

Hamilton Affordable Housing Trust

August 22, 2017 – 6 p.m.

Town Hall

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

HAHT Members absent: None

Town staff present: Dorr Fox, Hamilton Community Projects Coordinator; Patrick Reffett, Director of Planning and Inspections

Chair Russ Tanzer opened the Hamilton Affordable Housing Trust (HAHT) meeting at 6 p.m. A quorum was present. The meeting was attended by 8 members of the public.

MINUTES—JULY 25, 2017

The trust reviewed the minutes. Bill Wilson made a motion to accept them as written. Marc Johnson seconded the motion. The Trust voted unanimously to accept the minutes.

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY HOMES

Mr. Tanzer introduced Gary Cowles, president of Habitat for Humanity's Board of Directors, who gave a presentation updating the Trust on the construction of two homes, one on Asbury Street and the other on Lincoln Street. Mr. Cowles said the project is on schedule with a projected completion date for both by January 2018.

The Lincoln Street home was the first slide. North Shore Vocational Technical students did much of the framing. Rough plumbing and electrical work is done. Solar is in place. Blue board is being hung, and the next step is plastering. They will do gas, water and sewer hookup, and will finish siding in the coming months. On the Asbury Street home, they are framing the house now. They've constructed side walls for the second floor and need to put the roof on.

The future residents of the homes are a Hamilton woman with two teens and a Beverly couple who have a small baby. The residents are working with the crews, which meet every Wednesday and Saturday from 8:30 a.m. until about 2:45 p.m. Mr. Cowles said anyone wishing to join them would be welcome. The workers are comprised of retirees, college students and volunteers from various organizations. Many drive long distances to help.

Mr. Johnson noted the single family home projects are expensive and asked Mr. Cowles if he had other ideas about ways to do affordable housing projects. Mr. Cowles responded that sometimes Habitat acquires larger homes and turns them into three-unit buildings. The most common properties they buy are foreclosures. William Massos asked if the Town had any foreclosures and was told by Mr. Lombardo that there haven't been any in about five or six years.

Mr. Cowles said the earliest that Habitat could do another project with the Town would be spring 2018. The Trust members thanked him for his work and time.

REVIEW OF PATTON HOMESTEAD SITE—650 ASBURY STREET

Mr. Tanzer said the next agenda item was to take a look at the Patton Homestead site as a potential location for affordable housing. An aerial map of the property's 13 acres as they exist now was shown.

Mr. Johnson asked whether he should recuse himself because he sits on the Patton nonprofit board, but the Trust had no problem with him staying involved in the discussion because he does not have a financial interest.

The map showed three parcels: the Patton Ridge senior housing area, the restricted open space and the Patton Homestead area. Mr. Lombardo noted a plan for the property includes an active water garden in the pond area and getting rid of some invasive species. He questioned how much they can do there and still be consistent with the gift agreement signed with Mrs. Patton.

Trust members discussed where on the property affordable housing might be located. There are some wetlands and some of the property is sloped, so the area for housing is close to the Homestead. The Trust members also detailed where parking is now, as well as the grassy areas used for temporary parking for events. Having housing near the Homestead, where events will be happening, is less than ideal.

Mr. Lombardo said the gift agreement allowed for up to 12 moderately priced dwelling units. There are 12 moderately priced units of senior housing there now. The Trust discussed the possibility of an additional 12 affordable units and whether that would violate the gift agreement.

Mr. Lombardo said they cannot cut off another parcel and sell it without going through a first right of refusal process with the family. Whether they could potentially lease land there is unclear. Mr. Johnson noted that if any property is sold—if it goes to the first right of refusal process to the family and survives that—50% of that money would go to charity, so the Town would essentially only get 50% on the dollar.

Three applicants have responded to the current opening for a director at the Homestead. Currently there is an RFQ out for qualified architects, said Mr. Lombardo. The idea is to do fundraising and find grants that match the site in terms of use. When the director is hired, the person is expected to pursue grant opportunities with Mass Cultural Council and others. The property is intended to be a not-for-profit and open to the public.

Carin Kale, 36 Rock Maple Ave., president of the Patton Homestead Board of Directors, said that adding housing may detract from the beauty of the place and its intended use for small weddings, outdoor ceremonies, family reunions, etc. Patton Homestead is a scenic, quiet, special place.

The big question is if leasing or buying the land for additional housing (over and above the existing senior housing there) would be OK with Joanne Patton and the family. Mr. Massos said the only argument for doing so, in his opinion, would be if the Homestead needed more revenue.

Mr. Lombardo read from the gift agreement. Some use of the property is extended to Gordon College for its archival program. Any use of the homestead must acknowledge and respect its historic character. He said in his experience of working with Mrs. Patton, he has a good idea of her vision that it is for Town residents to use the property for various functions. There had been talk of recreation fields being located there, but once they put the housing in, that precluded the fields.

Susan Lawrence, 105 Rock Maple Ave., asked if it was an accurate representation to say that when they put the existing senior housing in, they did go to Mrs. Patton and if it was worth asking the question about putting additional units on the property? Mr. Lombardo said he felt the gift agreement already speaks to that. He said when they were considering putting a road in, the message he received is that Mrs. Patton wasn't interested in something outside of the agreement.

Mr. Johnson noted that the two Habitat for Humanity properties discussed at the beginning of the meeting were done as a result of the sale of the property used at Patton Ridge.

