

Meeting with Developers re: Affordable Housing

April 15, 2008 - Sanford Hall

7:30 p.m.

Andy Rodenhiser
Gino Carlucci
Eric Alexander
Susy Affleck-Childs

Paul Yorkis, Patriot Real Estate
Greg Whelan, Broad Acres Management
(John Claffey could not attend)
Ralph Costello Costello, Unique Homes

Andy Rodenhiser – We are trying to deal with our affordable housing issues.

Paul Yorkis – And opportunities.

Andy Rodenhiser – The cause of the problems is what precipitates this opportunity. We are trying to make some opportunities out of the issues that come up with affordable housing. We want your feedback. The warrant article/selectmen's calendar was dictated to us. This is something we have been working on.

Andy Rodenhiser – I would like to run thru the State's Smart Growth slide show on Affordable Housing with you. How we can create some incentives to help you include affordable units? In some cases, it is just mandatory. What we are trying to do is take the best of every bylaw we have looked at to craft a good model that would work for the town, the development community, and people who need housing. We are looking at some sort of bonus units. We (as a Town) need to work on this; we need to show the state that we are working on these problems. We need to focus on how housing is an economic development issue. We need to supply workforce housing for people who work in manufacturing, warehouses. They have to move further away from the jobs. We need to preserve our open space. We need housing for a variety of income levels – duplexes, mixed income neighborhoods, the true fabric of community.

Paul Yorkis – I know these slides were prepared by others. When people talk about demographics, there is an increasing need to recognize that it is beneficial to have diversity of ages in communities. My dad is 94 years old and he lives in an assisted living center. He is concerned that he is only interacting with old people. We need multi generational environments.

Ralph Costello – There has been a trend that has gone on with the over 55 communities with restricting an entire subdivision/arcpcud. What we have found is that people who are over 55 don't necessarily want to live just with people who are over 55. They want to be around people of various ages. We are doing an area in Medfield. It has been very clear that people don't necessarily want to be just with other old people. Inclusionary zoning should probably say no age restriction.

Eric Alexander – I don't want to get us off track; we are getting some important info here. I have always had a suspicion. Is your decision to build an over 55 community driven by the market or is it the path of least resistance at the local level?

Ralph Costello – I believe that the whole business of over 55 communities developed in towns because of their believe that the cost of education is reduced. What has happened is that there are so many +55 communities and there is a glut on the market now.

Andy Rodenhiser – What I am hearing right here is that perhaps we should have an ability to mix in regular (non age restricted housing) with an ARCPUD.

Paul Yorkis – At Pine Ridge, 5 of the 8 built are sold or occupied; of them, one has 3 adults; one has 2 adults and an adult child; another has 2 adults; another has 2 adults who are retired; another one is a couple just getting married; another is a single parent with 2 kids. People are happy that there is a mix. The age difference is wonderful.

Ralph Costello – Each town that has a project definitely has an interest in the success of the projects. There are some towns where you get a sense as a developer that we are on opposite sides with the town. A project is reluctantly approved. Maybe it will die. That is not good for anybody.

Eric Alexander – The idea of affordable home ownership for over 55 is that it is difficult to qualify people. Anything we can do to help open that up to more people is good.

Andy Rodenhiser – We want to provide for the diversity. Traditional subdivisions need some type of inclusionary zoning so people of lower means can afford houses. We need to provide housing for workers and we are really dealing with the problem you outline. 40B are the guns stuck in the back of the towns. It is an adversarial role for everybody. We want to provide a density bonus to offset the cost of the affordable units.

Ralph Costello – Even beyond the idea of a restriction with age, inherently within zoning there are restrictions . . . gridding out land into one acre lots. We are locked in. That is the restriction that drives what the developer can do and not do, what they will pay, etc. It drives the design, marketing, etc. . . .

Andy Rodenhiser – I am not sure how much you (Ralph) watch what we do here in Medway. Paul Yorkis knows, we are fairly active in terms of trying to be proactive, trying to be on the forefront of some of the initiatives and smart growth tools. We are trying to create different types of opportunities. We are forward thinking if we can. The master plan speaks to creating a diversity of housing types and looking after all of its citizens.

Ralph Costello – What you had mentioned earlier about having designs of housing that could be duplexes. That is certainly one of the things . . . there is always a shortage of creative designs. Many times it starts with restrictive zoning, and you end up with everything looking all alike. If you get away from that whole process and inclusionary zoning really becomes creative, we can mix designs of housing, make them look good.

