

MINUTES
Hamilton Affordable Housing Trust
Joint Pubic Meeting with the **Hamilton Development Corporation**
June 15, 2017 – 6 p.m.
Hamilton Council on Aging

HAHT Members present: Chair Russ Tanzer, Bill Wilson, Marc Johnson, William Massos

HDC Members present: Tom Goodwin, Rick Mitchell, Tom Goodwin, Anthony Nickas

Town staff present: Dorr Fox, Hamilton Community Projects Coordinator.

Chair Russ Tanzer opened the Hamilton Affordable Housing Trust (HAHT) and the Hamilton Development Corporation (HDC) joint meeting at 6:07 p.m. A quorum was present. The meeting was well-attended by members of the public.

Rick Mitchell began by defining the HDC as a State-chartered public nonprofit organization that's been in existence three years. The group is interested in finding developers interested in purchasing apartments for affordable housing. There is little rental property in Town and many people would like to live/stay in Hamilton, he said, but they need affordable housing. He added that Brian Stein, who represented the HDC and spoke on its behalf at the previous meeting, has recused himself.

The purpose of the public meeting was to continue a discussion from two weeks ago of the 59 Willow Street RFP, which had only one respondent: Andrew DeFranza of Harborlight Community Partners. Mr. DeFranza had previously proposed to purchase the site and do one of two options: develop 20 senior units as a 40B or develop a "by right" project that would include senior or mixed-use (senior and family) housing as well as some commercial (office or retail) space on its first floor. Mr. DeFranza had previously told the Trust that Harborlight did not want to do the project without "sistering up" with another property to make it financially viable, but the Town had only wanted to consider the one project. The Trust, the HDC and Harborlight were seeking potential compromises. For example, to look at other Town-owned sites for Harborlight to potentially "sister up" and develop another 12 units or so for family affordable housing.

Some of the conditions discussed concerning the Willow Street site included drainage and septic issues. These make the site more conducive to just senior housing (one bedroom units) rather than mixed (senior and family housing), which would be two- to four-bedroom units, thereby putting a greater load on septic and drainage.

The neighbors in the area would much prefer a two-story rather than three-story building. They favor the smaller footprint of the 40B option with 20 units for seniors. The zoning for the "by right" project does not allow for residential housing on the first floor. One way around this issue is to put the parking under the building, at street level, and consider the commercial space already there (Mac's) as the commercial piece.

William Massos brought up the possibility of asking the Zoning Board for a variance. Director of Planning and Inspections Patrick Reffett said that tool is limited to hardships for some difficulty with the site, for example, if it is oddly configured, full of ledge, etc. Later in the meeting, Elaine Swenson, 6 Linden Street, once again brought up the variance issue and said that first-floor units for seniors would make them handicapped-accessible and perhaps that could be the “hardship” presented. Mr. Reffett replied that this is rarely done and the Town cannot “create its own hardship” to get around zoning.

In addition to the two plans previously presented (the 40B and by-right project with commercial space), Mr. DeFranza presented two further sketches, passing these out to the public. Plan A was a bigger building, where Mac’s house is, with 15 one-bedroom units for the elderly and 5 multi-bedroom units for family housing. The mechanics of that are possible, he said, and it keeps under the septic count. However, he said, it is unlikely Harborlight would do it without having a sister project. Plan B would be a nine-unit project, a smaller building, which would be mixed-use, having one- to three-bedroom units. The reason it works is because the State has a program that funds projects of 20 units or less with a cap on 10 units of funding, so that’s why Mr. DeFranza proposes 9 units – to receive the max funding.

Mr. Massos suggested whether the project couldn’t be done in two phases, with 9 units per phase. The answer from DeFranza was yes, and this was looked on as a favorable option. One risk is that the program is new, so the first phase could be approved and then the second phase could be stalled or not approved. Funds are released each year around March. DeFranza reiterated that Harborlight would only consider Plan A with the 20 senior units if it were paired with another project, but he said that Harborlight might be open to the nine-unit proposal.

