

Newburyport Affordable Housing Trust
Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: Thursday, February, 2018
Meeting Location: Mayor's Conference Room, City Hall
Members in Attendance: Judy Tymon, Mayor Holaday, Susanne Cameron, Madeline Nash, Karen Wiener
Members Absent:
Staff Present: Kate Newhall-Smith, Andrew Port
Minutes Taker: Kate Newhall-Smith

Tymon called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Tracy Watson, Executive Director, Newburyport Housing Authority:

The Trust invited Ms. Watson to the meeting to discuss ways the two groups could work together to promote, preserve, and create affordable housing.

Ms. Watson states that Newburyport is one of few housing authorities in the state that are not federally funded. Their funding is dependent on the rents they collect and managing housing units. They operate more like a non-profit organization.

Ms. Watson's focus is on Kelleher Gardens, specifically creating accessible units, adding units, and also renovating all of the units' interiors. There are currently 42 units at Kelleher, although one unit is used for the learning center, not housing. The Authority is in the process of acquiring a 4-unit building in West Newbury. There is a chance that she will be able to translate this acquisition process from West Newbury to Newburyport for future projects.

Nash asks what are the Authority's biggest needs. Ms. Watson responds that family housing is most needed. Nash asks about potential partnerships with the abutter – the home for aged men. This could be an area that the Authority could explore that may result in more space to expand Kelleher Gardens.

Ms. Watson asks the Trust for support for this year's CPA grant application for a generator for the Kelleher Gardens Community Building. She also states that next year she will likely be submitting a request for funding for a capital needs assessment so she can then begin the larger process of renovation of all units in the portfolio.

Discussion: Brown School RFP Ordinance:

The Trust discusses City Council Ordinance # ODNC_008_02_12_18 regarding the 'parameters' that shall be included in the RFP for the disposition of the Brown School.

Nash distributes a draft response on behalf of the Trust. She acknowledges that the ordinance does declare the building as surplus, which is an important first step. She states that the parameters listed in the ordinance will make it nearly impossible for a viable project, especially for an affordable housing developer. Port suggests highlighting the funding challenges since this is an important factor in a developer deciding whether or not to bid on a project.

The Mayor states that the affordability parameters are a direct result of neighborhood pushback on the idea of a 100% affordable project. She states that neighbors have told her that they will not accept more than 40% affordability at the Brown School. Nash did not hear these objections vocalized at the public meeting. The Mayor responds that neighbors have called her with concerns. Tymon states that when she met with Councilors Khan and Earls they said they were getting a lot of comments regarding density and parking, not the affordability component. Nash asks if the neighbors are aware that school conversions naturally lend themselves to senior housing, which is often more favorably looked upon than family housing.

Wiener asks why put limitations into the RFP, why not leave it open and see what comes in, then the selection committee can choose the responder that most fits the City's and neighbors' needs.

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Port states that the listed parameters make too narrow of a window for developers to create a viable project. He also states that Councilor Eigerman told him that the parameters need to be in place or the Council wouldn't vote to declare the building surplus. The Mayor would prefer the document have less limitations she would also like to see the ordinance changed to an order. The document was referred to the Planning & Development Committee; a meeting date has not yet been set.

Cameron asks about the rationale for capping the percentage of affordability. She states that the reasons she is hearing now focus on neighborhood complaints and questions if the document violates fair housing practices since the rationale for the limits seems discriminatory. Wiener agrees. Port responds that neighbors are saying that they already have a lot of affordable units in their immediate area with the Sullivan Building and are arguing that the City should not be concentrating affordable units in one area. Wiener can understand this, but the Brown School will result in a very small number of affordable units, it will not be a large-scale development that would create a large concentration of affordable housing in the South End.

Nash questions why the land, the building, and the gym are listed individually for financial values. Smith questions if this was done to allow the option of a lease rather than an outright sale. If a responder wanted to lease the building and gym while the City retained the land, then the bid would only comprise the values of the structures.

Wiener is concerned that there will not be any responses to a new RFP with these limitations, which will then delay the process another several months. Wiener asks about the next steps. The Mayor responds that a date for the committee meeting will be set. In the meantime the Trust can refine its response and formally submit it to the Council. Nash asks if a presentation of other communities who have repurposed school buildings into affordable housing would be helpful. The Mayor believes it would be and also would like to see photos of projects around the City that include affordable units.

Housing Choice Initiative Technical Assistance Grant Program:

The City is eligible to apply for technical assistance from MHP to implement our housing production goals and deliver new mixed-income housing. If the Trust would like to apply for assistance in implementing a strategy from the HPP, the Office can work to draft an application for the next meeting. Applications are due to MHP by March 29th.

The Mayor would like Smith to investigate if the City qualifies as a Housing Choice community. Based on initial review it does not seem as though Newburyport will qualify, but it is worth a second look.

Housing Production Plan Update:

Smith provided a draft of the HPP housing goals for the next five years with the overall goal to increase the number of affordable units by at least 1.5% each year.

Nash and Wiener say that the numbers look good and the table seems to capture all of the pipeline projects.

Smith will send the projections to MVPC to include in the updated HPP.

Smith to send a note to Trust members requesting comments on the draft document that can be passed on to MVPC.

Approval of Minutes:

Wiener makes a motion to approve the minutes of 1/18/18 as presented, seconded by Nash, passed 3-0, Mayor votes present, Tymon absent due to leaving the meeting early.

Next Meeting

The Trust is next scheduled to meet on Thursday, March 15th.

Wiener makes a motion to adjourn, seconded by Nash, all in favor. Meeting adjourns at 8 p.m.