

Hamilton Affordable Housing Trust

Minutes

February 18, 2015

Welcome – Chairman David Carey opened the meeting of the Hamilton Affordable Housing Trust (Trust). Members Michael Lombardo, Marc Johnson, Matthew Tobyne, and Fred Mills were present. Also present were Rachel Meketon, Patrick Reffett, Heather Ford, and Joe Hughes.

Minutes from January 21st – Carey suggested that the Trust discuss the minutes at the next meeting. The members agreed.

Update on Hamilton Housing Authority – Reffett described his and Meketon's meeting with the new Housing Authority director, Kate McGuire. She seems very aware of the Authority's assets and challenges. Reffett expressed to her that the Town is interested in helping the Authority to maximize its potential, particularly by supporting the Authority's efforts to secure funding for improvements from state and federal government. McGuire is interested in requesting funds from the Trust on occasion. She would like to meet with the Trust to describe the Authority's current situation and discuss her needs.

Carey responded she would be welcome to present at a Trust meeting. Mills said that he would also like to hear about the Authority's specific mission and the process for accessing an apartment. Hughes said that he believes modernization to be an important issue for the Authority; and that the Trust could be a potential partner, since both groups seek to expand affordable housing in Hamilton. Carey agreed. Tobyne asked if the Authority uses vouchers, or what their scope and source of funding is, because it differs from authority to authority, and some can access more funds from the state than others. Hughes replied that this Authority does use vouchers.

Reffett mentioned that the Authority does not have many Hamilton residents on its waiting list. Johnson asked if there is a local preference. Mills asked for an explanation as to why there are not more residents on the list – is there no local demand? Lombardo asked if the push to consolidate the housing authorities on the state level has affected Hamilton, and what pressures the Authority is experiencing in that regard. The group agreed that they would like to meet with McGuire and the Authority's board to discuss these issues. The group also expressed an interest in visiting the properties.

Meketon mentioned that three people have picked up nomination papers for a Housing Authority board seat that is up for election. Hughes said that he was one of them.

Research on Home Rehabilitation Grant Program – Meketon spoke with Kevin Hurley, the coordinator for the North Shore HOME Consortium, which administers the funds locally, about using HOME funds for a local rehabilitation program. Hurley presented three major obstacles: A minimum five-year deed restriction for affordability is required for any property that is improved with HOME funds. The property must be completely up to code (according to federal standards) when the project is completed. And there are hefty administrative requirements that include: marketing the program, the application and selection process, building inspections, legal services, documentation of a fair process for selecting contractors, long-term reporting on and monitoring of projects.

The members agreed that these obstacles were too much for the limited benefit and may prove impossible if implemented. Ford clarified that even though housing trusts in other communities provide small rehabilitation grants, Hamilton's Town Counsel has advised that this does not follow the legal requirements that guide trusts.

Meketon mentioned that for the Housing Production Plan, a survey of twenty-five elderly residents showed that they were less interested in home rehabilitation support, and more interested in cutting their utilities and real estate tax costs. There are several existing programs that could support seniors and others in reducing their utility costs.

Discussion on Loan Programs – Meketon described a Home Modification Loan Program that is recommended in the Housing Production Plan. It is administered by a community organization in Lowell and provides 0% or 3% deferred payment and 3% amortizing loans to households that earn up to 200% of the area median income. She shared a description of the program with the members. Carey suggested that Meketon create a "FAQ" document with the Trust's questions that she then researches the answers to, so that the Trust can have a more informed discussion of the program at their next meeting. The Trust's initial questions were:

- Does the program consider assets when determining eligibility? (Mills)
- What are the steps involved in accessing a loan? (Carey)
- What are the difficulties? (Carey)
- How does this affect, or what is its relationship, to other loans that a person has? Is it a subordinate second loan? (Johnson)
- What are the requirements in selecting a contractor? (Ford)
- Can the funds be depleted? (Johnson)
- Can the Trust contribute funds for Hamilton residents? (Mills)

Ford agreed that this type of program would likely suit the three or four requests for rehabilitation support that the Foundation receives each year.

Next Meeting on March 18th – Carey confirmed with the group that they would like to continue meeting on the third Wednesday of the month. Carey asked if there were

any agenda items for the next meeting, besides the housing authority and the home modification loan program. Meketon mentioned conversations that she had with Andrew DeFranza regarding potential Harborlight projects and with Brian Stein regarding potential support from the Trust with mixed-use and multi-family zoning.

Lombardo and Carey expressed their interest in working with Harborlight and their confidence in DeFranza's abilities. Ford mentioned the Hungry Fox property as a potentially developable site. Hughes inquired about the possibility of developing affordable senior housing on top of the senior center. Carey said that they had considered doing that with Harborlight several years ago, and agreed that it was worth looking into. Lombardo confirmed that the property is dedicated exclusively to Hamilton's senior population by vote of the Board of Selectmen.

Carey clarified that the projects or issues that the Trust is currently pursuing are: improvements to the Housing Authority's properties, the home modification loan program, a development project with Harborlight, and zoning amendments. The Trust members confirmed this.

Hughes asked about the funding that is available to the Trust. Meketon shared that in 2012 the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) had contributed \$125,000 to the Trust. Since then, \$13,000 had been spent on the creation of the Housing Production Plan by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and \$11,000 had been expended on wages, so that the Trust currently has approximately \$100,000. The CPC has approximately \$160,000 in its community housing reserves. Lombardo said that the CPC also has nearly \$1 million (if the pool funding passes at Town Meeting as currently postulated) in unrestricted reserves.

Mills expressed an interest in analyzing the accuracy of the Housing Production Plan's population projections for Hamilton. Has the student population continued to decline? Has the elderly population increased? Lombardo said that the Town Clerk's office has the data from the Town's annual census, but they would have to compile and format it for an easy comparison. Mills said that if they could do that, he would gladly analyze the results.

Carey adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by Rachel Meketon, Community Projects Coordinator

ATTEST: _____

David Carey, Chairman