



TOWN OF GROTON
Affordable Housing Trust



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

Regular Session

Date: Wednesday, September 15, 2021

Time: 7 pm

Location: Virtual Meeting held via Zoom

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

Others in attendance: Ginger Vollmar, Peter Cunningham, John Amaral, Phil Francisco, Jennie Bissell, Meagan (unknown last name), Lois Young, Anna Eliot, John Sopka, Attorney Robert Collins, Judy Anderson, Claire Macy, Mark Presti, Adam Burnett, and Holly Grace

Handouts: Agenda, August 11, 2021 draft regular session minutes, August 6, 2021 email from Fran Stanley to Affordable Housing Trust, and Mirick O'Connell invoice dated September 3, 2021

Becky Pine called the meeting to order at 7 pm.

Agenda Item 1: 7 pm. Hear from B'nai B'rith Housing representative who will speak on the development of affordable housing. B'nai B'rith Housing is a Boston area nonprofit and an active developer of affordable housing.

Becky Pine introduced Holly Grace, who is a Senior Project Manager for B'nai B'rith Housing (BBH). She has worked for BBH for about ten years and also has prior experience developing affordable housing. Holly Grace began her remarks by complimenting and commending Groton for its efforts to create affordable housing.

BBH is a faith-based organization that creates nonsectarian housing. BBH has developed affordable housing in Brighton (Covenant House Communities), Newton (The Fairways & Carriage House at 33Comm), Sudbury (The Coolidge at Sudbury) and Swampscott (The Manchon). BBH strives to create comfortable housing and, for its senior housing, its aim is to create housing that allows seniors to age in place. Holly Grace described BBH's approach. For senior housing, BBH plans for each development to be served by a resident service coordinator and a property manager to help meet residents' needs.

Additionally, BBH said that BBH has a collaborative approach. Both the Swampscott and the Sudbury developments were friendly 40Bs [i.e., a 40B Local Initiative Project where the developer is joined by the municipality in its comprehensive permit application]. Also, Holly Grace said that strong property management is important to oversee the units. BBH works with two well regarded property management firms -- Peabody Properties and the Barkan Companies. Property managers provide the usual landlord functions (leasing up, income qualification and unit turnover) but capable management is needed to ensure adherence to the financing requirements associated with LIHTC (Low Income Housing Tax Credits). Oversight is provided by both the tax credit investors and internally by the nonprofit.

Holly Grace highlighted the Swampscott project (The Manchon) and also the Sudbury development (The Coolidge at Sudbury) as a way to highlight points of interest. The Manchon is a 38-unit senior rental development that is both a renovation and an expansion of a 1920s era public school. The Town of

Swampscott declared the property surplus and B'nai B'rith was selected as the developer. The Town of Swampscott retained ownership of the land with a 99-year ground lease. BBH renovated the 1920 era building, demolished a 1960s addition and replaced it with a new construction addition that complements the historic building. Although funding is available for projects that have time limited affordability restrictions (often 30 years), the Machon is restricted in perpetuity. The site had access to town sewer.

BBH responded to a Request for Proposal (RFP) issued by the Town of Swampscott. Holly Grace suggested that the Affordable Housing Trust may want to look at recent RFPs issued by the Hudson and Lynn.

Holly Grace said that B'nai B'rith Housing undertakes its own site planning and due diligence. It may perform a market study to ensure that there is enough demand for envisioned rental units. The Sudbury project received HOME funds¹. Sudbury is part of the West Metro Home Consortium. As far as financing goes, Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) are most commonly used. There are multiple layers of financing. BBH contracts with a financing consultant who has relationships with community banks interested in participating in development financing.

Holly Grace was asked a question about the minimum number of units needed to acquire financing. The Manchon was 38 units. 38 units can be challenging. 42 units allows a more robust allocation of tax credits. 60 to 63 units is sometimes thought to be the sweet spot for senior rental developments.

