



TOWN OF GROTON
Affordable Housing Trust



Becky Pine, *Chair*
Carolyn Perkins, *Vice Chair*
Phil Francisco, *Member*
Richard Perini, *Member*

Regular Session Minutes

Date: Wednesday, February 16, 2022
Time: 7:45 pm
Location: Virtual meeting via Zoom
Trust members in attendance: Carolyn Perkins, Becky Pine, Rick Perini, and Phil Francisco

Becky Pine called the meeting to order at 7:52 pm. She stated that the meeting is being recorded and introduced members. Cameras for Trust members were turned on.

Agenda Item: Review draft regular session minutes from January 12, 2022.

Phil Francisco moved to accept the January 12, 2022 regular session minutes as presented. Carolyn Perkins seconded and the motion carried (4:0) by roll call vote of Francisco – aye, Perini – aye, Perkins – aye and Pine – aye.

Agenda Item: Discuss submission of comments on proposed Heritage Landing 40B.

Fran Stanley said that MassHousing gave the Town a 30-day extension for submission of comments. The new due date is March 24, 2022. The format for submission will be a cover letter with many attachments grouped by the categories of town department, town committee, and then residents. Comments can be sent to selectboard@grotonma.gov.

Becky Pine said that she is generally in favor of this project because we are very much in need of affordable housing. Phil Francisco agreed and added that there are positives of this location being nearby recreation and Cow Pond Brook Road. Rick Perini supported Phil Francisco's comments. In addition, Rick Perini pointed out that there are issues on the side of the site that has the shooting range and he would like to have not only a mechanical fence but also landscaping (a form of green fencing). He explained that the combination of fence and landscaping will cut down the views of the solar panels and shooting range. Fencing and landscaping can mitigate the attractive nuisance issue but also diminish the noise issue presented by the gun range. Carolyn Perkins commented that to speak to the public transportation concern, none of Groton has public transportation. This is a rural town and the absence of public transportation should not keep out affordable housing.

The group discussed that there are advantages to each form of affordable housing – homeownership and rental – and that either choice would be fine. Trust members agreed that their support for the project is offered with the understanding that the project will fully meet legal requirements. Phil Francisco asked for consideration of the possible reciprocal impacts for the landowner at the rear of the site. The rear of the developer's site borders parcel 249-62 which is Groton land owned by MIT. In turn, parcel 249-62 borders the Westford town border and more land owned by MIT. These MIT owned parcels are part of the grounds of the MIT Haystack Observatory <https://www.haystack.mit.edu/>. Carolyn Perkins gave the example that the Groton Planning Board employs 'dark skies' standards when it permits projects. She said that it is important for the developer to be thoughtful of the impact its project is going to have on its Haystack Observatory neighbor.

Agenda Item: Continue discussion of MBTA Housing Choice Zoning and requirements.

Becky Pine stated that during the next Select Board meeting on February 28, 2022 Land Use Director Takashi Tada will update the Select Board on MBTA Communities zoning.

Several Trust members attended the MBTA Communities webinar today presented by the Massachusetts Municipal Lawyers Association. The webinar offered a close reading of the draft guidelines and was superb. One presenter noted equity issues with the outside impact of the 750 unit minimum on smaller towns and rural towns with limited infrastructure. The presentation contains several observations that the Trust may want to adopt and submit with its own comments.

Slide number 35 referenced affordable housing suggesting that if the Town's own zoning already called for affordable housing, then that would be a rationale for including it in multi-family zoning designed to comply with the MBTA Communities mandate. The Town will need to decide whether to redistrict or create an overlay district. Rick Perini commented that the Commonwealth is trying to write these guidelines in a way that applies to everybody whereas usually there are allowances for local adaptations. Phil Francisco commented that if Groton creates the minimum allowed density of 750 units, then it would result in a 15% population increase. Apart from Groton's extensive wetlands, over 80% of Groton is in an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) which can greatly limit new development.

Fran Stanley commented that if Groton creates zoning that allows for 750 units, then if these units are built we will want to end up with the Town reaching the 10% affordable Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) target. So, a tiered affordability requirement with 15% required for the lower number of units proposed and 25% required for higher numbers of proposed units would be more likely to result in Groton meeting its 10% target. For example, the next RiverCourt sized project -- 78 units at 8 West Main Street -- could have a 25% affordability requirement and if they are rentals, then Groton could probably count all of the units (market rate and affordable) on its inventory. Projects with larger numbers of units benefit from economies of scale that smaller projects lack. Another point in favor of 25% affordability for larger projects is that MBTA Communities zoning will not have a project limitation for developers. Currently developers of MGL 40B comprehensive permit projects meet 25% affordability requirements while working under a 15% profit limitation.

Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is accepting stakeholder comments on its MBTA Communities draft guidelines until March 31, 2022. Becky Pine noted that the Planning Board may have different comments from those offered by the Affordable Housing Trust.

Fran Stanley was directed to draft letters or at least bullet points incorporating the points made on Heritage Landing and MBTA Communities. Then, this information will be distributed to the Trust. Individual Trust members can send comment back to Fran Stanley who will compile that input to be shared in the Trust's next meeting on March 2nd.

Agenda Item: Review invoice for \$3,160 from Dillis & Roy Civil Design Group dated February 14, 2022 to flag/locate wetlands and prepare base plan

Caroline Perkins authorized payment to Dillis & Roy Civil Design Group for \$3,160 from the site assessment funds. Rick Perini seconded and the motion carried (4:0) by roll call vote of Francisco – aye, Perini – aye, Perkins – aye and Pine – aye.

Meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Next meeting: Wednesday March 2, 2022 at 7 pm

Notes by Fran Stanley