



TOWN OF GROTON

173 Main Street
Groton, Massachusetts 01450-1237
Tel: (978) 448-1111
Fax: (978) 448-1115

HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Peter Cunningham, Chair
Anna Eliot
Richard Perini
Carolyn Perkins

Regular Session Minutes

Date/time: Thursday, September 16, 2021 at 7 pm

Location: Virtual Meeting

Members in attendance: Peter Cunningham, Carolyn Perkins, Anna Eliot and Rick Perini

Others in attendance: John Amaral and John Sopka

Handouts: Agenda, draft minutes, draft Town Meeting warrant articles for multi-family zoning and draft Town Meeting citizens' petition for transferring Nashua Road parcel 227-135 to the Groton Housing Authority

Peter Cunningham called the meeting to order at 7 pm. He welcomed new members Rick Perini and Anna Eliot to the Housing Partnership.

Discuss the Housing Partnership's position/s on Fall Town Meeting articles that concern affordable housing.

Peter Cunningham opened up a discussion of the two multi-family development district zoning measures. The first warrant article defines the multi-family zoning district. The second warrant article applies that zoning measure to the 500 Main Street parcel (former Deluxe property) that was recently purchased by Omni Properties. The group began its discussion without John Amaral, a Groton resident and principal for Omni Properties, who planned to attend the meeting.

The impetus for the legislation was the recent Housing Choice legislation that has particular requirements for MBTA communities. Since Groton is designated an MBTA community, the Town must enact DHCD approved multi-family zoning or be barred from securing certain state grants such as MassWorks infrastructure grants.¹ As the group discussed, the state has not yet promulgated regulations related to the MBTA community legislation and is unlikely to have these regulations in place before Groton's Fall Town Meeting begins on October 23, 2021.

Rick Perini noted that affordable housing percentages probably will not be a part of the new regulations. Peter Cunningham stated that the proposed zoning bylaw has a fifteen percent (15%) affordability requirement and the Select Board discussed at their most recent meeting whether to increase that percentage. Peter Cunningham wondered about whether there would be preferences for veterans. John Sopka commented that he did not see a rush for Groton to enact new zoning if the start date for the MBTA community requirement is not known.

¹ Per the Commonwealth's website Mass.gov, "The new section 3A of the Zoning Act states that an MBTA community shall have at least one zoning district of reasonable size in which multi-family housing is permitted as of right and meets other criteria set forth in the statute:

- Minimum gross density of 15 units per acre
- Not more than ½ miles from a commuter rail station, subway station, ferry terminal or bus station, if applicable.
- No age restrictions
- Suitable for families with children." (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/housing-choice-and-mbta-communities-legislation>).

Peter Cunningham stated that with the nexus between developers and regulations and a lack of specificity, he understood the reluctance of any developer to proceed with that uncertainty. Anna Eliot noted that part of the reason that the Housing Partnership exist is to facilitate that connection between the developer and the municipality.

John Amaral joined the meeting at 7:24. pm. John Amaral said that if the market is there for assisted living, then Omni Properties would be interested in that. Omni has done healthcare. With the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) regulations unlikely to be finalized by Fall Town Meeting, then Omni may want to withdraw the two zoning warrant articles, or at least the article that applies multi-family zoning to 500 Main Street. John Amaral noted that the present general business zoning for the site offers flexibility for a number of allowed uses. Anna Eliot asked if it is the Planning Board's decision or the owner's decision regarding rezoning a property. John Amaral said that Omni may be asking the Planning Board to withdraw 500 Main Street from the application.

Peter Cunningham asked what Omni could do under current zoning. John Amaral responded that MGL Chapter 40B does create housing. A 40B development would not have the minimum density requirements whereas if Omni were required under the multi-family zoning to achieve a minimum gross density of 15 units per acre, then that would be 600 units which is not Omni's aim. John Amaral continued explaining that the owners do not have time for a carve out of a portion of the larger site for MBTA communities and still preserve some area for general business. While the MBTA communities legislation does not allow districts with age restrictions, John Amaral commented that by designing first floor bedrooms, one can attract the senior segment of the population that values that accessibility.

Peter Cunningham said that we would like to engage with a LIP project (a/k/a 'friendly 40B') that might address some common goals. Carolyn Perkins said that she appreciates that Omni wants what's best for the Town. Rental housing is a need and accessible housing is valuable. The group recalled that Select Board member Alison Manugian recounted in a public meeting the percentage of Groton municipal employees who would qualify for 80% AMI units (affordable housing) based on their earnings.

