

Town of Westbrook, CT
Affordable Housing Plan Subcommittee
Special Meeting
Thursday, June 3, 2021, 7:00 p.m.
VIA REMOTE ACCESS – ZOOM Meeting only

MEMBERS PRESENT: Marilyn Ozols, Chair; James Crawford, Bill Neale, Linda Nolf, Elizabeth Carpenter

OTHERS PRESENT: Selectman John Hall

ALSO PRESENT: Eric Knapp, Planning, Zoning and Development Coordinator and Glenn Chalder, Consultant from Planimetrics

1. Call to Order

M. Ozols called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

2. Review and Discussion of Session with May Panelists

Sarah Bird, Executive Director, Middlesex Habitat for Humanity; Robert C. Fusari, Sr, President (retired) of Real Estate Service of CT; past President of Home Builders Association of Hartford and Maria DeMarco, President of DeMarco Management Corp., property managers for commercial and residential property, spoke to the Subcommittee at their May meeting.

G. Chalder said he is taking what the speakers shared, and he is weaving it into the Affordable Housing Plan for Westbrook. Subcommittee members talked about how much they learned from the May panelists.

Hearing about how affordable housing works in practice is valuable. It is not easy to manage the procedural paperwork and the affordability plan, keeping track of which units are affordable especially when they only change hands every few years. The income level at the time the person first applies for affordable housing can be different when that person is ready to renew. Every time the tenant re-applies, he/she has to re-qualify. Staff can change, the interest rates can fluctuate which can impact the cost of the unit. Someone from the Town should be monitoring. At this time, no one in the Town is assigned this responsibility.

The deed restriction for a deed restricted unit is on the legal property deed. It's possible if the loan gets foreclosed on, the deed restriction would cease, and the affordable unit would not continue to be affordable. There needs to be a procedure in Westbrook's Affordability Plan for filing, monitoring and oversight which address potential pitfalls which can occur.

G. Chalder also talked about an "affordability easement."

The state's computation for affordability assumes a 20% down payment. If someone is foreclosed on, they would lose that 20% down payment. Those most vulnerable financially could possibly lose the most.

3. Survey of the Community

E. Knapp said the goal for this meeting is to review the survey before sending it out for distribution. Public education on affordable housing is very important. G. Chalder said the survey needs to be pared down to be more concise and direct. He said it's important for people to know the plan is a requirement from the State. The questions are not intended to be a redundancy of the Plan of Conservation and Development survey. G. Chalder and Subcommittee members reworked, reworded and eliminated some of the questions to elicit better information for answers.

G. Chalder is working with another town that is in the process of crafting a regulation for relief from the percentage of aggregate ground coverage and relief from property setbacks if they have a first-floor master bedroom with a handicapped accessible bathroom. In that town, the top priority people had is being able to have a first-floor bedroom and bathroom.

There was discussion about the public's interpretation of the terms "affordable workforce housing", "lower income", "affordable service worker" and "fixed income elderly housing" and the importance of terminology and phraseology. Some of these terms have a more positive connotation. "Academic rental" is a term very familiar to shoreline residents.

4. Timetable of Remaining Steps to Complete Report

G. Chalder will update the survey per tonight's discussion. The survey will be live for 4 weeks. The Subcommittee can look at what other towns are doing for their affordable housing plans, and they can weigh in on Westbrook's survey results. The July 1st meeting, which will be held virtually via Zoom, will focus on strategies. G. Chalder would like to be done with the Affordable Housing Plan by the end of this calendar year. At this time, the State Statutes are not clear as to who actually adopts The Plan.

5. Approval of Minutes – May 6, 2021

A motion was made by B. Neale to approve the May 6, 2021 Affordable Housing Plan Subcommittee Special Meeting Minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by J. Crawford and was approved unanimously.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen S. King, Recording Clerk