

Fair Housing Committee Minutes, March 18, 2021

Mimi Hollister, Scribe

Members Present: Debra Larkin, Co-Chair; Dirk Isbrandtsen, Co-Chair; Teri McDonough; Katie Farrell; Joe Whipple; Frank Evans; Mimi Hollister, Scribe

Guests: Ed Nilsson and Lou Meyi

Minutes of February meeting approved.

Communications:

Questions to Jason Silva: Who is the Equal Opportunity Officer? Unknown at this point. Fair Housing will follow up on this.

Question to Becky Cutting: Home Funds available for people in need of assistance? Yes, we get funds each year that are HUD restricted. Past use included first-time homebuyer assistance with down payment and home improvement. If not used, they go to the greater region Home Consortium Allocation Committee, which Becky Cutting is on. The committee develops and issues an RFP and then reviews the submissions and awards funds. Teri will follow up further in order to access funds for people she knows of who are in need. Lou Meyi suggested that \$27,000 could be “teased out” from our Home Funds for this purpose.

He also noted that the regional pool is large and Fair Housing could help put together a good proposal for the town to access more of these funds.

Update on Housing Production Plan Implementation Committee (HPPIC)

The first meeting of the new Housing Production Plan Implementation Committee was earlier today.

They have applied for a technical assistance grant to Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC).

Grants will be awarded in June and Jason is optimistic that Marblehead will receive one. The grant will provide technical assistance and market research for site analysis of several sites, including the Coffin School and school-owned property across from the Community Store. The grant will also include assistance with public forums. Another possibility is partnering with the Housing Authority to create more density in the Broughton Road development, for example. The State has passed zoning changes that require a ½ vote rather than a 2/3 vote at Town Meeting.

The assignment from this first meeting was for members to **come back with priorities** in order to develop a strategic plan. If the grant is awarded, the committee will meet likely more often than monthly for a time.

The Fair Housing Committee will do like-wise and each get back to Dirk Isbrandtsen and Kurt James, our representatives on the HPPI Committee – with our priorities as to affordable housing development. Then we can hone in on one or two very specific projects and the strategies needed to make things happen.

Ed mentioned the Green St. development with two affordable units, possibly partnering with Habitat for Humanity on this. Becky is looking into a funding source to capture at least 2 units. Ed will talk with Kurt James about what’s going on there. Ed also noted that Salem is approving new zoning that allows additions to current residences up to 900 square feet if they meet affordable requirements. *(Added note of clarification from Ed: the proposed by-law in Salem would allow internal subdivision within a house, external additions to a house, or free-standing structures of not more than 900 sq.ft., or less than 300 sq.*

ft. for an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) if it meets affordability guidelines.) Such construction would require a zoning by-law change at Town Meeting, but is likely a good way to add affordable housing in Marblehead where there are large properties with single family homes now. Making single family homes into multiple units or adding “mother-in-law” apartments over a garage, for example, are other ways that could be allowed with zoning changes. Ed noted that because we are a town, not a city, decision making is de-centralized and so it’s harder to get things done.

There will be about \$100,000 in the Affordable Housing Trust Fund after Town Meeting. Dirk has asked about who is on the Board of Directors of this Fund but has no answer yet. He would like to serve on the Board and also is interested in how to add to this fund.

In an informational meeting with Kristen Carlson at Harborlight Community Partners, Dirk and Debby learned that small projects are a challenge for them. 20 plus units is their best project, but they are interested in partnering as we go forward. They counseled patience and persistence. Kristen will be available to meet with Fair Housing later in the Spring. They also met with Senator Crighton, who was very supportive of our work. Dirk suggested that staying connected with both Harborlight and Senator Crighton is a good idea. He also made contact with a City Counselor in Cambridge who was part of a webinar about the process of their creation of affordable housing that several of us watched. Networking is important.

Unfinished business:

Dirk reported that he has had no response from the woman at National Grand Bank to apply for the opening on Fair Housing. **He will be in touch with Jim Nye about another possibility and also with Marblehead Savings again.**

Other matters: Lou noted that there is a well organized group proposing a skating rink in the school property across from the Community Store. Others have also proposed a bicycle jump track there. He suggested a letter to the Select Board and Jason and Becky that this site has been researched favorably for affordable housing. **It was moved, seconded, and passed that Debby will draft such a letter.**

Debby will also draft a letter to the Select Board about determining who is the Equal Opportunity Officer.

Teri will also follow up with Becky about use of Home Funds and about updates on Ted Moore’s Sailmaker Place development. She also drew attention to SHERA – Subsidized Housing Emergency Rental Assistance program. This offers qualified owners of eligible affordable properties in Massachusetts a chance to apply for federal funds to pay retroactive arrearages for tenants who have been unable to pay rent due to COVID-19.

We will continue to inform each other about affordable housing related webinars. Lou noted that the town website lists under “Community Projects” such things as the skating rink idea and its power point that was presented on March 4.

Meeting adjourned.

Note that the next meeting will be on April 22, rather than the 15th.