

**Town of Lenox
Affordable Housing Committee/Trust
May 19, 2014 at 4pm
Land Use Meeting Room**

Members present: Debbie Burke (DB); Ellen Jacobson (EJ); Jackie McNinch (JM); Kate McNulty-Vaughan (KMV); Olga Weiss (OW)

Members Absent: Joanne Magee (JAM) with prior notification

Staff present: None

Meeting documents: May 19, 2014 Agenda

DB chaired the meeting, and OW volunteered to take Minutes. A quorum of the Committee/Trust was present.

Minutes: 3-31-14

OW moved to accept Minutes with corrections for the previous meeting on March 31, 2014; EJ seconded the motion, and members voted 4-0 in favor with JM abstaining (absent from 3-31-14 meeting).

Sub-Committee reports:

Public Relations:

EJ and KMV met with Lenox realtor MaryJo Piretti Miller and discussed the role of local realtors as the “front line” in advertising the Home Buyer Grant program available to eligible prospective buyers looking in Lenox. MaryJo also identified a list of 11 homes currently for sale in Lenox priced below \$300,000. In discussing the condition of some lower priced homes, JM provided details on the availability of a program also supported by MA Housing coupling purchase with rehab funding support – an additional loan covering the cost for repairs would be added to the overall mortgage deal.

Home Buyer Grant Program update:

JM also reported another Home Buyer Grant application in the works, and will forward the completed application to the Town Manager for the town-side sign-off and release of funds. She also volunteered to contact the brokers for the 11 identified homes and provide the Home Buyer Grant Program information directly to them and the realtor list. KMV will e-mail JM updated Program info sheets.

EJ recommended that the Committee/Trust drop the word “affordable” from our program information materials as other communities have done to appeal to a broader potential market for housing for individuals and families along a range of incomes. The consensus of the Committee/Trust supported that, and KMV agreed to make those changes.

JM noted that she had been contacted by Mountain One Bank in Williamstown for information on the Lenox Grant program and how they might replicate that program.

OW will speak with Town Accountant Charley Brown about the status of the trust funds and report back to the Committee/Trust. The Comm/Trust agreed with DB that the question of when to reconsider the \$50,000 cap on Home Buyer Grant program funds is reliant on JM’s feel for how quickly the program is catching on and applications for funds are coming in.

Sawmill Brook update:

KMV provided an update on So. Berkshire CDC Director Tim Geller's request for a recent meeting with Town Mgr. Chris Ketchen and local Board Chairs who would be involved in the Comprehensive Permit process for this "Friendly 40B" development. She also advised that prior to the permitting process a Special Town Meeting would need to be called for a vote authorizing the BOS to execute the option to purchase by the CDC per the Designated Developer Agreement signed in 2011. DB outlined two tasks for the Comm/Trust: (1) To request that the BOS call for a Special Town Meeting; (2) To organize a political and educational campaign and get out voters.

KMV made a motion, seconded by EJ: To request that the BOS schedule a Special Town Meeting for the purpose of moving the Sawmill Brook project forward.

Discussion followed, with JM raising a concern about housing with deed restrictions and whether buyers could be found. DB noted that Geller's concern in the recent past had been whether there would be buyers for the market rate units. JM raised the issue of the lack of jobs in the region for young people, and the importance of saving for a mortgage and gaining a foot-hold – housing as an investment. Other Comm/Trust members commented on the importance of housing that is affordable, playing a role in turning a pattern around. OW suggested that informational meetings might assuage some concerns about the deed restrictions and other issues surrounding affordable housing.

The vote was called and the motion passed (5-0 in favor). DB will send a letter to the BOS and Town Manager requesting a Special Town Meeting as voted above.

DB and other members discussed the need for public education, and advocacy provided in the past by groups of townspeople. Since the project details were debated before the town's vote to purchase in 2011 and informational forums held then, opinions about the need for another similar round of discussion varied. DB indicated she would talk to Tim Geller about his timeline for permitting and thoughts about educational meetings.

Housing Production Plan update:

KMV will do follow-up on what's needed for an acceptable update of the HPP.

Planner Position Vacancy:

DB offered to write a letter to the BOS communicating the Affordable Housing Committee/Trust concerns about filling this valuable position as quickly as possible. Members offered specific ways the Planner had moved concepts to action and supported our volunteer work, networked and communicated on issues of importance, and whose knowledge of applicable regulations and models had benefited Comm/Trust efforts and initiatives. KMV suggested that at this time the Comm/Trust should/might consider selecting a Chair.

Next Meeting: Monday, June 2 at 4pm

EJ volunteered to chair and prepare and post the agenda.
By consensus the meeting was adjourned at 5:35pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Kate McNulty-Vaughan from Olga Weiss's draft