

Town of Great Barrington Community Preservation Committee (CPC)

Minutes of December 13, 2022

This meeting was held in-person and via Zoom as noted on the meeting agenda.

Call to Order: Chair Smith called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM.

Eight members were present: Tom Blauvelt (Housing Authority), Martha Fick (Citizen rep), Jeremy Higa (Planning Board), Jim Mercer (Historical Comm), Patricia Sharpe (Citizen rep.), Karen W. Smith (Parks Comm), Kate Van Olst (Conservation). Also, Phil Orenstein was present to represent the Finance Committee.

Leigh Davis (Selectboard) recused herself from all housing discussions and therefore was not present at this meeting.

Also present: CPA Administrator / Assistant Town Manager Christopher Rembold.

Continued Review of Step 2 Applications

6. Ian Rasch, Alander Group, for historic preservation and affordable housing in the Mahaiwe Block (322 Main Street).

Blauvelt recused himself. Rasch summarized the requests. He said the historic preservation fund request is towards three specific items: the brick repairs, the cornice repairs, and the first floor windows. He said these line items total about \$250,000 and he is requesting \$150,000 from the CPA.

He said housing request is for funds that would subsidize either 2 units at 80% of Area Median Income for 10 years each, or 1 unit at 20 years. Since the funds are not needed to construct the building, this is an operating subsidy. He will still renovate the building and build the apartments, the question is just whether some of the apartments will be affordable to lower income households. He said it would take about \$450,000 to build a new housing unit from scratch. He said this method of funding a few units within a large building mixes affordable housing into the downtown. He said it is important to create mixed income housing. He referred to a table that shows the difference between the market rate rents and the affordable rents at different income levels.

The Committee had questions about which of the housing units would be affordable, the size of units to be affordable, the term of the restrictions, whether there could be a local preference in tenant selection, the time frame, and if there was a market study. Rasch said the timeline is to occupy the building in June 2024. He said their market studies have shown that 1-bedroom units are in the most demand. Also the layout of the building lays out well with 1 bedroom units, so that each bedroom has a window, for example. He said he is open to whether the affordable units would be a 1-bedroom 2-bedroom or studio unit, but he would want to check the costs of each and restriction term that could be offered.

Smith said the question and discussion on this will be much the same as the next project.

7. Ian Rasch, Alander Group, for affordable housing at 343 Main Street

Blauvelt recused himself. Rasch said the units here are slightly bigger than at 322 Main. He said at 322 there would be 1 of the 13 units, at 80% of AMI or lower, for 20 years, or 2 units at 10 years each. As for 322,

this is structured as an operating subsidy; it pays the difference between the market rate rent and the 80% AMI rent. Sharpe said she very much appreciates his commitment to the town and to restoring these downtown buildings. Fick agreed and said bring housing into downtown will make the downtown more vibrant. There will be people and employees; there is an economic benefit to these projects. Mercer commented about parking for the residents of both projects. Rasch said there is a lot of parking at 322.

8. Town of GB, Affordable Housing Trust, for various affordable housing projects.

Housing Trust chairperson Fred Clark described the Trust's application for \$340,000. Smith said she wants to see the vote of the Trust that a majority of the members approved the submittal of this application.

Clark indicated that the request includes the list of the programs they operate and the amount they would use for each program, including the emergency rental assistance program and the down payment assistance program. He said another opportunity is to purchase a property with an existing house for \$140,000 in town where the Owner is interested in working with the Trust, and can wait for the Trust. He cannot disclose the property address at this time. Sharpe asked if there is money for the renovation. Clark said the Trust is speaking with local nonprofits who would bring the funds in for construction and renovation, if the Trust can buy the property. He said we would not be talking about buying a property unless we knew it would be viable. We talk with housing partners so we know they can bring the funds necessary to deliver the affordable housing.

There was a discussion about the Trust working with housing partners on the ADU program and rental assistance for example. Clark said our organizations like the CDC and Construct work with each other and we do not compete against each other. In some years for example the Trust applied for rental assistance money, and one year Construct applied. We don't both apply. Construct has been administering the rental assistance programs and uses other funds before using CPA funds whether from the Trust or a direct grant.

9. Construct, Inc., for a Housing expansion feasibility study.

Jane Ralph, Executive Director, and Construct's Housing Director June Wolfe were present. She said this is a request for funds to hire architects and engineers, for example, not construction. She said it will investigate whether units can be added at or in existing Construct properties. These are properties with underutilized space. She added that studios and 1-bedroom units are in high demand. This is a way we could add more units more efficiently than new buildings. Higa said using CPA funds for predevelopment work like this is very important.

Citizen's Speak: Jennifer Clark spoke about the proposals for 322 and 343 Main Street. Nan Wile also spoke about these projects.

Next Meeting: December 29.

Adjourn: Blauvelt moved to adjourn, Geiler seconded. On a roll call vote, all were in favor (8-0). The meeting ended at 7:05 PM.

Minutes prepared by:


Christopher Rembold