

RIDGEFIELD AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes: 9/1/2021 (via Zoom Teleconference)

PRESENT: Dave Goldenberg (chair), Debra Franceschini-Gatje, Kevin Brown, Sharon Coleman, Kent Rohrer (vice-chair), Krista Willett, Lori Mazzola, Sheryl Knapp (secretary)

ABSENT: Whit Campbell

Meeting called to order at 7:02 pm

1. **Affordable Housing Plan & Grant:** RFPs for planning assistance were sent to 5 planners and resulted in 2 proposals: Planimetrics, who has done considerable work for the town, and Tyche Planning & Policy Group. Both were highly recommended. Feedback was obtained from committee members; it was agreed that Planimetrics would be the best option because they've done so much previous work in Ridgefield, and thus had more institutional knowledge. A motion was made to select them; motion was approved unanimously.
2. **Prospect Ridge:** The committee had decided previously to conduct a preliminary building suitability phase before conducting a full feasibility study. A proposal was sought from the engineering company CCA, a town-approved vendor. The committee reviewed CCA's proposal, which came in at \$3k. Dave reviewed Scope of Basic Services provided, including reviewing local regulations vis-à-vis the site conditions, preparing a base map and conceptual layout. Dave and Kent, along with Frank Coyle of RHA, had a phone conversation with CCA's Stephen Sullivan, who indicated it would take approximately 3 weeks to complete the study. Many of the issues residents are most concerned about – traffic impact, sewer usage, etc. – will be reviewed in the second stage. Krista offered to interface with Sullivan. Dave cleared up the misconception shared that we are out of sewer capacity – the committee has been told there is sufficient capacity to absorb the proposed units. Committee members expressed concerns whether additional costs might exceed the proposed amount, and questions regarding how the final product would look. Dave and Krista will meet again with CCA to discuss capping the cost and request a copy of a conceptual layout, then will set a special meeting to revisit and vote.
3. **ADU survey:** Sharon and Dave are creating a postcard that Rudy would send out to ask those who did not complete the survey to complete it ASAP, emphasizing that the survey is anonymous and will only take 5 minutes. Goal is 40-50% response rate. Dave indicated that those returned as non-deliverable had been hand-addressed and re-mailed. Krista commented that we may be able to use some information we obtain to share with town – e.g., that an affordable unit adds to the value of a home. Committee also discussed the possibility of offering a deed restriction that expires with the transfer of a house, which would count toward 8-30g requirements without impacting the value of the home.
4. **Branchville TOD:** Dave received a call from a property owner on East Branchville Road who wants to build primarily affordable housing there. Dave shared that the committee has been investigating on-site septic issues, and that the First Selectman of Redding had indicated that it wasn't likely they would expand capacity and run a pipe. Dave, Debra, Kevin and Krista to continue to investigate on-

site sewer issues, including the possibility of tapping into a pipe that will be run by the town from the Rt. 7 substation, which is to be decommissioned, to the main sewer plant on South Street, since sewage capacity exists; the town has decided not to expand that capacity. The working group will determine whether this is feasible as well as financing options, and report back.

5. **Housing Trust Fund:** Dave reviewed a presentation he created with Debra, including how HTFs are structured and used in other Fairfield County towns. Once completed, it would be sent to P&Z and Rudy for feedback. The plan proposes that a \$10/\$1,000 of construction costs (excluding affordable housing), or \$20/\$1,000 market rate for multifamily properties, rate be used. The committee discussed how to position these funding sources on the presentation, agreeing to highlight the grants/private donations, as well as who would administer it; it was agreed that the Trustees would include a member of the public with financial or developer experience in addition to members of the RAHC, ECDC, P&Z, WPCA, Accessibility Commission, and Commission on Aging. The Committee would also request funding to seed the HTF from the town's ARPA grant. It was suggested that a sliding scale will be offered, to reduce the impact on those who might not be able to afford it. Kent proposed that a working group be formed to finalize the presentation, including adding a list of potential uses for the fund money, then meet with Rudy and Karen Martin and bring feedback back to the committee; Krista seconded. The group would consist of Dave, Kent, Debra, and Lori. Motion passed unanimously.
6. **Adults with Disabilities/Habitat:** Dave reviewed details of the prior meeting with Jane Davis of Ability Beyond regarding creating a second Sunrise Cottage on Halpin Lane. He has not yet had the opportunity to discuss with Rudy. Kent shared that it's not outside the realm that Habitat could be involved, but he would need to a specific proposal to present. Habitat has pursued several properties in Ridgefield, but none have panned out.
7. **Communications and social media:** The Ridgefield Talks Housing pilot program was viewed as a success despite the small turnout. Dave has been meeting every 2 weeks with a taskforce to discuss future events. There will be four regional programs with experts from the state and around the country to discuss particular areas of interest with opportunity for questions and feedback, and then each town will do four local programs. The focus will be on planning. The first state session topic will be: Are towns ready to take on affordable housing?
8. **New Business:**
 - a. **Interaction with RHA.** Rudy reached out to the town attorney who indicated that there is no provision in town charter for ex officio members, apart from the selectman, and there are provisions in state law that prohibit members of a housing authority from being on any other committee in town. Dave reported that he told Vinny that his ex-officio status, which had been granted based on the committee's previous understanding, is withdrawn, and that he's welcome to attend as a member of a public. Debra shared negative feedback she received from residents regarding interactions with the RHA that lends concerns about them being able to manage a larger-scale project. The committee discussed that there is no commitment to RHA, and ultimately the BOS will decide who will develop and manage additional projects.

9. **Minutes:** The August minutes were accepted as amended for a typo.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:32 pm.

Prepared by Sheryl Knapp, Secretary