The Sudbury property was a former 6-acre farm that BBH bought on the private market. The development is a senior rental project built in 2 phases (64 units in Phase 1 and 56 units in Phase 2). It is 100% affordable [Note that even a 100% affordable project may have mixed incomes]. The Sudbury project progressed smoothly over 5 years, with 2 years spent on financing. For Swampscott, the Town selected B'nai B'rith Housing as the developer in 2016 and they leased up this summer (2021). Holly Grace described the Commonwealth's One Stop Application where developers submit a one detailed application when seeking grants from all applicable state sources. It is common for even desirable and competitive projects to wait more than a year to be awarded funding.

Cindi Lane-Hand asked about outreach suggestions. Holly Grace used the Sudbury project, The Coolidge at Sudbury, as an example. At that 120-unit senior development (created in two phases), the local senior center and Sudbury Interfaith group helped to share information with residents and to encourage residents interested in senior affordable housing and affordable housing in general to attend municipal meeting to offer support.

Holly Grace was asked about the difference for developers between housing for people of all ages and senior housing. She replied that if the project depends on septic, then senior units can be smaller. With units having fewer bedrooms, then the septic allocation for senior units is less.²

In her experience, local preference can be done for the initial lease up of rental units. One recent project had 70 percent local preference.

Trust members and several audience members thanked Holly Grace for her presentation.

Agenda Item 2: Meet with Attorney Robert Collins, representing his client Robert Kiley, to discuss potential fund for affordable housing.

Attorney Robert Collins introduced himself and said that he was appearing tonight on behalf of his client Bob Kiley. Bob Kiley is developing the Hayes property in West Groton. It is a 90-acre site with state listed habitat which means that there will be limited development of the site despite the large acreage³. The Hayes parents founded the Groton Conservation Trust and assembled support for the Town beach. Approximately 60 acres will be conserved. The plan is to have 16 homes on the property. As configured, inclusionary zoning is not triggered so there is no requirement for the developer to build any affordable housing.

¹ The HOME Investment Partnerships Program is the largest Federal block grant to State and local governments designed exclusively to create affordable housing for low-income households. Larger cities receive HOME grants.

² For more information on on-site wastewater treatment, see https://www.mhp.net/writable/resources/documents/sewer_rules_housing_supply.pdf.

³ Attorney Collins referenced the translation of the Native American name for Groton which is Petapawag which translates to land between the swamps.

Attorney Collins asked for time to speak with the Trust because Bob Kiley is thinking of donating about \$50,000 to the Affordable Housing Trust. That donation may come in as a lump sum or it may be given over time at a rate of \$10,000 per year for five years. He explained that the gift could be used at the Trust's discretion for affordable housing. One possible use for the funds may be soft costs for a new affordable housing project. Or, the funds could be used to improve an existing facility such as to repair an elevator at a senior rental housing development [Note: Groton Commons on Willowdale Road has an elevator. The Groton Housing Authority does not have an elevator for its 20-unit senior housing complex on Lowell Road.] A third use could be to help one or more individuals in accordance with need who is in a compelling circumstance related to their need for affordable housing.

Becky Pine stated that this is a generous offer though the main purview of the Affordable Housing Trust is to build affordable housing. Attorney Collins said that yes you could use the funds for that purpose. Cindi Lane-Hand commented that Bob Kiley is making a generous offer. Rick Perini stated that this is tremendous opportunity. Carolyn Perkins thanked Attorney Collins. Attorney Collins said that his next step is to assemble a letter of intent. In addition, Attorney Collins offered to be of pro bono assistance to the Trust as it considered certain sites since he has a lot of familiarity with the Town.

Agenda Item 3: Discuss proposed multi-family zoning warrant article.

Becky Pine introduced the discussion by reminding the meeting that the proposed bylaw calls for 15% of the units to be affordable and that the Trust had sent a letter to the Planning Board requesting that this percentage be raised to 25%. Becky Pine said that the Select Board wondered and discussed the matter at their September 13, 2021 meeting and they plan to discuss the matter again at next week's September 20, 2021 meeting. Becky Pine added that she and Rick Perini met on Monday, September 13, 2021 with John Amaral, Russ Burke and Mark Haddad to discuss the multi-family zoning warrant article.

