

## Newburyport Affordable Housing Trust Meeting Minutes

<u>Meeting Date:</u>	Thursday, January 7, 2021
<u>Meeting Location:</u>	Online
<u>Members in Attendance:</u>	Judy Tymon, Madeline Nash, Susanne Cameron, Karen Wiener
<u>Staff Present:</u>	Katelyn Sullivan, Andy Port
<u>Members of the public:</u>	Tiffany Nigro, Sierra Partlan from the Pettengill House and Kevin Hurley, North Shore Home Consortium

Affordable Housing Trust (AHT or Trust) Chair Judy Tymon called the meeting to order at 6:30pm and went over the agenda. Chair Tymon introduced Tiffany Nigro and Sierra Partlan from the Pettengill House and Kevin Hurley from the North Shore Home Consortium (NSHC). Chair Tymon confirmed that Nigro sent over a status update before the meeting.

### Emergency Rental Assistance Program Update

Nigro reported that the total assistance awarded so far is approximately \$45,000. Nigro reported that the program is running smoothly and her staff has settled in regarding the internal processing of applications. There are several new applicants including three families to the program and staff is working with them and their landlords to gather the required application documentation for approval.

Member Madeline Nash asked Nigro if she felt there are now more people aware of the program since it seems there has been a recent uptick in applications. Nigro agreed that in the past week there had been an increase in applications and at this point she was not sure what to attribute the increase to. Member Nash asked Nigro another question related to the maximum total amount of assistance per household and if Nigro was seeing applicants bump up against the maximum. Nigro responded that there are some applicants/families that have reached the cap in total funding amount but that her staff continues to work with the applicants to find other sources of funding or assistance. Nigro went on to say that she encourages applicants that have reached the limit in assistance to keep in touch and continue to make their housing a priority and assures them that staff is there to help. Nash asked Nigro if she was seeing applicants apply for funds for reasons unrelated to Covid as the Trust is considering a new rental assistance program that would not be tied to the current pandemic. Nigro responded that she does see a small number of applicants apply for assistance that cannot demonstrate a Covid related hardship.

The Trust members thanked Nigro for her work.

### Discussion with Kevin Hurley, North Shore HOME Consortium

Chair Tymon welcomed Kevin Hurley to the meeting. Hurley said he was happy to speak with the group about the HOME funds program and reminded the group that he sent out materials that listed the amount of HOME funds set aside for Newburyport which is approximately

\$77,000. Hurley said these funds can be used for the development of affordable housing generally speaking but there have been allowances over the years to allow for tenant based rental assistance. The struggle with setting up this type of program for cities and towns is finding a partner to administer the program. Hurley was encouraged that Newburyport has found a partner in the Pettengill House but wondered if Pettengill staff was familiar with the reporting requirements tied to HOME funds which are slightly burdensome. Hurley said lately he has been seeing the rental assistance funds helping individuals that were homeless and providing them with a one year subsidy with the individuals hopefully paying 1/3 of their salary towards rent. However, Hurley acknowledged that it seems Newburyport is not looking to do that. Newburyport is looking to assist individuals that need immediate assistance because they have hit a rough patch like loss of a job or to help someone get into an apartment (first and last month's rent and security deposit).

Hurley asked the Trust members to elaborate as to how they envision using the HOME funds. Chair Tymon responded that the Trust had discussed establishing more of a general rental assistance program that would offer first and last month's rent and security deposit and would be separate from the Covid related relief. Tymon explained that she wanted to learn more from Hurley as to the restrictions that would be put on a program if HOME funds were to be used. Tymon referred to the materials that Hurley had sent around and she called out that it was clear that the funds were to be used for applicants that were under 60% AMI. Hurley agreed. Hurley expanded on the requirements and parameters of the funding which include visual inspections of the housing units for which the funds are to be used for to ensure clean and decent housing standards.

Nash said that the Trust was envisioning applying to the Newburyport Community Preservation Committee (CPC) to start a program that would provide some portion of first and last month's rent and security deposit to those renting income restricted affordable housing units. Then we are talking about another general assistance program with HOME funds that would be for the general market and it could be limited to first, last month's rent and security or it could be subsidizing the monthly rent. Chair Tymon agreed. Nash asked Hurley if other cities and towns limit HOME rental assistance to first, last and security. Hurley responded that it was not limited to that and in fact you can get creative about the parameters which would need to be communicated to Hurley so that it can be built into a contract that would need to be entered into with NSHC to use the HOME funds.

Nash and Tymon expressed concerns about creating a general rental assistance program that could not be financially sustained and said the idea was that the program would be funded by Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds that could then be re-applied for when the funds get too low.

Member Susanne Cameron said what she is hearing is that with the use of HOME funds, we have to do an inspection so she is wondering how that can be accomplished (either by a non-profit or by City Inspectional Services). This is an important parameter for use of the HOME

funds so we need to be sure we are able to do the inspections. Hurley was curious if the Pettengill House had existing staff that could carry out inspections.

