Leverett Affordable Housing Trust (AHT)

Meeting Minutes

December 14, 2021

Attending the Meeting: Julie Shively (select board representative), Barbara Carulli (Chair), Ken Kahn, and Dan Levine, Elizabeth Ahearn (members of trust), Melanie Gaier (our liaison) from HRA & Alyssa LaRose, new Dir. of Housing Development at RDI, and several community members.

Meeting convened at 10:08 a.m.

Minutes from our most recent meeting (5/10/2021) were approved.

Introductions were made.

Barbara provided a brief review of the two programs that are presently offered in town to assist qualified potential purchasers with funds to offset the costs of buying a home.

It was acknowledged that due to soaring real estate prices and lack of supply, the formula that was developed several years ago is no longer applicable. Ken offered the information that when the programs were first implemented there were 32 houses on the market in town and 10 were under $250,000. Presently there is only one house listed for $325,00. Ken proposed that we consider no changes until the spring of 2022 when perhaps the market would right itself once more. Offering additional funds would not help both because there is nothing available to purchase and applicant’s eligibility is tied to the Area Median Income (AMI) making it untenable for them to afford expenses associated with maintaining a home in Leverett. Melanie noted that there have been no homes purchased since the spring of 2018, when she became our liaison at HRA. Alyssa and Melanie both made points which favored the increase in max purchase price, explaining that it “wouldn’t hurt” even if it’s not effective (given lack of inventory). Alyssa shared that with a current AMI of $82,900 for a family of 4, and with our subsidy of $50,000-even if that subsidy is not increased-such a family could afford a mortgage of $260,000, meaning the purchase price could be $310,000, which could justify an increase. (Note: for more details on the existing situation see AFT minutes from May 10th 2021). Apple proposed that we make no changes to the existing programs until spring of 2022, which Ken seconded. It was voted upon and passed.

Up until two weeks ago it seemed that the only path forward would be to work with Habitat for Humanity as mentioned at our last meeting. Since that time efforts have been made to locate a lot in town that the AHT would purchase on which Habitat would build (again see May minutes for additional details). Nothing has materialized in the intervening months and so it was decided to once again reach out to the largest landowner in town.

Barbara and Ken arranged a meeting with Cinda Jones and two of her staff. The plans that were developed and rejected years ago when a similar project was proposed-but not supported by the then Selectboard- were once again reviewed and Concept 1 was shared as a place to start looking at a development like this (but smaller). Two sites on Montague Road were discussed as options to build on, with the site closer to town center clearly preferred by Barbara and Ken.

Dan expressed concern that whatever we decide to undertake to provide affordable housing in town that we keep as a priority what benefits the town as a whole. A discussion began about resources, costs, water, trees, wildlife etc. and it was agreed that we would move forward carefully with a complete assessment and involvement from relevant town committees (planning, zoning, conservation etc.) before moving forward. Alyssa will create a list of requirements for us to consider in addition to ideas for funding sources.

Barbara will contact Matt Boucher (head of our highway dept.) to see if he can give us a ball-park figure of the rough cost per foot to put in a town road-probably gravel, not paved-on the Montague Rd site we discussed.

Ken and Barbara plan to communicate with Cinda Jones, et al re- what other studies may have already been done on the site-and when, (environmental, etc.) and this information will be shared with Alyssa to inform her research into what remains to be done.

When enough information is gathered, another meeting will be called to develop a plan to move forward if the information gathered supports it. In the meantime efforts to seek a site for a Habitat building will continue.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Elizabeth (Apple) Ahearn