

Fair Housing Committee Minutes

October 18, 2022 Meeting

Mimi Hollister, Scribe

Members Present in Person: Debby Larkin, Chair; Mimi Hollister, Frank Evans, Katie Farrell, Joe Whipple

Present on Zoom: Bob Neuss, Teri McDonough,

Guests: Moses Grader, Erin Noonan, Rachel Barber,

League of Women Voters Observers: Bonnie Grenier, Stephen Levy

Minutes of the September 12, 2022 were approved.

Discussion regarding the possible reconfiguration of the Fair Housing Committee:

Moses Grader, Chair of the Select Board, presented ideas and led the discussion. The following is a summary of his points: (These ideas surfaced at a meeting related to establishing a Board for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.) The Fair Housing Committee has a broader mandate than the Housing Production Plan Implementation Committee (HPPIC) and needs the power to implement its mandate. So the Select Board would like to present the possibility of reconfiguring the membership of the Fair Housing Committee as follows: bring two Select Board members, Moses Grader and Erin Noonan, to the committee and make Thatcher Kezer, Town Administrator, the Chair; add Becky, Cutting, Town Planner, to the committee; also someone from the Housing Authority and perhaps the School Board. Mr. Grader felt that all this would give a firmer hand to the agenda, would be more efficient in putting initiatives into action, and would underscore the importance of the Fair Housing Committee – raise it up and enable it to set and carry out strategic directions. This initiative will be on the agenda of the Select Board not at the next meeting but at the one after that, perhaps November 9th. Mr. Grader then invited reactions. Summarizing what followed:

Mimi raised concerns that the deep and long history of the Fair Housing Committee must not be lost in this configuration. Mr. Grader agreed. She also expressed concern that serious implementation takes a lot of time – public education, fund raising, all the details – and the people he is proposing to be committee members are already very busy people in their other roles.

Joe Whipple agreed that having the time to devote is a concern. He liked the direct connection with Thatcher and Becky. Mr. Grader affirmed that they are both very much on board with these ideas. Debby Larkin expressed that this committee has been active and would suddenly be dismissed for the most part. Mr. Grader responded that there could possibly be consideration of expanding to more than 9 members but was reluctant to do that lest it become unwieldy. He suggested that there could be another category of particularly interested citizens that would be welcome to attend the meetings and provide input.

Teri McDonough expressed that the HPPIC does have much of the same representation and just hasn't met lately but has developed strategies and carried out some public education and enlisted FHC to do research on Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) in other communities, so has accomplished these and other task-oriented projects. Mr. Grader responded that FHC should be empowered to have the bigger picture, to organize actions, bring resources to bear, and this new configuration makes it more seamless.

HPP should just be about implementation, not education and advocacy. The Fair Housing Trust should just vet projects and allocate funds as well as do fund raising/advocacy.

Erin Noonan explained that the discussion at the Trust meeting was about learning who is charged with what. There was no plan to dissolve the HPPIC.

Joe asked why there should be a school committee member on FHC. Once a presentation and decision is made about the possible use of a school property for affordable housing, the school committee no longer has a role to play.

The discussion ended with an invitation to attend the Select Board meeting where this will be discussed and decided on. We then proceeded to complete our agenda.

Letter to Planning Board was submitted to Becky Cutting as requested and voted on at the last meeting.

Recent Events: Teri, Debby, and Dirk attended the Housing Institute in Salem, presented by Harborlight Homes, about community engagement. Harborlight plans to take this on the road and Teri would love to have them present it here. She also expressed the great need for a "Housing Counselor" in funding discussions. Several of us attended the annual fund raiser for Harborlight Homes entitled "Finally Home" and held at a brewery in Ipswich, an inspiring event.

Mimi attended two CHAPA webinars in September: "Tools and Strategies to Build Affordable Housing" and "Understanding MBTA Communities". Both were excellent and were recorded, so available on the CHAPA website.

Debby met with Cathy Hoog, the Executive Director of the Marblehead Housing Authority. She has known her work for years and is very gratified to have her in this role and available to collaborate. Teri suggested that perhaps she could be a back-up for Cathy on the new Fair Housing Committee if that happens since she, Teri, currently represents the Housing Authority. Whatever unfolds will be fine.

Other Matters

Further discussion ensued about Mr. Grader's presentation:

Frank Evans suggested that many of the points he made are already in the MAPC study report that resulted in creation of the HPPIC.

Teri suggested a joint meeting of FHC and HPPIC to which Moses and Erin would be invited to just look at the Strategy section. On the agenda would be what has already been done and what is next. It seemed apparent that Mr. Grader was not familiar with the MAPC very helpful report that has indeed been a strategy guide.

Debby was concerned that the new committee would mostly be officers of the town and not the hard working citizen volunteers that have traditionally been on this committee.

In summary, there was much to digest in this surprising and important plan to change the whole picture. It was agreed we must attend the Select Board meeting and consider and insist upon public comment time before a vote is taken.