Andy Rodenhiser – Everything you are saying are things we are thinking about. Each year, we have pages of goals. We do very good. A lot of our stuff has been clean up but the tenor now is fairly aggressive. W want to move us forward. We are taking advantage of the time now that we don't have as many projects before us to try to make the permitting process easier.

Eric Alexander – And faster.

Andy Rodenhiser – We want to use technology so permitting can be done quicker. The development community needs to be looking forward to the consultants who are up to speed on this and the need to quickly turn over a project. We understand what you want. We are trying to help by using technology.

Ralph Costello –There is some software that is out there. Some companies are set up to do it. You give them a perimeter plan and a set of specifications and what to save. They could generate a plan to include inclusionary zoning. What often happens is that the design is done by engineers who look at zoning bylaws and what you can't do. What you are talking about here are different types of houses and different price points that might require somebody to be more creative.

Paul Yorkis – There are no incentives for voluntary inclusionary zoning. If we had a voluntary program which had incentives for affordable housing, I honestly believe that developers would pursue that. If it costs a dollar to build a home and a dollar to build an affordable home and you are losing all of that but if you say to a builder, you can do more houses by including some affordables, it can work.

Eric Alexander – I think you are absolutely right. Medway has not had incentives for voluntarily including affordable units. On the flip side, we have had some success in getting folks to include affordable housing in ARCPUD projects.

Paul Yorkis – This planning board has walked the walk and talked the talk about trying to speed up the process.

Paul Yorkis – I would rather see voluntary with incentives vs. mandatory. I think most of the people would.

Ralph Costello – That would be my preference too. With mandatory, what happens is that there is a cost related to providing the affordable unit. Who pays for it? If it costs \$400,000 to build a house that you have to sell for \$180,000, who will eat that cost?

Andy Rodenhiser – We are trying to provide options for how to accomplish this.

Paul Yorkis – There is another incentive that is not on the screen and not in the proposed bylaw and that is offering low impact development options. Right now, the subdivision rules and regs prohibit it.

Greg Whelan – That is exactly what I want to do on West Street.

Gino Carlucci – Low impact development options should be available no matter what, and not as an incentive.

Ralph Costello – If the cost can be less to develop, that is good.

Andy Rodenhiser – We would like to institute the low impact development stuff across the board.

Gino Carlucci – Low impact development standards lower infrastructure costs in general. .

Paul Yorkis – I would say to you today that the zoning in Medway is not compatible with the local housing market. Duplexes as a matter of right are not allowed anywhere in this town. Multi family is not allowed anywhere by right.

Andy Rodenhiser – We should create areas where a specific type of housing is allowed by right.

Eric Alexander – We allow up to 5 units in the OSRD by special permit. I am not on the PB anymore. I think the minimum lot size in Medway is too big.

Paul Yorkis – The last duplex built in the town of Medway was when Jan Morris was the chairman of the ZBA. It was built at the corner of Route 109 and Winthrop Street. It is really nice. It is compatible with the surrounding community. It is impossible to get any duplexes approved with the present ZBA

Paul Yorkis – You could offer an amendment to the zoning bylaw to strike that portion. If you did that, some of what you are proposing here makes sense; if you don't do that then some of this doesn't make sense.

Susy Affleck-Childs – Maybe we need an AR3 type zone where duplexes are allowed by right.

Gino Carlucci – There are already hundreds of lots in town that are undersize.

Paul Yorkis – I served on the Zoning Bylaw Revision Committee (mid 90's). That crashed and burned. The community was not able to see the value of our proposed changes at that time. Almost every one of those things is in place today because it was done piecemeal.

Andy Rodenhiser – we will keep working on these things.

Paul Yorkis – I would suggest you change ARII so that duplexes do not need a special permit.

Andy Rodenhiser – This proposed affordable housing bylaw takes all the good stuff from the other towns.

NOTE - Andy Rodenhiser passed out the slide show handout and runs thru the slide show for all present.

NOTE - Andy Rodenhiser highlights key components of the draft proposed affordable housing bylaw.

Paul Yorkis – I have a question in your purposes section about producing high quality affordable units. That is a building code issue.

Paul Yorkis – Why did you decide on 3 units as the size to require affordable units?

