

RIDGEFIELD AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMITTEE

Special Meeting Minutes

June 6, 2022 – 7:00 PM

Town Hall – 400 Main Street, Ridgefield
Large Conference Room, Lower Level

PRESENT: Dave Goldenberg (Chair), Kent Rohrer (Vice Chair), Kevin Brown, Sharon Coleman, Debra Franceschini-Gatje, Sheryl Knapp, Lori Mazzola, and Krista Willett

ABSENT: Whit Campbell

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM.

1. **Current Business:**

- a) **Discussion of and vote on Bailey Ave. letter.** Dave read the letter he drafted to Rob Hendrix, copying attorney Bob Jewell, requesting that the developer at 34 Bailey Avenue set aside 3 units as fungible affordable units. Members of the Committee felt that it was well written, and Kent moved that we approve the letter as written; Debra seconded. Approved unanimously.
- b) **Affordable housing plan:** Dave referenced written feedback on the Plan received from a resident (Tim Vilinskis), as well as from a lawyer representing residents who live near Ballard Green, plus from PZC, and two members of the BOS (Maureen Kozlark and Sean Connelly). Dave and Kent also spoke to Rudy, who provided some comments; they shared that his feedback was similar to what was communicated in the PZC memo as well as the BOS emails. Dave asked for general feedback from the Committee. Kent shared that an overarching issue is the level of specificity. Debra added that transportation is something that should be addressed, and that we reference a map showing how much open space is available. Kent proposed that the WestCOG toolkit should be included in our plan for additional information as an appendix to our plan, and we should also confirm that our data is consistent with their published data. Other Committee members agreed. Lori stated that it is important that the plan does not contradict what is in our plan. The Committee discussed what we would do if the two sources of data are contradictory; it was agreed that we would default to WestCOG data in the appendix of our plan. Debra stated we should look at the WestCOG plan holistically, and everyone agreed, although Dave noted the Committee has been criticized in the past for focusing on the region as opposed to Ridgefield specifically. Debra proposed that the plan be more user-friendly, but other Committee members had concerns about space and timing issues. Kevin proposed that this information be contained in a separate document, as referenced in the plan – an online source of information for individuals that are interested in pursuing affordable housing. Several committee members agreed. The Committee then agreed to review written feedback received individually.

Rob Hendrick's memo summarizing PZC's suggestions was reviewed first. The Committee first discussed the general suggestion, echoed by others at well, that the Plan

recommendations be consolidated, with reduced specificity, prioritizing those that that do not add to the housing stock. Committee members discussed the specific language to use – for instance, that the Committee is looking to expand housing stock within the RHA inventory rather than referencing Ballard Green. It was agreed that specific recommendations regarding Halpin Lane will remain since property has already been allocated by the town for use and is not controversial, plus it supports the Committee’s goal of finding housing for adults with disabilities. The Greenwich plan was mentioned as a potential source of good language to utilize in our Plan. PNZ’s more detailed comments were then reviewed individually, and accepted with the following exceptions:

- Re: Section 11, the Committee remove specificity with the exception of Halpin Lane.
- Re: the Housing Trust Fund (11.2.2), the Committee does not agree that the language should be changed from “pursue” to “investigate” since we have already begun investigating moving in that direction.
- Re: consolidating Middle Housing (11.3.2) with Multifamily Housing (8.0), the goal of middle housing is to create a transitional zone, making it sufficiently significant to warrant separate mention; it was agreed that it would be consolidated with 8.0 but called out as a transitional zone.
- Re: TOD Branchville (11.4), the Committee feels it should be kept as a separate recommendation, but will change the wording as proposed.
- Re: CHFA mortgages (11.5.1), Lori proposed and the Committee agreed that we add a statement underscoring that new housing would be added without adding building stock.
- Re: Surplus Land Task Force (11.5.4), the Plan will mention that representatives from an open space committee would have input into any decisions regarding open space, and that such a task force will be formed.

