



**Acton 2020 Committee
Minutes
September 28, 2011 – 7:00 PM
Acton Town Hall, Room 204**

7:00pm Discussion about affordable housing with invited guests

- I. Welcome and introductions (10 min)
Committee members: Margaret Woolley Busse, Celia Kent, Sahana Purohit, Paulina Knibbe, Jim Snyder-Grant, Charlie Mercier
Other meeting attendees: John Sonner (BoS liaison), Marge Kennedy, Roland Bartl (staff), Kristin Alexander (staff), Kelley Cronin, Mark Racicot, Senator Jamie Eldridge, Nancy Tavernier, Jim Stockard, Jim Purdy (the Collaborative), Daphne Politis (Community Circle), Bob Van Meter, Janet Adachi (BoS), Wayne Friedrichs, David Clough (BoS), Bernice Baran, Brian Barber (the Collaborative)

- II. **Review purpose of meeting (10 min) [7:15]**
Margaret reviews the meeting

- III. **Review strategies in Goal 5, Objective 2 (5 min) [7:20]**
 - Margaret reviews the goals

- IV. **Open discussion of questions, including:**
 - a. **Review housing needs in Acton—who needs housing and what types? (15 min) [7:30]**

 - b. **Discuss meeting housing needs in Acton and grappling with 40B, including the following questions: (80 min)**
 - i. **What are examples of communities successfully dealing with 40B as well as meeting housing needs?**
 - ii. **What are examples of successful housing production plans?**
 - iii. **Explain condo buydown program in Acton. Are there examples of successful buydown/conversion programs in other communities?**
 - iv. **What legislative changes regarding 40B/housing/zoning are afoot?**
 - v. **Are there any unintended consequences that we should be aware of in our planning efforts?**
 - vi. **How can we effectively fit our housing goals in with our “concentrate growth” strategy?**
 - vii. **What would you recommend be our highest priority in pursuing housing to meet our communities’ needs?**

- **Start of 40B conversation: [7:35]**
 - Large drop in people getting affordable housing in the last few years. (Primarily because of difficulty in getting financing.)
 - <Bob VanMeter> Acton’s affordable housing is much higher cost then other towns. Deed restriction is less attractive because of potential lack of long term financial gain.
 - <Kelly Cronin> Related to ACHC:
 - of their clients, 200 are local residents (currently renting in Acton, or being evicted, etc)

- Some folks are coming in because their rentals are being foreclosed on.
- Of the units under management: 141 units are rental. Of the rentals, 91 are single units, and of the single units 86.5% of them are used by the elderly, (the rest of the 91 are used by the disabled)
- They also manage 155 Housing vouchers for folk to use to rent anywhere (section 8). Of the 155 vouchers, 90 of them are used within action
- They also have an additional 12 vouchers specifically for people with disabilities.
- They see a lot of adult disabled people who are moving out of their elder parents homes
- There is no emergency housing in action. Laura (from Community Resources) is the primary person who can help people during a crisis. (ie: loss of housing), but the only real emergency option for homeless is to homeless shelter.
- It takes between 6 months to 2 years to get into a rental unit from them
- When someone gets assistance from them, 30% of the rent comes from renter, 30% from them, and federal government pays the rest.
- As far as what kind of unit someone could get assistance on, HUD sets fair market costs (fair market rent), and there is a cap of \$1000 (for single tenant), so rent high apartments would not be included.
- The housing pool is so limited that some people stay at the Concordian Hotel/motel and pay by the month.
- Seniors try and age “in place”, but at some point, they need low-income assisted-living facilities.
- Some of the current units have stairs, which is difficult for the seniors that are trying to use them
- Funding
 - section 8 by HUD
 - Alt vouchers by state
 - State public housing (with ACHC paying for excess utility costs)
 - CPC helps with capital and new units
- <Bernice Baran> points out that the needs for housing changes with the economy, and that it’s difficult to predict what the need will be.
- <Nancy Tavernier> points out that single mother with children is the highest need, but this year, they have seen a jump in full family’s needing assistance.
- <Bryan Barber, (planners coll.)> Single headed households with children grew by 50% over the prev. FY. (no data yet for this year though)
- <Nancy Tavernier /Bob VanMeter>
 - Total subsidy per unit was on, ave. was about \$200k
 - Condo buy down is much more difficult than building new.
 - New housing is more flexible for older/disabled
 - (Kelly points out) we need *more* housing as there is not enough, so while buy down is a good tool, it is only a small one compared to the other options.
- <Ronald> Condo buy downs are less attractive because you are converting a low cost “affordable” house, and removing that unit which someone could have afforded to purchase on their own, and removing their options to only affordable housing.
- < Jim Stockard >

