sunday afternoon time will hopefully allow residents who are busy working and attending to other priorities Monday through Friday to attend a weekend event. A Sunday afternoon is preferred over a Saturday in an effort to schedule around the many sporting events and graduation ceremonies that are typically held on Saturdays in June.

Forum

Currently, the plan is to have an indoor event at The Center at 163 West Main Street. Formerly known as the Senior Center, this building has been reserved. For people who cannot join in person, some remote participation via Zoom is anticipated.

Varied Covid-19 considerations, which have changed over time, have influenced Housing Summit planning. The original plan was to have an outdoor gathering in June and perhaps on the Lawrence Academy campus. It was thought that by June, outdoor gatherings could be conducted in a safe manner. By early May, the plan shifted to a virtual event due to continued hesitancy about public gatherings during the pandemic. With the Governor's new Covid-19 guidelines and a June 15, 2021 end to the state of emergency, the plan has changed again – this time -- to an indoor gathering. The Center is a recently constructed building with good ventilation and a large public meeting room. Working group members are now hearing less hesitancy about meeting in person and more feedback that some people, especially older people, that they are tired of virtual meetings and may not attend the Housing Summit if it is a virtual meeting.

Outreach

Invitations will go out to all town boards and committees. Some boards, while not Part 1 panelists, are apt to have a particular interest. For example, the Council on Aging might be expected to speak up on behalf the needs of seniors for affordable housing. I expect that there will be a number of residents who may follow municipal government loosely but are not presently serving on a board or committee.

There will be outreach to nonmunicipal groups such as A Better Community, the Civil Discourse project, local political parties, religious groups. And, there will be information put out in the Groton Herald and online forums (The Groton Line, Facebook). It is expected that about a month of lead time is needed in order to have effective outreach to alert the public.

Part 1 Agenda

- Moderator: Ed McNierney has agreed to serve as moderator.
- Round robin introductions: a brief 5-minute intro from a representative of each of the following committees:
 - Diversity Task Force (co-sponsor),
 - Affordable Housing Trust (co-sponsor),
 - Groton Housing Authority,
 - Housing Partnership,
 - Planning Board,
 - Zoning Board of Appeals, and
 - Select Board.
- Housing Production Plan presenter: Karen Chapman, Senior Planner for the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission and author of Groton's current Housing Production Plan, will describe the Plan (what it is, why it is done, demographic findings and the goals/implementation strategies)
- Open up the meeting to public input and feedback.
 - Questions from the public will be directed to the moderator who will then repeat the question to the panelists.
 - Ideas and other public input will be written down and/or recorded.

Other Information

A town led effort requires community support and some of the opposition to the Surrenden Farm Reserve Parcel development highlighted differences of opinion about the approach that the Town should take. Despite the approved Housing Production Plan which has identified goals and implementation strategies, and even though there has been increased public support for affordable housing, there is still work to be done to arrive at a level of consensus that will permit the Town to move forward.

Part 2

For Part 2, the goal is to have a smaller group of the committees who are expected to do the nuts-and-bolts work. This group would presumably include the local housing groups but might have a broader selection of committees depending on the priorities identified in Part 1. Part 2 will dig into details that are impractical to share with a large audience with varied knowledge levels on the subject. The Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP) or perhaps Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) with its Municipal Engagement Initiative might help with this presentation.

Part 2 will also be a public meeting but if enough progress has been made in Part 1 to try to identify the types of affordable housing efforts that Groton supports, then Part 2 would be expected to have less public input. Part 2 might be a virtual meeting as that medium would allow for conversation and the easy exchange of information.

Part 2 will be scheduled for a date in August. It is difficult to hold Town events in July. This July in particular, there is expected to be some pent-up demand for residents to vacation. Agenda details for Part 2 will depend somewhat on the amount of progress made in Part 1.