

Selectboard & Planning Board Housing Subcommittee Meeting via Zoom  
Tuesday, January 24, 2023

Approved

1. CALL TO ORDER HOUSING SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING – Chairperson Leigh Davis called to order the Selectboard and Planning Board Housing Subcommittee meeting at 5:30 pm.
2. ROLL CALL - Leigh Davis, “present,” Malcolm Fick, “present”, Jeremy Higa, “present.” Members not present: Garfield Reed
3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Mr. Fick moved to approve the draft minutes of January 10, 2022. Mr. Higa seconded, and all voted to approve.
4. SUBCOMMITTEE’S ANNOUNCEMENTS/STATEMENTS
  - a. Mr. Fick reviewed the zoning bylaw changes that the Planning Board is considering for the next Town Meeting. He said there were changes affecting multi-unit housing of two or more units. There were also language changes being considered that replace “family”, as in “multi-family” with “unit.”
  - b. Mr. Higa pointed out that all the changes were targeting housing, specifically streamlining the approval process.
  - c. Mr. Fick reported that zoning changes are also being considered for the Stockbridge Road Corridor that would provide density building incentives for projects that include affordable housing and/or child care. He said that that these changes are more extensive and may or may not be ready for the 2023 Annual Town Meeting.
5. NEW BUSINESS
  - a. Ms. Davis shared the current version of the Housing Plan Worksheet and pointed to Items 24, 20 and 19 as being issues that she would like the Selectboard to consider.
    - Mr. Fick suggested adding a column of “who” indicating who would be responsible for continuing the effort for each item. He suggested that many of the items would have to be followed up by Town staff, which, if the aggregate benefits of these items warrant, may argue for adding a housing position.
  - b. Ms. Davis presented a slide show that she had prepared to introduce Item 24, a tax exemption for owners of affordable year-round rental housing. In order to implement this proposal it would have to be first passed by Town Meeting and then presented to the legislature in a Home Rule Petition. She expressed that this and other proposals requiring Home Rule Petition would have to be presented at the 2023 Annual Town Meeting or the entire process would be delayed.
    - Mr. Higa questioned if the tax exemption would increase the tax burden on those who don’t receive the benefit. Ms. Davis said that the burden would be limited and pointed out that the experience at Provincetown, who enacted a similar exemption, suggested that it would take several years for the homeowners to take full affect of the exemption and the town would have sufficient time to assess the impact.
    - Mr. Fick expressed support for Item 24 and the concept of moving forward because of the approval process. But he said that the cost of this and other

initiatives should be weighed against potential benefits to properly prioritize them for the Town and its taxpayers.

- Mr. Fick and Mr. Higa then had a lively, if inconclusive, discussion of the benefits of encouraging the development of large-scale affordable housing projects versus investing in the inclusion of affordable housing in existing neighborhoods or encouraging home ownership. Mr. Higa was concerned that a strict cost-benefit analysis would favor large-scale projects to the detriment of neighborhood and home-ownership investments that he feels are preferable.
  - Ms. Davis said she would present Item 24 to the Selectboard. Mr. Fick and Mr. Higa expressed approval. Ms. Davis said she would revise the slide show and send it to the committee for consideration at the next meeting.
- c. Ms. Davis said that discussion of Items 19 and 20 would be deferred to the next meeting.
- Mr. Higa asked about Item 20, which would impose a transfer tax surcharge for affordable housing. He wanted to know if the transfer tax would be paid by the buyer or seller. Ms. Davis said it could be either and that the proposal still needs ideas and collaboration.

6. NEXT MEETING DATES

- a. Wednesday, February 8 at 5:30 pm.
- b. Monday, February 13 at 6:00 pm to present recommendations to the Selectboard

7. CITIZENS SPEAK TIME

- a. Ms. Vivian Orlowski spoke on two issues.
  - i. Ms. Orlowski asked how many people in the assessor's office are needed to administer the proposed tax exemption. Ms. Davis said that Provincetown has three in their assessor's office.
  - ii. Ms. Orlowski asked if the Provincetown is a good example for Great Barrington regarding its experience with the Item 24 tax exemption. She pointed out that Provincetown has a much lower tax rate and much higher assessed values and was concerned that it may not be a great model for Great Barrington.

8. SUBCOMMITTEE'S TIME – No members requested to speak.

9. MEDIA TIME – No media members requested to speak at this time

10. ADJOURNMENT – M. Higa made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Fick seconded the motion. All voting yes, Chairperson Davis adjourned the meeting at 6:45 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Malcolm Fick, Vice Chairperson