

Selectboard & Planning Board Housing Subcommittee Meeting via Zoom
Tuesday, October 18, 2022
Approved

1. CALL TO ORDER HOUSING SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING – Chairperson Leigh Davis called to order the Selectboard and Planning Board Housing Subcommittee meeting at 1:00pm.
2. ROLL CALL - Leigh Davis, “present,” Jonathan Hankin, “present,” Garfield Reed, “present,” Malcolm Fick, “present”.
3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Mr. Hankin read a proposed correction to the minutes that had been sent to the Chairperson. Ms. Davis requested time to review edits to the proposed corrections. Mr. Reed raised objections to the content of the correction. It was agreed that the minutes will be reviewed again at the next meeting.
4. SUBCOMMITTEE’S ANNOUNCEMENTS/STATEMENTS –
Ms. Davis informed the committee that Construct has an offer on the Windflower, a 13 unit inn. More information will be forthcoming following an expected close in early December. Also, the Cassilis Farm in New Marlborough has been bought by Construct to convert into workforce housing, which is currently in the pre-development phase.

Mr. Fick described initiatives being considered by the Planning Board. These include alternative residential types, Stockbridge Road rezoning, streamlining Site Plan Review by building up performance standards, issues around driveways the number of curb cuts, and issues around common driveways.

Ms. Davis also announced that the Town will be using the worksheet developed by the committee to help focus on housing priorities.

Mr. Reed asked if the gathering of interested parties will still be considered. Ms. Davis explained that the plan was to conduct such a gathering after developing more of the worksheet

5. NEW BUSINESS

6. Continuing discussion of the Great Barrington Housing Worksheet.
Ms. Davis introduced the topic by describing changes she made to the format and sequence of the worksheet. Links have been added. Lead Entities have been indicated on the worksheet.

Mr. Reed confirmed that the Affordable Housing Trust is exploring ADU’s and tiny homes.

Mr. Fick suggested that “Fiscal Impact” be changed to “Impact” on the overall housing goal. The priorities can be determined if the level of effort and the impact are known in terms of high, medium and low. He also said that we should consider staff time should be considered when estimating the level of effort. Ms. Davis said that was part of the reason for previewing the worksheet with Chris Rembold, the Assistant Town Manager.

Mr. Hankin suggested that “Offer ADU and Tiny Home Incentives” should be a priority. He suggested that the Town consider freezing the assessed value of homes that offer affordable ADU’s. He further suggested hosting an information session concerning ADU’s. He’s aware of an ADU builder who has conducted such sessions in New England. Ms. Davis expressed concern about ADU’s getting financing and questioned if people really want to become ADU landlords. The last

ADU item on the worksheet will be combined with the “Offer ADU...” item to address the entire issue.

Mr. Reed asked about the current bylaw status of ADU’s for workforce housing on farms. Mr. Hankin said there is current language that allows multiple ADU’s on farms as long as the ADU is for farm workers. Mr. Hankin further explained that Tiny Homes are considered ADU’s and neither can be considered a primary dwelling. ADU’s can only be constructed on lots that already contain a primary dwelling. Ms. Davis asked if Amy Turnbull could speak about Tiny Homes.

Mr. Fick explained that the consideration of additional of curb cuts would allow the increase of housing density and is not specific to affordable housing. Ms. Davis asked if these would be by-right. Mr. Fick explained that any additional building would have to be in conformance with zoning and that additional curb cuts would have to be approved by the Selectboard.

Ms. Davis said that the items designated as “Home Rule Petition” would require legislative action. Are there any worth pursuing. She advocated property tax relief and local option transfer tax. She described a scenario where a 1% transfer tax option could provide funding for the Affordable Housing Trust as well as for property tax relief. Mr. Fick supported the idea and should be prioritized on the worksheet. Mr. Hankin expressed that this would have a huge adverse impact on property values in Great Barrington. It’s one more thing, in addition to high taxes, no-fiber, and Housatonic Water, that cause people to live elsewhere. He suggested that Great Barrington residents be excluded to avoid penalizing people who have their life savings tied up in their house.

Ms. Davis asked if the Planning Board was looking into the issue of tax abatements. Mr. Fick said that the Planning Board had recommended that tax abatements be considered but that they are not a zoning or Planning Board issue and that the Selectboard would have to take the lead.

Mr. Fick asked about the 30% rule that describes the threshold for upgrade accessibility. He was under the impression that this is much bigger than an issue that the Town can impact.

Mr. Hankin asked about the “matchmaking” program on the worksheet. Ms. Davis said that she put this on to help people feel more comfortable offering through a service that can vet any listings on both sides of the equation. Mr. Reed said he would be concerned that seniors be protected from the scammers that seem to be everywhere. Mr. Hankin asked if this could be used for rental roommates. Ms. Davis asked who could do such a service and that it would be likely performed by a private entity, perhaps using a Town-created app.

Mr. Reed asked about the status of the former Nursing Home on Maple Avenue. Can the Town incentivize the builders to make some affordable units.

Ms. Davis said that she has asked the Town to begin identifying current rental properties and blighted properties. Construct is currently enrolled in the Commonwealth’s abandoned property receivership program and suggested that the Town consider enrolling.

Ms. Davis will send a pdf of the updated Worksheet.

Mr. Reed expressed that he was pleased with the progress made at this meeting.

7. NEXT MEETING DATE – Tuesday, November 1 at 1:00 pm.
8. CITIZENS SPEAK TIME – No citizens requested to speak.
9. SUBCOMMITTEE’S TIME – No members requested to speak.
10. MEDIA TIME – Eileen Mooney requested that a copy of the housing Planning Worksheet be included with the worksheet page.

Sheila Clary asked if there might be a new position to support the committee and its work. Ms. Davis said that she recalled the committee deciding early on not to spend the money and that the work could be done internally. Mr. Fick said he felt that the number and complexity of the tasks may require additional Town resources.

11. ADJOURNMENT – Mr. Fick made a motion to adjourn, Mr. Reed seconded. – Chairperson Davis adjourned the meeting by unanimous consent at 2:09pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Malcolm Fick, Vice Chairperson