

Newburyport Affordable Housing Trust

Meeting Minutes

<u>Meeting Date:</u>	Thursday, December 2, 2021
<u>Meeting Location:</u>	Online
<u>Members in Attendance:</u>	Co-Chair Susanne Cameron, Co-Chair Madeline Nash, Member Karen Weiner, Member Meo Young, Member Robert Currier
<u>Staff Present:</u>	Katelyn Sullivan
<u>Members of the public:</u>	Tiffany Nigro, Pettengill House

Welcome and Introductions

Affordable Housing Trust (AHT or Trust) Chair Madeline Nash called the meeting to order at 6pm and welcomed Trust members, staff and guests. Chair Nash recognized that Mayor Holaday would not be present and reviewed the meeting agenda.

Rental Assistance Program Update

Chair Nash recognized Tiffany Nigro, Executive Director of the Pettengill House to begin the conversation regarding the development of the new rental assistance program guidelines. Nigro said that she met with Sierra Partlan from her office and Katelyn Sullivan from the Planning Office to look at creating three separate applications depending on the reason for applying for the assistance. The Pettengill House has asked that the way applicants apply to the program with three different sets of the guidelines/applications. This will help the Pettengill House with administration and online application portal configuration. The overall grant amount is \$4,500 (currently the total grant amount for Covid-related rental relief). Nigro detailed the three applications for assistance as outlined below:

- **Future rent** (including first and last month's rent and broker fee to secure a new rental unit in Newburyport up to a total of \$4,500 available to income eligible households who are at risk for housing instability due to being adversely affected by a temporary barrier such as job loss, rent increases, temporary utility shut-off, health or mental health crisis, loss of daycare voucher or reliable work transportation, etc.)
- **Current rent or arrears** (available to income eligible households in Newburyport currently residing in rental housing who are at risk for housing instability due to being adversely affected by a temporary barrier such as job loss, rent increases, temporary utility shut-off, health or mental health crisis, loss of daycare voucher or reliable work transportation, etc.)
- **Covid-19 rental relief** for income eligible households in Newburyport that have been economically impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic

Nigro said that Pettengill House is in the process of revamping their Newburyport Emergency Rental Assistance Program page online to reflect an expanded program with a hyperlink on the main page to apply online. If someone can't apply online, staff can assist in person or people can send a hard copy of the application in the mail.

Trust member Meo Young asked about the application format and thought all three applications looked very similar. Nigro and Sullivan discussed how the applications would not be duplicative and be clearly separated and the language would be clear and separate in the online applications. Members had a

discussion about the overall limit of assistance being at \$4,500 and if that total amount makes sense. Nigro said that based on her experience administering the emergency rental assistance program to date, it seems like the \$4,500 has been sufficient to ensure people are stabilized in their homes. If there is a situation where the household has more back rent, staff would be looking to RAFT to assist. Also, not everyone ends up needing the full amount from the AHT and staff at the Pettengill House assesses the full picture.

Member Karen Weiner thinks the total grant amount available makes sense and thinks the applications look good but it should be clarified that the applicant must show that there is a plan for sustained tenancy. Nigro said that right now, staff at Pettengill, for example, asks for job offer letters showing hours and rate to show they are working towards a plan to be able to pay rent once the temporary assistance has been provided. Staff wants to see that the applicants can self-sustain. While this rental assistance is about stabilization, the applicants need to show they can stabilize beyond.

Chair Madeline Nash commented that she thinks the assistance cap of \$4,500 makes sense and if the funds become exhausted, the Trust can always go back for CPA funds. Trust members thought that the other eligibility requirements and application document seemed appropriate and in line with the existing program that has been running well.

Chair Nash thought that there should be some outreach efforts put forth to raise public awareness of the expanded program. Pettengill and the City worked hard to get the information out about the Covid-19 related rental assistance that was available and similar efforts should be made again such as an article in the Daily News and to get some time on the Planning and Development Committee schedule to describe the program and answer questions.

To wrap up the discussion regarding rental assistance, Nigro reminded the Trust that she submitted the updated Newburyport Emergency Rental Assistance spreadsheet which showed to date three (3) household including 3 elder, 2 adults and 1 child have been assisted with \$7,430 in rental assistance. One application is pending at this time. Sullivan reminded the Trust that all original CPA funds have been spent and the program is now running on a second grant using \$25,000 from the City's CARES Act-Coronavirus Relief Fund.

Goals for 2022 Discussion

Chair Nash let the Trust members know that she sat down with Susanne Cameron and Sullivan from the Planning Office to discuss some goals for the 2022 year. The idea is to have a work plan for the next year. Some of the draft goals that were discussed are:

- Strive to have more visibility and regular communication with the Planning and Development Committee so the City Council is aware of what the Trust seeks to accomplish.
- Stay informed about what is happening at the Brown School and can the Trust take on an active role in next steps
- Continue to implement the Rental Assistance Program
- Look into revamping the Housing Rehabilitation Program
- Update the Housing Production Plan
- Collaborate with local developers and property owners which share the Trust's mission

Chair Cameron would like to stay on track by having a deliverable and action step to create more visibility to the community each quarter. Chair Nash agreed and thinks that working on the Housing Production plan will allow the Trust to tap into a broader community group.

Next meeting date will be 1/20/22 (hopefully in person).

The meeting adjourned at 7 p.m.