Andy Rodenhiser – We seem to be seeing a lot of those. That is a real popular. Everybody wants to build a 600 foot road.

Paul Yorkis – I have a concern .There are people who have lived in the town of Medway for years whose only equity is their land. There will be an impact on them as soon as you say that if they put their land on the market and a developer comes in to do ANR lots, they will have to do affordable units.

Paul Yorkis – I also think you have to bring the design review committee process under some control.

Andy Rodenhiser – We are trying to use the new design guidelines.

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Eric Alexander – You mentioned voluntary vs. mandatory. I just think it would be helpful, even if you disagree, to hear about where the town is coming from on mandatory affordability. We are trying to accomplish 2 things – improve consistency and predictability and provide affordable housing. We are trying to satisfy the state which has authority over local incentive payments and grant monies. The current administration is really beefing up how they look at a town's scoring on the Commonwealth Capital application score sheet so in a way we are trying to accommodate developers and the state at the same time.

Andy Rodenhiser – And companies like Cybex who want to be competitive.

Eric Alexander – One of the things on the State's side, is that they are increasingly looking at a town's progress on improving their subsidized housing inventory. That Commonwealth Capital score means a lot in terms of our competitiveness for grant programs. We feel it is imperative to gain some ground on Medway's subsidized housing inventory.

Ralph Costello – A comment on mandatory vs. voluntary. You can have both. Have some more incentives with a voluntary approach. You need to win over the support of local property owners. They want to not lose any money because of these changes.

Eric Alexander – We are trying to make progress toward our 10% affordable housing target. If we increase the bonus some more we aren't moving as much toward the 10%.

NOTE – Gino distributed and reviewed a handout showing two scenarios and how Affordable Housing units could be addressed.

Andy Rodenhiser – We have been thinking about the marketing plans that need to be done for the affordable housing units. We want to provide an almost boilerplate. We are working on another idea, to put somebody on retainer to help with all the qualifying and marketing work.

Eric Alexander – Qualifying buyers and marketing the units. We are looking at ways to take the marketing off your plate.

Andy Rodenhiser – We think there is a mechanism to fund this.

Andy Rodenhiser – We are also looking at some standard stuff on neighborhood/homeowner associations.

Paul Yorkis – Affordable housing with a lower case “a” is as important to me as (official) AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

Eric Alexander – Starter homes on smaller lot size cannot be built new right now. Maybe an option is to have a minimum requirement for affordable housing with some additional incentives for more.

Paul Yorkis – I would represent to you, that communities where there is a diverse housing stock, the value of property in those communities is higher than in those communities where there is not a diverse housing stock

Ralph Costello – There is a vast market for 1200 to 2500 sq. ft area homes, but we have to get the density to make the economics work.

Paul Yorkis – The Subdivision Rules and Regs have as significant an impact on price as the zoning bylaw. The costs of development infrastructure and road costs is significant. If you want to create small “a” affordable housing, I would encourage you to look at reducing some standards such as reducing the standard road width from 26’.

Andy Rodenhiser – We are having our zoning public hearing on April 29th. We invite you to come. We will suggest some of these changes.

Paul Yorkis – A suggestion . . . if you have some time prior to the public hearing, I would suggest you put together 2-3 charts and slides which show here is a parcel of land and how it could be divided to include the affordable units. You need to get ahead of the question especially on ANR lots.

Andy Rodenhiser – Is it safe for me to represent that we met with some developers and that you guys supportive of this? With the incentives and bonuses do you find it is palatable formula?

Ralph Costello – My gut says if there was greater incentive, it would be better. It feels like there is additional work just to get even. We need some incentive to help us do more. I see it as additional work to get back to square one. A greater incentive is better and even more creative. I understand you may not be able to get that approved.

Andy Rodenhiser – It may be easier to get something thru now and then come back with suggestions for changes.

Ralph Costello – I am not opposed to it.

Andy Rodenhiser – There will be a lot of ideas that will be generated by this discussion for additional changes that are certainly congruent with a more positive bylaw that will accommodate the varying needs of the developer, the town and certainly the state and people and businesses.

Paul Yorkis – There has been this rumor that projects like the Village at Pine Ridge or Kingson Lane create tremendous influxes of children in the public schools. It is absolutely not true. I see young couples moving to Pine Ridge not yet with kids and empty nesters who are moving here. People saw a chance to downsize to quality.

The meeting concluded around 9:00 p.m.