At 8:30 pm, John Amaral joined the meeting as a panelist. He explained that Omni Properties purchased 500 Main Street from Deluxe after an abbreviated 60-day due diligence period. Omni has only owned the property since September 9, 2021. John Amaral explained that there is a tight time frame leading up to Fall Town Meeting. The Commonwealth has not finalized their MBTA Communities regulations yet and may not do so before Fall Town Meeting. John Amaral said that if both zoning proposals pass, then the property would lose its present general business zoning which has a good deal of flexibility.

In response to the question of whether all rental units would count on the Town's Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), John Amaral said that he was not sure even with 25% affordability at 80% Area Median Income (AMI) incomes. All in all, John Amaral said that he is not sure that his group is ready to commit to having the warrant article that applies multi-family zoning to 500 Main Street go forward.

John Amaral said that his goal is to build affordable housing and other housing at the site. The point was made that Groton has three abutting communities who do have commuter rail access even though Groton does not have public transportation.

Becky Pine said that she would still like to see the percentage of affordables go up and that it is an evolving landscape. John Amaral responded that if we give up business zoning, which is of great value, we would not do that 40B levels of affordability. He reminded the meeting that 40B, which is state zoning, can occur regardless of a parcel's underlying zoning. John Amaral added that his development team includes Attorney Robert Anctil and Mauge Architects. This is a development team whose work and expertise are all well known in Groton.

Becky Pine thanked John Amaral for coming to this meeting. She said that Omni has a great track record and we look forward to working with you. She added that the Town certainly needs this planned development with some affordable housing as a part of its goal.

Agenda Item 4: Discuss potential Open Meeting Law violation posed by August 6, 2021 email from Fran Stanley to the Affordable Housing Trust.

Fran Stanley forwarded an email to the entire Affordable Housing Trust committee on August 6, 2021 that contained an opinion from Trust member Becky Pine about whether some coronavirus money should be spent on rental assistance. Fran Stanley explained that although the Trust discussed the potential Open Meeting Law violation at its August 11, 2021 meeting, the issue has been brought up again this evening in order to try to comply with a suggested set of actions that will end with a self-report to the state Attorney General regarding the violation.

Fran Stanley read the August 6, 2021 email into the record.

Rick Perini moved that the Affordable Housing Trust direct Fran Stanley to make a self-report of the August 6, 2021 potential Open Meeting Law violation to the Attorney General's office. Cindi Lane-Hand seconded and the motion carried (4:0) by roll call vote of Pine – aye, Perkins – aye, Lane-Hand – aye and Perini – aye.

Agenda Item 5: Discuss housing trust vacancy.

Becky Pine stated that she had asked Halsey Platt to consider joining the Affordable Housing Trust. In a recent conversation with him, Halsey Platt declined to join as he has just taken on a new project that will occupy his attention.

Agenda Item 6: Review draft regular session minutes from August 11, 2021.

Rick Perini moved to accept the August 11, 2021 minutes as drafted. Cindi Lane-Hand seconded and the motion carried (4:0) by roll call vote of Pine – aye, Perkins – aye, Lane-Hand – aye and Perini – aye.

Agenda Item 7: Review pending invoice from Mirick O'Connell for \$135 regarding Fieldstone Drive legal research.

Becky Pine said that the Trust has received an invoice from the law firm Mirick O'Connell who serve as Town Counsel for legal fees related to Town owned Fieldstone Drive parcels. Becky Pine noted that Town Counsel is still working on this matter and so the Trust can anticipate that there will be additional charges.

Trust members discussed the invoice and decided that they would like to pay the invoice out of recently approved CPC Site Assessment funds. Because the funds are held by the Community Preservation Committee (CPC), the invoice will be forwarded to the CPC for its review next.

Carolyn Perkins moved to have the Affordable Housing Trust pay the \$135 invoice from Town Counsel using Community Preservation Committee Site Assessment funds. Rick Perini seconded and the motion carried (4:0) by roll call vote of Pine – aye, Perkins – aye, Lane-Hand – aye and Perini – aye.

Trust members declined to enter executive session and adjourned the regular session meeting at 9:18 pm.

Notes by Fran Stanley

Next meeting: Wednesday, October 6, 2021