

Town of Fairfield
Office of Community & Economic Development
Affordable Housing Committee
May 10, 2023

The Affordable Housing Committee of the Town of Fairfield held a Regular Meeting on Wednesday, May 10, 2023 at 7:00 p.m., in the Second Floor Conference Room of the Old Town Hall Building. The meeting was also available on Zoom.

PRESENT: Steve Grathwohl; Urb Leimkuhler; Heather Dubrosky; Gwynne Alperovich; Nina Velez; Janice Bouloubasis

ALSO: Mark Barnhart, Director of Community & Economic Development; Bob Ellwanger

Serving as Acting Chair, Mr. Leimkuhler called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

MINUTES: Consider & Act Upon the Minutes of April 19, 2023

The minutes of the April 19th meeting were accepted unanimously.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING PLAN:

Mr. Leimkuhler asked commissioners for updates on their research into inclusionary zoning requirements in nearby towns. Mr. Grathwohl reviewed the criteria and specific questions to be asked.

Mr. Grathwohl reviewed findings for Westport. Westport has many regulations pertaining to affordable housing but it didn't appear that these had produced many units to date. It appeared that some regulations pertained to specific projects. The regulations provide for as much 20% affordable with some increases in allowable density based on bedroom count, but with a maximum density of 18 units/acre. He noted that some regulations cover assisted living developments, and that there were provisions for a "fee in lieu of" payment as well as off-site development. The fee in lieu was linked to the area median income, which equated to \$250,000 per unit.

Mr. Ellwanger reported on Milford. He noted that Milford has a regulation that allows for a 25% set aside but that the provisions only apply to a single zoning district. He stated that there was no opt-out provision. He noted that the number of affordable units had actually declined; so it doesn't appear that the provisions are generating many new deed-restricted units

Ms. Alperovich reported on Shelton, which enacted "inclusionary" zoning requirements two years ago. It applies town-wide but only to areas served by sewer, water, transportation, etc. It was estimated that inclusionary zoning provisions have resulted in 40-50 new affordable housing units over the past two years, with another 15-20 units of affordable housing under construction. Mr. Barnhart noted that the Shelton Planner had reached out to Town Planner Jim Wendt with some more information which he will forward to the Committee.

Ms. Alperovich also reported on Redding. While Redding doesn't have any inclusionary zoning regulations, it does have an overlay incentive housing regulation for the Georgetown and the Route 7 corridors.

Mr. Leimkuhler reported on Darien, where the focus is on two areas along the Post Road and proximate to the train stations for multi-unit housing. He mentioned that Darien allows for Increased density allowances and lessened parking requirements as well as tax abatements. He also stated that they have an opt-out clause (payment in lieu) based on construction value per square foot, which seemed quite low at \$29/sf. (Subsequent to the meeting it was learned that opt-outs have routinely not been permitted by the Planning & Zoning Commission). It appears that 52 inclusionary units have been produced in 8 buildings since 2014.

Mr. Leimkuhler asked that committee members complete their work by May 22nd if possible. Mr. Grathwohl offered to ask Glenn Chalder if he had suggestions on other towns that the Committee could look at. Mr. Barnhart offered to share the Committee's work with TPZ to see if they had any suggestions or comments.

Mr. Barnhart shared with the Committee a case study regarding the mixed-use development at 1838 Black Rock Turnpike, where the Town did a land swap in exchange for six units of affordable housing. Mr. Grathwohl shared that in Westport there is a provision that gives Westport a first option to extend an affordable housing provision beyond the initial 40-year term.

Other Affordable Housing Plan goals:

Mr. Barnhart noted that he will follow up with the First Selectwoman's office regarding outreach to the Diocese of Bridgeport regarding the St. Emery's property.

Mr. Leimkuhler will continue to pursue the development of some of the large parking lots adjoining retail establishments to evaluate their viability for housing. Mr. Barnhart indicated that the Economic Development Commission is also exploring this topic and the potential to collaborate.

Mr. Leimkuhler previously shared his research into specific town properties. He noted that the property at 32 Still Meadow that he and Mr. Grathwohl planned to study does not appear to be a promising site for housing.

Goal #7: Mr. Leimkuhler reiterated the need to confer with TPZ regarding changes to the Town's zoning regulations to allow multifamily units on smaller, non-conforming lots within the Residence B and C zones.

Goal #11: Mr. Grathwohl will ask Mr. Chalder if there are other towns who have established 501c3 funds to be used for affordable housing.

Goal # 13: Mr. Ellwanger is compiling presentation materials to accompany the groundbreaking ceremony for 244 Greenfield Street.

OLD BUSINESS & UPDATES

Mr. Barnhart reported on several development projects currently underway including 2-6 Beacon Square, 5545 Park Avenue and 528 Black Rock Turnpike, all of which should be completed by early 2024.

The hearing on the Berkeley Road application has been continued until May 23rd.

Mr. Barnhart will distribute an updated moratorium status tracking sheet to committee members.

Mr. Barnhart reported that the Housing Trust Fund balance is \$859,318, of which \$350,000 has been reserved for Parkview Commons.

Mr. Barnhart reported that the Court had scheduled a foreclosure sale date of August 5, 2023. Mr. Barnhart advised that his office will be finalizing and issuing a request for qualifications/proposals for potential development partners for Parkview Commons.

NEW BUSINESS

CDBG Funding: Mr. Barnhart reported that his office recently held its second public hearing on proposed allocations under the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, and that he would forward recommendations to the Board of Selectmen and Representative Town Meeting for their approval in June.

Proposed Berkeley Road Set Aside Development: Mr. Barnhart reported that the next hearing would be open to the public.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:36 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 14, 2023.

Respectfully submitted,

Gretchen Goethner