The Committee then reviewed feedback from BOS member Sean Connelly, agreeing to adopt all suggestions except the following:

- Re: referencing changing age demographics as a result of the pandemic (4.2), the Committee agreed not to reference this information as no data is available.
- Re: adding Ridgefield’s diversity numbers (4.3), the Committee again agreed not to add this information.
- Re: removing references to numbers that are not specific to Ridgefield, some Committee members stated that we should remove these numbers, in part because of the misinterpretation of these numbers by members of the public, while others felt that they were important to keep but should be provided with some context. Sheryl noted that New Canaan’s plan, which is an WestCOG Annexed plan, cites these figures pertaining to its town. The Committee agreed that they would be referenced more broadly versus citing specific figures.
- Re: focusing on economic diversity over racial diversity (9.0), some members of the Committee supported replacing “racial and economic diversity” with “socioeconomic diversity” but others did not agree. Sheryl indicated and the Committee agreed that

more racial diversity might be the result, but is not the intent of adding affordable housing, and proposed making the above change but adding a statement to the effect of people from all racial and socioeconomic groups feeling welcome in Ridgefield.

Regarding Sean's suggestion that the feedback provided in public sessions be acknowledged, the Committee agreed that the "umbrella" issues that residents have raised through a variety of sources, including these public sessions and survey feedback, would be cited in a feedback section of the report, including that regarding maintaining open space. Debra proposed that the Plan state that the Committee supports 30% open space. Kent suggested that the Plan acknowledge it as a public issue that is a goal, while noting that it is a POCD issue. Kevin proposed that we write that the town should pursue our affordable housing goals in a matter that is consistent with the town's open space goal; the Committee agreed.

Debra requested that the reference to a "complete community" be removed but it was not agreed to do so.

BOS member Maureen Kozlark's feedback was then reviewed and accepted, except the following:

- Re: not mentioning survey results since it represents a small segment of the population, Committee members agreed that it is relevant in the same way that public comment and other forms of feedback are.
- Re: not including waitlist numbers for RHA housing, since these numbers are constantly changing and there are duplicates across lists, Committee members shared different views on the issue, with some feeling it was important to include the precise numbers with these caveats specified. It was eventually agreed that the Plan would indicate that there are wait lists that substantially and consistently exceed the supply, and the numbers would be put in the Appendix.

The Committee then discussed feedback presented by members of the public at the hearing, as documented within the BOS' minutes. Kent summarized the overriding community concerns as pertaining to density, traffic, infrastructure, and aesthetics, adding that they will have to be addressed as the Plan moves forward. It was also agreed that the Plan will reference our naturally occurring affordable housing, only about 3% of which qualifies for affordable housing – and how we can provide incentives so that it counts toward our numbers. Committee members also mentioned the possibility of the Committee helping to create short-term affordable housing in the future, such as for artists or people in transition..

2. Public comment was provided by numerous members of the public. John Tartaglia stated that he feels that terms used like "compassion" and "diversity" ascribe an agenda to the Plan and are not necessary. Jan Triani supported efforts to make the Plan easier to understand by laypeople, as many need to understand issues like local housing. Kirk Carr stated that much of the polemics and ideology he felt was previously contained within the Plan has been taken out and it is now a better plan, adding that the RHA waiting lists numbers are exaggerated and misleading. He also asked about the timeframe for completion. Christine Moore thanked the Committee for its robust discussion and asked whether Prospect Ridge will be on hold (it will not, as the study was interrupted just to complete the plan, and the feasibility study would be picked up again unless the Committee decides otherwise). She also feels that race should not be referenced in the plan.

Bob Hebert asked about the \$11k grant that the Committee applied for and received, which paid for consulting with consultant Glenn Chalder early on – Dave shared it was for data, analysis, meetings with the Committee, and a presentation at a town informational session; approximately \$9,000 has been used. Bob asked for deliverables for this fee, and Dave and others explained that the funds also went toward more than deliverables, but indicated that he would provide this requested information to Bob.

3. **Minutes:** The Committee reviewed the 5/25 minutes, and Debra requested that the first sentence be changed to indicate that Debra, and not Dave, proposed that a letter be sent to PZC regarding the 34 Bailey Avenue Project. Kent moved to accept the amended minutes as written; Sharon seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously as amended.
4. **Next meeting:** Dave and Sharon to work on revisions to the Plan, and Dave will send out a Doodle poll to schedule another work meeting if the revisions are completed prior to 6/22, the date of the Committee's next regularly scheduled meeting; otherwise, the next meeting will be on 6/22.
5. **Adjourn:** Sheryl moved to adjourn; Debra seconded, and the Committee voted unanimously to adjourn. Meeting adjourned at 9:30.
6. adjourned at 10:09 PM. # % / ; + # % ' % # % - # The meeting was

Prepared by Sheryl Knapp, Secretary