

**Town of Westbrook, CT**  
**Affordable Housing Plan Subcommittee**  
**Special Meeting**  
**Thursday, September 2, 2021, 7:00 p.m.**  
**VIA REMOTE ACCESS – ZOOM Meeting only**

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

**ALSO PRESENT:** Hiram Fuchs and Pat Macarelli (arrived at 7:23 p.m.)  
  
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 7:00 p.m.

**2. Westbrook Housing Survey Results**

The Westbrook Housing Survey Results were discussed at the August 5, 2021 Affordable Housing Plan Subcommittee meeting.

**3. Possible Affordable Housing Strategies**

G. Chalder started tonight’s discussion on page three (3) of the possible affordable housing strategies. Recommendations for the seven (7) strategies will go to the Zoning Commission when a plan is adopted.

G. Chalder reviewed what his report was proposing as strategies. One possible strategy would be to allow two-family dwellings to be located in the HDR, the coastal area of town, and RR, the district with the larger lots. Currently two-family dwellings are only allowed in the LDR and MDR districts. Two-family houses help to take the place of “starter homes” in terms of affordability. One approach would be to allow two-family dwellings in all districts. The other approach would be to keep one unit of the two-family dwelling unit deed restricted.

G. Chalder reviewed the options for the MDR District, which is a higher density district and does allow for two-family dwellings. One option to consider would be to allow for conversion of an existing building to a three (3) or four (4) family dwelling. Other possible options are courtyard apartment buildings or cottage courts, also called pocket neighborhoods, which are smaller units clustered around a cottage court. J. Crawford said he endorses the cottage court concept, and he feels it will provide naturally occurring affordable housing, and it will not require a deed restriction. There was discussion about higher density developments, septic capacity and placement.

G. Chalder outlined what a courtyard apartment would consist of. Courtyard apartments are smaller apartment buildings, with four (4) to five (5) units that generally can look like a single-family house from the exterior. Two and a half stories could be the upper limit for size of the building with fewer units. Members of the Committee felt that the cottage court design would fit the character of Westbrook better than the courtyard apartments because the courtyard apartments look urban and too big, at least in the examples provided. There was discussion of both a maximum number of units per building and the character of the design in order to make buildings compatible with Westbrook existing development.

There was discussion of an older style residential looking home or a home conversion with multiple units in it. H. Fuchs suggested that it be recommended that the parking be separated from the units to make them more pedestrian friendly. This would be preferable in the MDR and LDR Districts.

G. Chalder talked about a flexible zoning concept called a Planned Development District which could encourage appropriate development in the Town Center. There is limited septic capacity in the Town Center. Housing in the Town Center would be near the train station and near the stores, restaurants, and services. M. Ozols said requiring deed restricted affordable apartments in the Town Center could be problematic for economic development. Mixed use buildings in the Town Center are supported by the Town Center Vision Plan and the Plan of Conservation and Development. The Committee discussed the possibility of a bonus incentive for affordable units.

Mixed use is already permitted in the NCD District. Appropriate development would be naturally affordable. There could be a density bonus for affordable units.

E. Knapp explained that many large properties on Route 1 are in the flood zone, and if people are given incentive to elevate and invest in infrastructure, perhaps they could put in three (3) or four (4) units. This would depend on septic capacity. E. Knapp said the current trend he is seeing in Westbrook is for mixed use, people looking to have offices or a business on the first floor and residential units above. He said it would be great to offer financial incentives for redevelopment.

There was discussion about the Subcommittee's thoughts about affordable housing in the Turnpike Interchange Commercial Zone. M. Ozols explained the history of the zoning of that area. G. Chalder said he could craft language to say that affordable housing and other flavors of housing such as cottage courts are possible and could fit into this area and provide affordable housing. This could provide a redevelopment opportunity. The zone will not be changed on the owner, but the opportunity will be there through zoning to provide broader options and more flexibility.

G. Chalder suggested the possibility of a new overlay zone that is design based with certain visual images be put into a sidebar in the report.

G. Chalder talked about a different type of Planned Development District, that allows for Site Plan Approval through a zone change process. It allows the Commission to do what it wants by Special Permit as long as the end result is the creation of affordable housing. This could be a sidebar in the report, for future, consideration.

G. Chalder indicated that some municipalities have established a municipal housing trust fund that can accumulate funds over time from a variety of sources that can be used in support of affordable housing. There can be a zoning permit fee which will go towards affordable housing. This is allowed per State Statute. J. Crawford suggested recommending that the Town establish the fund because more grants will become available, and affordable housing has become a critical issue. The Subcommittee will not make specific recommendations as to the source of the funding.

G. Chalder suggested recommending a Standard Housing Affordability Plan. The Housing Affordability Plan is the recipe for how the development will be administered over time. He explained that the Town could adopt a standard plan with lists of approved third-party administrators and a model deed restriction. M. Ozols said she was very supportive of the idea of model documents and identified administrators for the success and consistency of affordable housing.

Members discussed the need for staff to administer and promote affordable housing and the fact that it just can't be added to an existing staff member's plate. B. Neale said RiverCOG may be able to provide an affordable housing resource person for the 1 (one) city and seventeen (17) towns that are part of RiverCOG. G. Chalder suggested there be a local connection and a shared regional resource. J. Crawford suggested this fall under the purview of the Economic Development Commission with referrals from Land Use Staff and Social Services. The solution could include any of these options. The Subcommittee wants to emphasize the recommendation that this be handled, at least in part, regionally, by RiverCOG.

G. Chalder discussed how tax revenue generated by a new development can be used to subsidize development costs. There are also tax credits and tax abatements related to affordable housing. Subcommittee members would like to indicate that these are possibilities that are available.

Education and collaboration would fall to an entity, group or regional resource person. “Aging in place” is often supported by many municipalities now with services such as Meals on Wheels, Dial a Ride and local senior citizen centers.

The Subcommittee suggested that Town owned land and facilities be considered for affordable housing especially in collaboration with groups such as Habitat for Humanity.

G. Chalder had the Subcommittee look through a visual gallery choosing the most appealing and most positive visual images of affordable housing and discussing what is most appropriate for the character of Westbrook.

#### **4. Draft Report Schedule**

G. Chalder would like to prepare a draft report based on the strategies, goals and objectives of the Subcommittee meetings and Westbrook Housing Survey. He plans to have the report submitted to the Subcommittee at the end of September.

#### **5. Approval of Minutes – June 3, 2021 and July 1, 2021 and August 5, 2021**

**Motion** was made by B. Neale to approve the June 3, 2021, July 1, 2021 and August 5, 2021 meeting minutes as presented. The motion was **seconded** by J. Crawford and was approved unanimously.

#### **6. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen S. King, Recording Clerk