



TOWN OF GROTON
Affordable Housing Trust



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

Regular Session Minutes

Date: Thursday, May 18, 2023
Time: 7 pm
Location: Town Hall, First Floor Meeting Room, 173 Main Street
Members in attendance: Richard Perini, Becky Pine, Phil Francisco, and Carolyn Perkins
Others in attendance: John Sopka (Groton Housing Authority)
Referenced documents: draft April 12, 2023 regular session minutes

With a quorum present, Becky Pine called the Affordable Housing Trust to order at 7 pm.

Minutes

Phil Francisco moved to accept the April 12, 2023 minutes as amended. Richard Perini seconded and the motion carried unanimously (4:0).

Review of April 29, 2023 Spring Town Meeting

Becky Pine and other Trust members observed that while the citizens petition to rezone 797 Boston Road failed at Town Meeting, several neighbors and abutters expressed support for residential development and affordable housing on that site. Richard Perini noted that he tried to contact the owners of 797 Boston Road when he first joined the Trust and he did not find the owner to be reachable at that time. Phil Francisco commented that neighbors said that they wanted the Four Corners area to be more walkable and more of a neighborhood.

The Trust's warrant article for \$200,000 in CPC funds passed. Phil Francisco said that he can see a need to explain to residents how the CPC works. Unless Town Meeting moves the money out of the CPC accounts to a use, then the funds cannot be used.

Consider approaching Conservation Commission to discuss prospective land acquisition suitable for affordable housing.

Becky Pine spoke with Conservation Agent Nikolis Gualco about this idea recently. By consensus, the group agreed to put the idea in writing for the whole committee to consider. Perhaps a joint meeting of the Affordable Housing Trust and the Conservation Commission would need to be held in executive session in case parcels on the list for acquisition are mentioned. Fran Stanley will prepare a draft letter.

Update on Request for Determination of Applicability (RDA) for Fieldstone Drive parcels.

Becky Pine said that the RDA could be prepared by nonexperts if Stan Dillis is too busy to submit the application to the Conservation Commission. The Trust's engineer cannot access the other side of the stream without Conservation Commission input on the stream crossing in order to protect the wetland. Fran Stanley will follow up with Stan Dillis on this matter.

Heritage Landing 40B Development – request for development restriction on Town owned properties

According to past representations by Attorney Alphen, Heritage Landing developers need additional restricted land in order to build their own proposed housing development at their desired density. The developer would like to have sufficient credit land and other offsets on town owned land in order to be allowed to build 40 three-bedroom condominiums. 10 of the condominiums will be affordable. The developers are close to filing for their comprehensive permit with the Zoning Board of Appeals.

The Park Commission is waiting to speak with Natural Heritage about its desire to improve safety by rerouting the present access, improving parking. In addition, the Park Commission would like to create a new playing field to be sited on the Hoyts Wharf Parcel. All these plans would involve expanded use of the Town owned parcels directly south of the Cow Pond Brook Road ball fields (parcels 249-51 and 249-57). The Park Commission will not be able to fully weigh the Heritage Landing developer's request for permanently restricting land until the Commission receives input from Natural Heritage on what the Park Commission might be allowed to do with the land.

Under state law (MGL 30B), a permanent restriction is a disposition requiring Town Meeting approval. If the Town is interested in helping the Heritage Landing developer, then proposed permanent restriction should be placed on the warrant for the Fall Town Meeting.

The Select Board is waiting for the recommendation from the Affordable Housing Trust and the Park Commission before the Select Board renders a decision. Since it takes time to inform residents about Town Meeting warrant articles, the sooner the Town arrives at its decision then the better the chance that the merits of the proposal will receive a full airing so that residents can reach an informed decision at Town Meeting.

Discuss spending Trust funds for repair of one of Groton Housing Authority's scattered site units

Trust members discussed the disrepair of the Still Meadow condominium owned by the Groton Housing Authority. The number of repairs and the expected cost of repairs to bring the unit back to rentable condition exceeds the housing authority budget. Lisa Larrabee explained to Fran Stanley that turnover of the unit will be delayed for months.

John Sopka, current Groton Housing Authority board member, confirmed that the Housing Authority struggles with turning over apartments in poor repair. John Sopka said that there was a Sandy Pond apartment that was out of use for almost a year. John Sopka added that the Groton Housing Authority lost a lot of rental income during the pandemic. There was a state program that could have reimbursed those losses. John Sopka knows that an application was made but does not know if the housing authority received any funds. Richard Perini asked if Groton's rental assistance program helped. Fran Stanley said that she drafted the Groton's program to exclude subsidized rents. Richard Perini said that he does not like to think of the Trust turning the \$100,000 of unspent rental assistance money back to the CPC when the housing authority may have been in need.

Richard Perini said that he works with a business named 24Restore that does mitigation and reconstruction, sometimes working on housing authority units. Richard Perini asked if the damage was covered by Mass Fair Plan insurance that is carried by DHCD on behalf of housing authorities. Richard Perini also offered to provide a free cost estimate with embedded photos to help with organization of repairs.

With further discussion and several questions, Trust members agreed that they are open to spending Trust money on the repairs to preserve the unit which would get it rented faster and allow the housing authority to collect needed rents. The Trust would like to learn more about the situation including how the authority covers the ongoing landlord expenses and if other scattered site units have similar set ups. Carolyn Perkins said that the goal is to work cooperatively and to make sure that the Trust has legal support for any actions it takes. The Trust would be willing to meet with the Groton Housing Authority board at their usual second Wednesday of the month meeting (19 Lowell Road, at 7 pm on June 14, 2023).

Becky Pine spoke with Martha McLure, of the Town's Trust Funds regarding helping to turn over the Still Meadow unit. Martha McLure said that the Trust Funds like to be helpful and that they could consider the expenditure. Fran Stanley was directed to check to make sure that the Trust could spend funds for this purpose.

Becky Pine mentioned an upcoming Massachusetts Municipal Association webinar on affordable housing scheduled for May 23, 2023.

Plan 2023 affordable housing roundtable

Brief reference to this year's roundtable. A common goal of housing roundtables are increased coordination and cooperation between housing committees. The repairs needed for the Still Meadow unit are a topic that has drawn the Trust together with the housing authority with a shared focus which is essentially the point of having a roundtable.

No executive sessions were held. Meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm.

Notes by Fran Stanley

Next meeting: tentatively June 14, 2023 at 7 pm