Nash said that the NSHC has to report how funds are used to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Nash wanted to know how the City of Newburyport would be obligated to report to Hurley so he can complete his reporting to HUD. Hurley responded that he would ask the agency running the program (perhaps Pettengill) to fill out a project setup form which results in monthly drawdowns in total project funds. Applicant information would be entered into a system by project manager staff which would be in the NSHC's files as well as HUD's. Hurley said there is not a big annual report that would need to be submitted.

Tymon asked to get back to the question of Pettengill House performing inspections. Nigro responded that her staff currently does not have any expertise in inspections but understands there would be questions about lead paint, occupancy, etc. Hurley mentioned that the Pettengill House has a relationship with Community Action based in Haverhill and that group may have the capacity to carry out inspections however that would be an administrative cost that may need to be funded some way other than with HOME funds. Cameron said that CTI is the administrator for Section 8 housing in Newburyport so perhaps they could take on a role in inspections as well.

Nash wanted to know if there were any municipalities that are doing something like what the Trust hopes to accomplish. Hurley responded that essentially no, municipalities are finding they need to have a community action partnership agency carry out this work. Hurley pointed to Gloucester where the City is using a partnership agency (Action Inc.) and various funding sources like HOME and CPA to run a rental subsidy program. Nash thanked Hurley for the information and said that she has had a lot of experience with HOME funds finds that it is a bureaucratic funding source compared to CPA funds and we know there is a small amount of HOME funds that come to the City every year that we would like to use but is concerned about capacity. Nash would like to create a regional program and partner with other communities that may have more capacity. Hurley said that may be a possibility and brought up how the Town of North Andover reached out to the Greater Lawrence Community Action Council and developed a rental subsidy program that is managed by the CAC in downtown Lawrence so as to not forego their small amount of HOME funds. Perhaps a similar situation would work for Newburyport.

Chair Tymon asked the group if they thought Community Action Inc. in Haverhill has worked with HOME funds. Hurley was not aware and did not think that was the case in recent times. Hurley offered to send the group the inspections checklist if the group was feeling that was the biggest barrier to using the HOME funds for a new program. Nash asked Hurley to clarify the process for accepting HOME funds. Hurley said the first step was to notify him of intention to set up a program for short term rental assistance. Then a contract would be entered into which would outline the program parameters. The program administrator would provide NSHC with the name and address of the applicant and the funds would become available for that

particular household. Finally, Hurley mentioned that the City could also look to the Newburyport Housing Authority to do the inspections.

Katelyn Sullivan of the Newburyport Planning Office asked Hurley what the deadline was to use the current HOME fund allocation. Hurley responded there is not a hard and firm deadline but usually June 30 is when he would want to see a decision but due to Covid, the deadlines have been relaxed but most likely he needs a decision and contract in place by September 30, 2021.

Trust members thanked Hurley for attending and were appreciative of the information he provided.

#### Planning Office Updates

Sullivan and Sierra Partlan from the Pettengill House described their marketing efforts for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program with the most recent strategy of reaching out to the Chamber of Commerce which in the end sent out a notice regarding the program in its Newsletter which may have resulted in the uptick in applications the Pettengill House received over the past week. Partlan communicated to the group that she is happy to help out in any way that she can.

Sullivan reminded the group that they will ask the CPC for reimbursement to support its existing Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) Program in the amount of \$110,000 as well as \$90,000 of funding to support a new General Rental Assistance Program for a total of \$200,000 in CPA funding. Members discussed how the funds could greatly help those looking to rent at the new development at Boston Way. Members discussed the timing of that particular development occupancy, the timing of the General Rental Assistance Program creation and the timing of allocation of CPA funds. Renters would look to occupy the development in the Spring/Summer. Director Port confirmed this anticipated timeline for occupancy.

Trust members recapped the content of the draft CPA application and Member Nash made a motion to submit the application as drafted to the CPC. Chair Tymon seconded. All were in favor.

Finally, member Nash conveyed to the group that the City Council is considering a vote on the Low Street Amory Project that would put an environmental restriction on the property which would mean that the property could never be used for affordable housing. That being said, Nash said it is a complicated matter and she is just raising it as a thought. Director Port said there is an immediate need for an existing City department (Parks) to take up that space. If the building is not going to Youth Services, then it will most likely go to the Parks Department for instance. Port did not feel that affordable housing at that site is the top priority. Tymon asked Port why that was the case. Port said that the history of the site is long and the Mayor and the Director of Youth Services thought it made sense for Youth Services given it was across the street from the schools. That was always the expectation. Port thought it would be wiser to focus efforts of creating affordable housing at the Brown School. Nash commented that she understands that but did not understand why there had to be an environmental restriction put on the Low Street property which limits what

can be done with the property. Port agreed and urged Trust members to reach out to convey the same concerns to the City Council.

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.