John Amaral commented that there are four different housing committees. Peter Cunningham said that the Housing Partnership makes recommendations to the Select Board. Housing summits can help break down silos between committees. Anna Eliot stated that she wants to help the Trust spend its mostly public dollars. John Amaral clarified that Omni is not looking for Community Preservation Act funding for the development of 500 Main Street. But that this project could be the catalyst for bringing the various housing groups together through the many anticipated public meetings.

Anna Eliot suggested that a meeting be posted for the Housing Partnership so that its members can attend the September 23, 2021 public hearing on the multi-family development zoning.

As for the citizens' petition, Peter Cunningham said that it may be premature for this committee to take a position. John Sopka, who is on the Groton Housing Authority board, said that since he was elected to the board, there has not been a discuss of the citizens' petition. Peter Cunningham said that this is not what his impression was after speaking with Groton Housing Authority Executive Director Lisa Larrabee.

Regarding other potential developments in Town that could have affordable housing, Peter Cunningham recalled that the Housing Partnership met with Donald Van Dyne, the owner of 797 Boston Road, about two years ago. Anna Eliot was also at that meeting. At that time, Donald Van Dyne reviewed some concept plans and then we have not heard anything else from him. The group discussed whether to reach out to this landowner. Carolyn Perkins said that she was in favor of waiting.

Anna Eliot asked what the group thought of B'nai B'rith Housing as a developer. Rick Perini said that from his view B'nai B'rith Housing is one of the best if not the best developer of affordable housing in the state. B'nai B'rith Housing does make outright land purchases sometimes. From what Rick Perini has seen, the organization does what they say that they will do.

Peter Cunningham asked if the Partnership might reach out to the owner of Winthrop Place to see if he would want to rebuild the eight (8) units that were lost to the June 1, 2020 fire. As Peter Cunningham pointed out, there is both the actual loss of the low-income rental units as well as the loss of the units on the Town's subsidized

housing inventory (SHI). Anna Eliot said that the expiring restrictions for the property – restrictions expire in 2044 – may be a factor for the owner.

Anna Eliot moved to authorize Peter Cunningham as Chair of the Housing Partnership to reach out to the owner of Winthrop Place about future intentions and what assistance the owner might need should there be a plan to replace the lost housing units. Carolyn Perkins seconded and the motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote of Perini – aye, Perkins – aye, Eliot – aye and Cunningham – aye.

Anna Eliot asked about development plans for 63 Gratuity Road. Fran Stanley replied that there had been no news in the past year.

Peter Cunningham asked about the small 18 Breakneck Road parcel. John Sopka asked if the Town might want to offer to buy the land. Carolyn Perkins said that the Town probably does not want to purchase a small property if it can only yield a couple of units.

Fran Stanley stated that the Westford developer who represents the owner (Def Con 1) of land on Cow Pond Brook Road is interested in siting a 40B project there. This developer has had several meetings with Town Hall staff about bringing water to the site (15.5 acres; parcel 248-42). Fran Stanley has not heard anything new lately other than the word that Attorney Robert Collins may be brought in to help represent the developer's interests.

Anna Eliot left the meeting at 8:27 pm.

Review regular session minutes from: February 10, 2020, June 27, 2019, May 28, 2019, January 24, 2019, and July 23, 2018.

Carolyn Perkins moved to approve the minutes of July 23, 2018. Peter Cunningham seconded and the motion carried (2:0) by roll call vote of Perkins – aye and Cunningham – aye (Rick Perini abstained and Anna Eliot absent).

Carolyn Perkins moved to approve the minutes of January 24, 2019. Peter Cunningham seconded and the motion carried (2:0) by roll call vote of Perkins – aye and Cunningham – aye (Rick Perini abstained and Anna Eliot absent).

Carolyn Perkins moved to approve the minutes of May 28, 2019, June 27, 2019 and February 10, 2020. Peter Cunningham seconded and the motion carried (2:0) by roll call vote of Perkins – aye and Cunningham – aye (Rick Perini abstained and Anna Eliot absent).

Carolyn Perkins moved to adjourn. Peter Cunningham seconded and the motion carried (3:0) by roll call vote of Perini – aye, Perkins – aye and Cunningham – aye (Anna Eliot absent).

Next meeting: Thursday, September 23, 2021 at 7 pm (join Planning Board meeting to participate in public hearing about multi-family development zoning.)

Notes by Fran Stanley