Hamilton Council on Aging (COA) Director Mary Beth Lawton, who is opposed to having the sister project be on COA property for many reasons, asked DeFranza if he could take a portion of the Longmeadow site as the sister property. This was followed by a lengthy discussion of specifics concerning the site.

Marc Johnson said one consideration with the Longmeadow property at Longmeadow is that the front 4 acres are untangled while the back 16 have complicated, tangled easements. The town could use a certain percentage for playing fields for the schools. The acquisition price for the front 4 acres is a little over 1.1 million. The Town would be better off taking the whole property and untangling it, he said, or could just use the first four acres for family housing and then do the fields and other projects later.

Jean Borsetti, 746 Bay Road, cautioned that if something is not done with the back 16 at Longmeadow, a developer can come in and put something there that the Town may not like. Mr. DeFranza noted that five acres of the 16 is wetlands; 10 to 11 acres are buildable. He agreed it would be good to know what’s going to happen with the 16.

Mr. Mitchell noted the Longmeadow site is locked up right now but if that is given up, another developer could put a huge project on it. 40B is a State-mandated program that

overrides all local zoning, he explained, so according to the State, if you are building 40B housing, you have no local control.

Mr. Tanzer circled back to the idea of just looking at the “two nines” (two 9-unit sites at Willow Street). Mr. Johnson said if they did two nines they would prob. connect them.

Julia Maycock, 62 Willow Street, pointed out that the number of bedrooms with the nine plus nine scenario added up to 34 bedrooms, which she feels is too dense for the site. The 20 units is much better in her opinion. Plus she said that Mr. DeFranza had not proposed this so why were they even discussing it instead of talking about the plan he proposed? Later she asked whether the Town would have to do another RFP if considering the 9-unit option. The members of the two boards were not sure. Dorr Fox said he will look into it and will also check with Kathleen O’Donnell about whether the RFP can be extended beyond June 30.

Michael Dinsmore, 136 Willow Street, noted a big (10-foot) drop-off with the Willow Street property. Mr. DeFranza said, yes, it would have to be raised with fill and a drainage system installed. It isn’t in the flood zone. If parking was done under the building that could potentially be done by working with the existing grade. It can be dealt with, he said.

Discussion continued about the 300K funding being offered and whether that would go for the nine units, etc., or if 600K would be offered for both sites, which is all up for more discussion.

Susan Lawrence, 105 Rock Maple Ave., said there are other Town-owned properties not being talked about that might be appealing for the sister property. Patrick Gray, 151 Asbury Street, clarified that if the 9 plus 9 option is chosen, then the HDC would not be sistering with Longmeadow. He is told that is correct.

In the end, it was decided that the Trust and HDC would do more research and give further consideration to this puzzle, specifically by writing out a list of each proposed idea and the pros and cons of each option. For example:

9 units at Willow Street

9 plus 9 units at Willow Street

9 units at another Town-owned property (COA)

20 seniors units sistered with 30-40 units at Longmeadow with Harborlight doing the project

20 senior units (stand-alone project) done with another potential developer

They will look at their newly devised template (in progress) as well as other Town-owned properties and consider the two boards getting together to talk about it further. They decided it was too early to involve the Planning Board. Before the next meeting, the Trust will have a draft of the matrix to look at the pros and cons of each option that seemed reasonable.

Mr. Massos asked if re-zoning was out of the question. “There is a benefit to having first-floor living for seniors,” he said. He was told that would mean bringing the issue to Town Meeting in the fall. They discussed how that would affect the timeline.

The public portion of the meeting was adjourned at approximately 8 p.m. The date for the next meeting will be announced.

MINUTES—MAY 30, 2017 JOINT PUBLIC HEARING

Mr. Johnson stated that the minutes were longer and more detailed than required. A few edits were suggested: A paragraph needed to be struck and Peter Clark’s name was incorrectly recorded. Mr. Fox will fix those items.