- The putting a cost of the management overhead of low income housing in Cambridge would be difficult because of the complexity. They is a lot of work though, including:
 - Prep new home buyers,
 - Managing sales of homes, and finding new buyers
- <Ryan Bettez> Buyer has 3 choices when looking for low cost housing
 - Low cost house
 - Deed-restricted condo (lenders don't want to give mortgages for these)
 - Bigger, newer, deed-restricted house
- <Jamie Eldridge>
 - Lower income mothers with multiple children: it's impossible to find any available housing. For example, there is one woman who has been waiting for more than 2 years.
 - We don't have enough units with more than 1 bedroom.
- <Mark Racicot>
 - Our 2 unit condos are really apartments, and not really condos. They are too small.
 - We should provide housing that is of "standard" quality. Just because they are low income, does not mean the housing should be low quality.
- <Bob VanMeter>
 - The State is less generous for new housing, and is focusing moneys mostly on rentals.
- < Jim Stockard >
 - Mass has the strictest town zoning laws in the US:
 - On average across the state, new houses are zoned with 1.54 acres
 - Price in our state is high as supply is throttled because of our zoning rules. 30B helps increasing housing stock and providing more, lower cost units.
 - There are no zoning in our state for new multi-family housing
 - Lincoln story:
 - Battle road farm: The town purchased the land, and put a RFP out to build new homes on it. They were able to control the zoning, the design of the new buildings and they came up with 3 affordable units that are really nice.
 - 40R (40b but controlled by the town): This is when the town manages the building process. When the town moves forward with one of these, the state will assist the town to deploy these, and they will also seriously give you a break from other 40B projects.
 - Housing production plan: The state has made it clear that
 - You must have your housing needs assessed.
 - You must have a commitment to get the planned housing put in place
 - Oregon has a 10% affordable housing system too: they require towns to zone enough multi-family housing area.
- <Ronald> Only 6 towns in the state have a "housing production plan"
 - If we had one, then the 40B (safe harbor) is "waved" by the state
 - It would take around \$25K to put together a really good, workable housing production plan
- < Nancy Tavernier >
 - We would need 42 units per year to get safe harbor

- Inclusionary zoning is where the town tells builders that they should provide a specific percentage of new units as low income. This is done through incentives as the builder cannot be forced into this.
 - <Ronald> Points out that inclusionary zoning needs to provide more carrots to prevent developers from simply suing.
 - < Jim Stockard >
 - In Cambridge, for every 10 units, you need 1.5 affordable, but you get density bonuses.
 - It's ok to have design conditions within a Housing Production Plan, as long as it does not make the development uneconomical.
 - <Jamie Eldridge> things that the state are working on:
 - Because of the current financial situation, the effort now is to just keep the current funding in place
 - When it comes to state monies, there is a tension between smaller towns wanting to build in their communities, vs. big city's; where larger facilities with better economies of scale win out.
 - 40 b reforms:
 - Supports 40b
 - Voters had the chance to get rid of it, and they voted to keep it. Because of this most representatives would not want to go against it.
 - Issue is what "counts as affordable". Rental: if 25% is affordable, 100% is counted as affordable, but for housing it's only 1-1. Jamie is trying to make non-rentals more attractive.
 - Another point pro 40B, th state's goal is to increase housing, and 40b is a very good tool to do this.
 - <Mark Racicot> Related to 40B, and having enough units to prevent developers from building against the wishes of the town:
 - We currently have 519 rental units, and would need 875 to get to our 10%
 - To get to the 10% mark (safe-harbor), we would need to do one of the three:
 - Build 1-2 new Avalon-like properties
 - Build 42 new units per year
 - Buy down around 800 units.
 - To put that in perspective, Acton had 30 building permits *total* last year.
 - <Ronald> propose CPA surcharge to provide more \$ for housing projects
- Concentrate growth: [9:25]
 - <Roland> reviews the plan
 - < Jim Stockard >
 - He favors the plan of smart growth. And seen that work well
 - Cambridge big issue with growth is that they are lacking resources for middle class families. The rich are ok because they can afford housing. The poor are also ok, because there are supporting resources and programs, but the middle class are left out.
 - In Cambridge, 60% students in school (K-12) live in public housing They are challenged to solve how to build 2-4 bedroom units for the "middleclass" (teachers, fireman, police, etc).

- Whatever the problem though, careful planning, and, thoughtfulness is key. If your town does not have a plan, then things will go poorly.
- <Nancy Tavernier>
 - Our current Zoning bylaws are much like “40b with zoning”
 - It does not seem to work.
 - One reason it does not work is because we didn’t want to appear to give developers too much, and land pricing went up too high.
- We need to focus on reworking the current zoning bylaws.
- <kelly cronin >
 - We simply need more affordable rental units
 - Re: Chelmsford has created a nonprofit (housing developer) to help with the planning. Sharing a solution like this could pay off, but being able to show yearly budgetary return on investment might be difficult.
- <Jim Stockard>
 - We have as many people waiting for affordable housing as we have total “n-use” units.

9:00pm Internal committee meeting [9:45]

V. Approve minutes from 9-14-2011 and 9-21-11 meetings

VI. Review remainder fall meetings

a. Confirm communication with committees/stakeholders

b. Confirm logistics/attendance

- Next week no guests (debrief)
- Oct 12th: Goal4-5
 - See meeting min draft (sep14)
- [Action item: Charlie] tell COD to come on Oct12th
- [Action item: Charlie] tell CPC to come on Oct 26th
- [Action item: Margaret] tell School Committee to come on Oct 26th
- Oct 26th: Goal6 & 1
- OctoberFest Oct. 1st: [Action item: Charlie, 10-12 Jim, 12-2]
 - Jim to get Kristin a pdf of our goals sheets
 - Charlie will get the tables and chairs from somewhere (Middlesex bank possibly?) Under Margaret’s name.

VII. Plan for November 9th meeting

a. Oktoberfest logistics

b. Meeting space

VIII. Formalize revised goals and objectives

IX. Comment on TDR write-up

X. Begin debriefing on September 14th, 21st, and 28th meetings (if time allows)

XI. Agree on priorities for Oct. 5th meeting

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PDF	030 - III. - Goal 5: Support Inclusion and Diversity Strategies - Draft - 9-16-11	kalexander	09/28/11	48 KB	
PDF	032 - III. - Goals 1-4 and 6-7 Implementation Strategies related to Housing - Draft - 9-28-11	kalexander	09/28/11	22 KB	
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