

Minutes of the Housing Committee for
April 12, 2023
Woodbridge Town Hall

In Attendance: Mary Dean, Lewis Schaffer, Jim Graham, Elaine Feldman, Kathy Hunter Dave Vogel; Ben Fink on the phone.

Debrief of Community Conversations:

Elaine reported on the conversation held at her house. Lew also said that it was very informative and that very good questions were asked. These were their Old Quarry Rd. and Peck Hill neighbors, so they were less aware of the housing matters. Invited about 25 people and there was good attendance. Her impression was that most people in Woodbridge don't know much about the issue of affordable housing. People were engaged, but need information provided in a usable format (a one-page information sheet) so they could continue the discussions. This conversation didn't use prompts as with the conversations in the Library, or introductions. Ben approved, saying it is important to read the room, so if you know the people in the room and they are not combative, other approaches can work.

Kathy is meeting with the Rotary Club tomorrow morning at the invite of Buddy DeGennaro. He advised to expect a small group. Elaine will join her.

We need to keep up the momentum generated from these conversations. Should get the informational material to facilitate conversations quickly. Kathy and Mary to work on it.

Lew commented that having snacks was a good ice breaker! The more social ties that you have, the less structure you need.

Library conversations: Kathy sent thank-you via emails to some of the participants, and had a subsequent correspondence with Cathy Wick about the availability of "Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing" (NOAH) in Woodbridge. Cathy, who was a participant at a conversation, shared a list of about 300 hundred local properties that she determined were NOAH.

In further investigating the claim, Kathy asked Buddy DeGennaro to run a list of sales of properties \$250K or less for the past 3 years to get a sense of how many properties sold at this price point. Buddy ran the report and there were 20 properties. There were a couple of issues with this concept. First, some of the houses were purchased by investors that subsequently rehabbed the properties and were sold for a substantially higher amount. Second, \$250K is not the price point for an affordable house. Given the rise in interest rates, an affordable homeownership opportunity is more in the \$180K range. There were only 6 houses that sold for under \$200K over the past 3 years with no knowledge as to what the condition of the house was. Kathy was going to follow up with Cathy Wick to address these concerns.

Ben explained that it's easy to get down rabbit holes (re NOAH) with this stuff. We should acknowledge people's questions and concerns but keep eye on the problem (nobody can find housing). (i.e., "If there is a lot of housing available, how come no one we know can find what they need?")

Discussion turned to having a bigger follow-up meeting. Lew has spoken to the head of CONNECT, who suggests they (CONNECT) could reach out to all the religious leaders. Kathy has reached out to a former Beecher teacher whose letter in the WTN suggested she would have interest, and she has offered to gather Beecher staff for a conversation.

Summary of 1:1 Relational Meeting Training at the SCRCOG March meeting:

Mary attended and reported. There were similarities in approach to the training we got for the group conversations (e.g. opening with general questions to identify mutual interests; not trying to sell anything) and some differences, including the desirability of meeting in a neutral location. (Ben clarified that when you have many people participating, there is no problem with meeting in a home, which might be intimidating 1:1). The exercise is meant to be diagnostic, with emphasis on the follow-up questions and on listening—try to be speaking only 30% of the time. Don't recruit at the first meeting.

Kathy reviewed the March 1st minutes which included some good recommendations from Sean Ghio for actions a town can do to increase affordable housing. Minutes of the March meeting were approved.

Kathy raised the issue of increasing coordination with other committees and Commissions, as appropriate. We already have connection with CUPOP through Nicole and P&Z through Kathy. Kathy reached out to the Task Force 2030 Committee as they are also making recommendations for zoning in the business district so it's important to coordinate our efforts. Kathy is also reaching out to the Economic Development Committee as housing is an engine of economic development.

We must report to the BOS in June, and Kathy proposes that we advocate that the Affordable Housing Plan be incorporated into the Town's POCD. Amy Marella continues to raise the matter of a lack of opportunity for public comment before the Plan was accepted by the BOS, and it was decided that we would invite public comment at our next meeting. (Note that Amy and others with that concern have been invited to send any comments and corrections directly to the committee, although none have been received).

Meeting ended at 9:05 pm.