Mr. Johnson made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. The motion was seconded by Mr. Tanzer. The minutes were unanimously approved.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING TEMPLATE

Unlike Beverly, which is doing many transit-oriented development (TOD) projects currently, Hamilton is a rural community that happens to have a train station, noted Mr. Massos. We need to think about what we are trying to promote. The Trust discussed the differences between guidelines and a template (checklist) and decided that guidelines are more what they need so that they can tell a developer: “This is what we do” and “if you have a project like this, come to us.”

Mr. Reffett said one of the real values of the Trust has been its ability over the last several years to raise interest in particular properties for their development. He does not see the notion of rezoning happening. He said that templates with specificity (such as evaluating water flow) put a financial burden out there for the cost of that evaluation and that only a developer can give that level of specificity and it should only be done on projects likely to move forward. Trust members agreed that while the Town could hire consultants to vet its own property, it would not want to expend money for private sites.

Mr. Johnson said that speaking in generalities is probably best, such as “Is topology an issue? Are wetlands an issue?”

Mr. Massos said that instead of looking at numbers of units, density should be considered, for example “No more than x units per x acres.” He is told that the Town’s zoning laws provide these maximum density requirements.

The Trust discussed incorporating what is already in the zoning template in addition to using the PEL form. Dorr Fox said he believes the template should be more generic, to identify issues that could potentially be flags.

Kate Walker said she was at the Selectmen’s meeting when the idea of having a template was discussed and her take on the template is that people were more concerned about how their tax dollars are going to be spent and what kind of community we are going to have tomorrow. For example, are we going to invite multi-family housing over senior housing?

The townspeople want a plan for what affordable housing should look like. A large housing complex affects the population of the schools, for example.

Mr. Massos reiterated his idea, proposed a couple of meetings prior, about looking at the current number of affordable housing units in Town (the Trust puts that number at 2700) and finding a way to include them in the “affordable” number by making them deed-restricted.

Mr. Reffett said the census people say seasonal housing like Asbury Grove cannot be included in that number. On the count there are houses that are affordable, he said, but they are not deed-restricted so if/when they’re sold, the prices could go up. The members discussed programs in which the Town could offer financial incentives for residents to put a deed-restriction on a house. There are programs to acquire properties and flip them. For example, you buy a 350K house and it has to be below 200K when you sell it. Communities doing that take a loss on the homes, but this is considered their “subsidy.” A program like that would keep the character of the town the way it is and members consider the idea worth including on the template as something they are in favor of.

Mr. Wilson brought the issue back to the template and questions like: What open space needs to be protected? What is the shared understanding of the project? Does the Trust make rental housing a priority? How can existing structures be reused? The members agreed that projects with no more than 75 units are strongly preferred.

Ms. Walker said a benefit to having a rental property is that you can take 100 percent credit for all the rental units, even if only some are deemed “affordable.”

Mr. Johnson noted the Town’s inclusionary bylaw is that the 10th unit and every 7th thereafter has to be affordable. These units can be done off-site but they equate to just under 15% of the total project. Workforce housing is another version of affordable, which is more market-driven. On the template will be needs at both ranges.

Jean Towne, 20 Savoy Road, said that nobody has mentioned this, but the Town has a lot of wealthy landowners who for years have been using their land at an agricultural tax rate. The Town could reach out to them to see if they’d like to donate a small section of property for benefit of Town and not have to pay back the difference between the regular tax rate and the agricultural tax rates. Mr. Johnson said if one of these property owners wanted to “unwind,” they could give the Town a piece of land, but it would take a very civically minded person. We have people who have loved this town for generations and they are protecting the town as best they can, he said.

The final document that the Trust is preparing will be a combinations of all these recommendations, incorporating the Zoning Board and Planning Board development guidelines.

NEW BUSINESS

The next meeting will be Tuesday, July 11 at 6 p.m. at the Town Hall or the COA. Mr. Fox will check availability. There was talk about resuming a monthly meeting schedule but for now they will meet every two weeks to maintain momentum.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Johnson made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Massos seconded the motion. The motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at 9:22 p.m.