

RIDGEFIELD AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMITTEE

JOINT MEETING OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMITTEE AND PLANNING AND ZONING COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

December 1, 2021 – 7:00 PM

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

PRESENT: **RAHC:** Dave Goldenberg (Chair), Kent Rohrer (Vice Chair), Sheryl Knapp, Kevin Brown, Whit Campbell, Sharon Coleman (by phone), Debra Franceschini, Lori Mazzola, Krista Willett

**P&Z:** Robert Hendrick (Chair), John Katz, Joe Sorena, Susan Constantino, Elizabeth DiSalvo

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

1. **Current Business:**

- a) **ADU survey:** Mail surveys were sent to the names on record for the 140 ADU permits that have been issued since 2008. The returned surveys were distributed to committee members for data input outside of the meeting.
- b) **Adults with Disabilities/Habitat:** Dave and Kent met with John Loehr, the Past President of Habitat and current President of Sunrise Cottage, to discuss a potential partnership between Habitat, Ability Beyond, and the town utilizing the parcel of land at 3 Halpin Lane available and designated for the purpose of creating a home for adults with disabilities. John shared that a challenge is operational costs, so there may be some apartments offered at market rate to help offset these costs. The committee discussed additional details to be worked out such as the type of housing unit established (e.g., whether it would be an Intermediate Care Facility like Sunrise Cottage), which Sheryl indicated could determine the number of residents who could receive state funding. A follow-up discussion will be scheduled with Rudy, Dave, Sheryl, and John Loehr.
- c) **Housing Trust Fund:** Committee is on agenda to present the plan to the Board of Selectmen on 12/8.
- d) **Affordable housing plan and grant:** The plan must be delivered by June 1. The committee was going to do one in 2018 but under the new law the state indicated that they could provide some funding and guidance with the plan, which consisted of a \$11,000 grant. The committee agreed it was important to get the word out that people should return the surveys; they will be done digitally but paper surveys will also be available. Kevin will spearhead zoning review. Plan will need to be approved by the Board of Selectmen and likely P & Z. Robert Hendrick, chair of the Planning & Zoning Commission, indicated his

commission's willingness to partner with the Affordable Housing Committee to ensure the best possible outcome. This was welcomed by the Committee.

- e) **Prospect Ridge Expansion (PRE):** In response to a question from a member of the public, Dave explained that the original 150-unit number used in some early documents was calculated by multiplying the total acreage (approx. 15 ac.) by the moderate multi-family density of 10 units/acre. This number is a hypothetical maximum, based on preliminary site-suitability data; the maximum is likely to be ~75 units. He pointed out that rumors of a "five story tower" were completely unfounded.

The Planning & Zoning members in attendance were asked for feedback regarding ideas for creating affordable housing using existing housing inventory. P & Z Chair Robert Hendrick stated that the Commission had historically focused largely on more technical and clear-cut zoning issues, as opposed to more strategic planning functions, and much of this latter function has fallen on RAHC. He believes that we can find some existing housing that could qualify as affordable to get closer to the approximately 660 units needed to achieve 8-30g compliance. However, it is possible to accumulate the remaining HUE points required to obtain a second moratorium. While incentivizing through deed restrictions and other strategies, such as adaptive reuse, will create some units, new construction will likely be required to meet our goals. He also emphasized the coordination required to derive and implement such incentives, involving several town organizations such as P&Z, Board of Finance, and the Board of Selectmen. All agreed that we cannot be reactive to 8-30g applications, noting that "The worst thing we can do is nothing." Other P&Z Commissioners mentioned specific incentives that could be offered such as tax rebates, emphasizing the scope of the task in converting our existing stock of housing, due especially to resistance on the part of owners to agree to a 40-year deed restriction.

RAHC members agreed that we likely need to look at a combination of existing units and new construction to get to the next moratorium. Dave indicated that we need 180 housing equivalency unit points to get to the next moratorium, and that deed restrictions are important in that naturally occurring affordable housing would not count as affordable if a person living there does not meet income restrictions; however, the state has indicated it would consider allowing deed restrictions to expire when the property is transferred.

Lori moved that any action regarding the PRE be tabled until the Affordable Housing plan is submitted to the state in June; Debra seconded. There was extensive discussion among committee members regarding the motion, including ensuring that the motion would not preclude the committee from investigating other town-sponsored developments. Dave reiterated United Way information released suggesting that 22% of the household have need for affordable housing. Alternative proposals were suggested such as reducing the number of months and continuing the feasibility study but not submitting it to the Board of Selectmen prior to submitting the AHP. The motion remained as moved. 5 voted in favor; Dave, Kevin, Sheryl, and Sharon dissented. Motion passes.

- f) **Branchville TOD:** Committee to investigate site-based sewage alternatives.

2. **New Business:**

- a) Debra requested that the committee size be increased, allowing the committee to have members possessing specific knowledge of issues discussed (e.g., sewers). Based on research conducted by Dave, this would require a resolution from the Board of Selectmen. Certain individuals would also not be permitted to join the RAHC based on other committee affiliations.
- b) Debra shared concerns regarding a lack of transparency among committee members, citing as an example that the RHA was a presumed partner in the Prospect Ridge project yet they are currently being presented as prospective. Kent explained that the charter of the RHA is operational, in that they own and manage the day-to-day operations of town-owned housing, versus the RAHC which is more strategic in nature.

3. **Public Comment/Questions:** In the remaining time, the committee took questions and comments from the public. Many expressed opposition to the PRE.

4. **Minutes:** Debra moved that the minutes be accepted as written; Kent seconded, and the minutes were accepted unanimously.

Upcoming meetings were scheduled for 12/6 and 12/13.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:57.

Prepared by Sheryl Knapp, Secretary