

Washington Housing Commission
Minutes
Tuesday, January 16, 2024, 6:30 pm
On Zoom due to weather

Members present: Judie Gorra, Carrie Loyd, Darryl Wright, Charlie Jackson, Henrietta Small, Robert Woodroffe

Staff: Michelle Gorra

Public: Ann Jamieson (from *Voices*), Chris Charles

1. Call to Order 6:31

2. Review of Minutes December 12, 2023

1. Charles moves to accept the minutes, Darryl seconds, all in favor

3. Old Business

a. Update on Baldwin Hill Property

1. Sara Guillemette and Bruce Adams have joined the Trust. They are enthusiastic and ready to get to work. Judie spoke with Bill Fairbairn today; he is submitting a joint application with several towns to fund the \$200k for the Baldwin Hill project. With \$50K for the first homebuyer that would leave \$150K for the town to fund.

b. Update on additional property being donated to the Washington Community Housing Trust

1. Judie also spoke to Bill about the 30-acre parcel being donated to the Trust; spoke about the cost for the surveying (has already been done) and engineering and architectural cost. The plan is to have ten homes on the property. There is always talk about single family homes, but what are the options with duplex/multiplex properties?
 - a. Darryl seconds the idea for multiple units, and asks where the property is. Judie confirms that the location is not yet known.
2. Chris shares that Bill is focused on single family because of money. Multifamily is also fundable, however. Michelle adds that rentals are a harder funding model as money must be raised or it is necessary to go the federal funding route. Idea to start with single family units and move to a rental build in the 5-7 year timeline. This is a puzzle to be figured out.
3. Charlie says to achieve the number we want to achieve on a reasonable timeline, we may not have a choice. Going beyond single family can be a can of worms with pushback, but may be a necessity. Focusing on rentals means setting up infrastructure and upkeep models. Michelle adds that a condo set up means a housing association model, which could include a housing management company like at Dodge Farms or Riverwood. Charlie counters that a non-profit may not want to lean on this option.

4. Project is estimated to be \$350,000 for pre-development costs. This is something to keep in mind as budget requests are submitted.
5. Judie proposes writing a letter to the Trust encouraging consideration of multi-family homes.
Darryl makes a motion, Charlie seconds, all agree.

c. Habitat for Humanity update - will be present on Martin Luther King Day at the Judy Black Park for publicity and possible volunteerism.

1. Habitat was present at Judie Black Park to increase volunteerism. They have four homes occupied and two more being built with no one approved yet for those homes.
2. Michelle highlights their work to help elderly stay in their home. This is a shared goal and could be a good partnership with the Commission. Habitat representatives told Michelle they are in search of volunteers to help make modifications at these homes.
 - a. There is more flexibility with income requirements on this initiative.
 - b. Judie is attending Lunch and Learn at the Senior Center in January and will be talking about this and projects like this. She will bring brochures.
3. Robert raises an organization with a similar mission, Rebuilding Together. They are stationed in New Milford, but work in Litchfield Hills. Judie suggests looking into their work.

d. Moore property update

1. Property came up at the Zoning hearing: Wayne and Liddy didn't think there was much developable land at this property as it was acquired with conservation money. Jim is going to ask the town attorney if we can undo limitations on this land.
2. Chris adds that Wayne was emphatic that it was conservation in perpetuity. Afterwards, Wayne realized he overstated, the town paid \$500k in hopes that over time the property could be developed as affordable housing. Thirty-one acres shown to be subdivided into nine individual building lots. Septic has been checked out, on town water.
3. Still in need of a legal opinion.

e. Update on meeting with the Finance Commission attended by Bill Fairbairn and Judie Gorra

1. Finance Commission wasn't aware of what we are doing or what the housing plan is. We have a goal to go back and talk some more to them.

f. Reminder that there will be a Lunch and Learn about housing in Washington at the Senior Center January 24 at noon.

1. Judie invites anyone on the Commission to join the Lunch and Learn. A great way to meet people, share about the Commission, and find out what the local needs are so we can meet them.

g. Discussion multi-family regulations Zoning hearing 1/8/24.

1. Judie shares that Wayne's letter stood out; a copy was sent to the Commission. The Planning Commission thinks multi-family housing should be centered around town centers. Committee's hope is to make it fair and make it available everywhere.

2. Darryl speaks about the difficulty of underground power for small projects given shortages and timelines. Stipulations that mandate utilities simply won't work.
 - a. Charlie asks if it is prohibitively expensive. Darryl says it's not, but it is about timing and available resources. If they don't have the materials available, it won't work.
Transformers, which are made overseas, are not readily available. The power company advises a wait of 18-26 months.
3. Some of the standards were too restrictive for those updating their own property. Robert wasn't surprised to see these standards go, but ultimately felt that all of the Committee's work was still intact at the end of the report.
4. Charlie asks what happens now: hearing will continue at the next meeting on the 22nd, then the Zoning Commission will vote.

4. New Business

a. Budget discussion for 2024-25

1. The Commission's budget goes through June 30, to date we have spent \$57.50 on printing brochures.
2. Housing Fund budget: From the bottom line \$100K is marked for Down Payment Assistance fund (\$60K needs to be backed out for loans out, as does the \$40K earmarked for others), \$252,885 available after earmarked funds are backed out.
 - a. Judie would like to request for development costs for the thirty acres. If granted this would be transferred from the general fund to the housing fund which carries over year to year.
 - i. Michelle encourages Judie to go ahead and ask
 - b. Darryl asks, if funds are taken for development, would we still have funds for building. Could Habitat help build to offset the costs of some of the houses?
 - i. Henrietta asks if houses built by Habitat would still count towards the commission's goal
 - ii. Michelle adds that the financing structures of the organizations are different. Habitat does count, but their model lets houses flow to market rate at the end of the 15 year term when the house is paid off. This is not the model of the Housing Trust, they keep the house restricted for 40 years or in perpetuity. If all the pre-designed work is done, the whole project would be available for grant applications.
 - iii. Another note that these projects must be developed before applications.
 - c. Judie asks Commission if we should keep line items the same and request \$350K for the Housing Fund. Charlie says yes, if that is a reasonable ask. Judie agrees.
 - d. Michelle says keep the money flexible and ask for money to go to Housing Fund, Also need to revisit ordinance as it does not allow the commission to purchase land with a building on it. Update to language is needed, may consult with the town attorney.
3. Judie asks for motion to continue asking for the same operating budget and ask the Housing Fund for \$350K
 - a. **Charlie makes motion, Henrietta seconds, all in favor.**

4. Michelle had an intern, Oscar, working with her last year. Oscar set up Facebook page for Trust and Commission. Michelle asks Commission to consider paying Oscar to continue this work now that he isn't receiving college credit. The Commission agrees.

b. Commission members concerns

1. Robert asks if Jocelyn will be attending. Judie shares that Jocelyn was going to come last week, but the meeting date changed. Robert adds that she is always a helpful addition, perhaps we have an issue we would like her advice on.
2. Robert raises the ideas of alternates and will provide names to Judie. Judie will reach out.

5. Visitors input/concerns

6. Motion to Adjourn made at 7:29pm, Robert makes a motion, all in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Carrie Loyd, Secretary

Link to meeting recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szxFGRv-paM>