Mr. Wilson and Mr. Tanzer advocated looking at the possibility of doing a long-term lease for the benefit of the Town to create some affordable housing. Ms. Lawrence stressed that someone should speak with Mrs. Patton directly, not her assistant.

Mr. Johnson discussed the Military Day held at the Homestead and the value of the historical and military history there. Mr. Lombardo said the Hamilton Wenham Garden Club may want to explore a project there, such as a rose garden or children's gardens to educate them about where food comes from. The Green Meadow farm stand is closing, but perhaps a food-related project could be done.

Ms. Kale said she thought it premature to challenge the opportunities "we know are there." If the property can't sustain itself with grants and fundraising, perhaps it could go back into the mix, she said, but felt it logical to honor the gift agreement and give the property a

chance to demonstrate its potential. Even if 50 affordable units were constructed there, she said it would not solve the Town's affordable housing issue.

Mr. Lombardo said he can provide a copy of the gift agreement to the Trust and forward correspondence he has concerning the property. The Trust noted that a roadway to get on and off the property for events was much different than a road needed for affordable housing there.

Mr. Massos commented that he didn't think affordable housing on the site is what was intended there. Mr. Lombardo said he wanted to make sure that the Trust understands that the legal aspects may allow something to be done, but the gift agreement is a different story. In the end, it was agreed to ask the question of Mrs. Patton and see what happens.

CPC/TOWN FUNDING

The Trust discussed funding and whether they wanted to continue to build a reserve, to ask the CPC for more money, and/or to borrow money for projects coming up.

Per Dorr Fox, the Trust has \$630K now and the CPC has an additional \$630K. July 1, 2018 will start another fiscal year. According to Mr. Johnson, the CPC receives about \$500K each year, which includes \$400K from the Town and \$100K from the state.

Trust members discussed the current affordable housing project with Harborlight Community Partners and how to fund it, in addition to how to fund other projects on the list. It was clarified that at this year's Town meetings, they can request funds used for next year's projects.

Mr. Fox needed to leave the meeting at 7:11 p.m.

Mr. Wilson asked if they had a list of projects being worked on. Mr. Massos said he thought they could spend 300K now, 300K in January and another 300K six months after that. Mr. Johnson noted they were restricted last year to not spend money on Longmeadow. He said that some of the money they have is "tagged" (for Willow Street, for example). They discussed the Habitat for Humanity projects and what could potentially be done in the future.

Mr. Massos suggested starting a program to help first-time homeowners buy a house they considered affordable and give them a percentage for a down payment in exchange for doing a deed restriction. He said he noticed houses in the area for relatively low amounts, \$279K for example.

Mr. Johnson said previous programs like this had targeted seniors, but seniors were less likely to want to buy into the restriction.

Mr. Lombardo discussed how to fund such a program. Mr. Massos said it would be “a good problem” if you could get 10 affordable units per year. The Trust didn’t think it could afford that many. Mr. Lombardo didn’t think they could count on \$300-400K per year for affordable housing. Those reserves will be spent and it would take a while to build them back up.

Patrick Reffett said he thought the ideas were great, but that properties with low values had low values for a reason, such as lead paint, and the Town doesn’t have a rehab staff to deal with those issues or the staff to qualify the people buying the properties. He said that’s why it’s great to work with known entities like Habitat for Humanity because they can take problem properties and convert them, which is an expensive process.

Mr. Johnson said the Town would just assist people with the down payment and the work would be up to them. He said the problem would be finding the properties and homeowners that would qualify.

Ms. Lawrence said the idea was great, but it would give the Town only five to six additional affordable properties a year and they needed far more.

Trusts members agreed they liked the idea and asked Mr. Massos to pull together some terms and present the plan in more detail at the next meeting.

Asbury Grove and the apartments at Gordon-Conwell currently do not qualify as affordable housing. Mr. Lombardo said he had the Assessors send Gordon-Conwell a revised form requesting they tell the Town about what housing they have and how many units are for students, faculty, etc. The idea is to explore the metrics and whether some of those units might be opened up to the public and offered as affordable housing.

Mr. Tanzer brought the Trust back to the issue of what funding should be asked for at the upcoming Town meeting. The deadline for the Fall Town Meeting is passed, said Mr. Lombardo. He will look into having a discussion with the Community Preservation Committee to discuss the Trust’s projects/plans.

NEW OR OTHER BUSINESS:

Mr. Wilson said that Andrew DeFranza visited the schools. At the next School Committee meeting, they will discuss Longmeadow and potential uses there for the school.

Mr. Massos asked if anything was happening on rezoning downtown. Mr. Lombardo said Rick Mitchell, who serves on the Planning Board and Hamilton Development Corporation board, said the Planning Board would be looking into the matter down the road. Mr. Wilson said the Trust should be pushing to make sure Willow Street is moving in the right direction and is a part of the master plan. Mr. Tanzer asked how they should proceed with Mr. DeFranza and discussed the ways Mr. DeFranza said he would implement the project.

The Trust set its next meeting for Wednesday, September 20 at 6 p.m. at Town Hall. If another meeting is being held there that evening, they will hold it at the Hamilton Council on Aging.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Wilson made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:53 p.m. Mr. Massos seconded the motion. The Trust voted unanimously to adjourn.