

Minutes of Housing Committee May 3, 2023

In attendance: Kathy Hunter, Elaine Feldman, Mary Dean, Donavon Lofters. Also joined by resident, Miles Katz

Kathy acknowledged Miles Katz, a high school student with an interest in affordable housing and planning. Would love to have more young people involved, although people too young to vote aren't eligible to be members. .

Agenda: update on CUPOP's property list (Nicole). Part of CUPOP's charge is to maintain a list of all publicly-owned properties in Woodbridge and it is being brought up to date. (Last reviewed in 2014) Four categories. Numerous properties were miscategorized between them. Many in Category 1 (Grant in Aid properties, i.e. not purchased) did not belong there but were under Category 3, the catch-all category that doesn't have an assigned agency, committee or commission.

Have been researching the deeds and property cards for each property. (Some not now available on the town's website.) To be digitized and posted on their web page with appropriate links and any restrictions noted.

For housing purposes, some Category 3 are vacant, some with restrictions re development. Once CUPOP is finished with the list, Phase II of the project will be to consider whether the usages for each property need to be changed, etc. Hearings about this should be expected before recommendations to the BOS would be made. The final report would summarize all information gathered for an individual parcel including public comments.

Reference to a document found on their website now previously created last survey of properties in about 1982 comprehensive report on all the properties and their histories.

Category 4 is Right of First Refusal; discovered viz 7 Forest Road that there is a state statute requiring all state-owned property applies, so they intend to research and add all those properties in their survey, as well.

Kathy asks when the project will be completed. Nicole hopes that the list itself will be ready by CUPOP's next meeting. Right categories. Document attachment may take a little longer. Credits Javier and Alison for their contributions.

Kathy wonders about operationalizing use of the list esp as it will be publicly reviewed as individual properties. Nicole lists the four categories:

Category 1: Land and Buildings dedicated to open space or other use under the terms of grant in aid conditions (that's how they were purchased)

Category 2: Land and Buildings the uses of which are under the direction of existing commissions other agencies of the town

Category 3: Land and Buildings the uses of which are not under the direction of existing commissions or other agencies of the town

Category 4: Land and Buildings to which the town has the option to purchase and/or right of first refusal

Nicole gives more information about how individual properties will be examined in larger context. Kathy asks if we can make a request for examination of a particular property.

Nicole advises we can make a proposal for a specific site for e.g. development for affordable housing. Or notify CUPOP and they can do the same. P & Z would not be involved until later in the process. Anything that involves a change in use goes to CUPOP.

Discussion of Forest 7; Donavon questions whether the location is suitable for development; it doesn't appear to be a road. Nicole explains that it is a paper road for a subdivision of small individual "Theatre Lots" that were prizes given to attendees in the mid-1920s, and they assume that the town and state ended up with them in lieu of taxes. A few are still privately held. Also known as "Woodbridge Heights"—this information was put into their recommendation to the town that 7 Forest should be purchased.

Kathy: one of the things to plan for including BOS in June and ultimately some type of community charette about how we are going to use properties in town; visualizing images of suggested sites; maybe bring in a planner or architect to offer a visionary exercise for a site.

Nicole: the goal is to determine whether these properties are serving the town or Woodbridge as is and alternative possible uses, that would be a time to offer the suggestion for housing; Conservation to be expected to make recommendations esp perhaps for their plan for expansion of their greenways.

Kathy: If there is a piece of property that it's determined that this is the best use for it and the town will donate it and put out an RFP for development of 10-12 units with an overlay zone...does that property have to go to a town vote? Nicole thinks it does. A meeting, not a referendum? This came up at an earlier meeting but no one remembers the answer. A couple of places that might be examples were noted, including Brookwood Drive as well as Forest Rd. But more research is needed; for example, power lines may be a problem. Group discussed what might be put on Forest Rd (where we currently own about 5 acres).

Conservation has also voted to recommend purchase with a conservation easement on it. Question about whether it's in a watershed area, but that also needs to be considered as a factor in proposed density. Kathy: a community septic system might be feasible depending upon soils, etc.

Donavon: read the email about there being 300 affordable units in town now. Kathy reported on her analysis: these are properties appraised at \$250K or less. Donavon noted a recent listing of a 2 bedroom of 1600 square feet, for \$400K. Kathy gave another example: a house on No. Racebrook appraised for like 379\$K that just sold for close to \$700K.

Kathy thinks that those who see this list as an indication of what would be classified as affordable may have other incorrect assumptions, including that if there's going to be a federal program they are going to look at the verifiable Town appraised list. But in fact what they would look at is units that people can afford and that are available (they have to be affirmatively marketed and available to qualifying people). And the fact is that there haven't been any houses that have sold for \$250K for a long time; Kathy asked for a list of houses at or below that figure (and even \$250K is now too high to qualify) and in three years there were 20 houses, of which a couple were sold to investors or resold them for much more. Some may indeed qualify; if somewhat affordable, one can get perhaps a CDBG loan to rehab it and because of the federal subsidy in there you can make it restricted. But in general, the assumptions are wrong,

particularly using \$250K as the affordable price. Did a spreadsheet and it's not realistic based on the current interest rate. When we started this 2-2 ½ years ago and the interest rates were low maybe you could have gotten a house affordable for \$220 or \$230K, but interest rates at 5% kill the affordability.

Mary gave a recent example that was encouraging: small lot (early subdivision) on Fairview, with like 780 square feet and the kitchen torn out and so forth, and it just sold for \$228K. Good thing was that it was apparently not sold to be turned over. She also noted her impression that a lot of the houses with low evaluations may have been in their respective families for a very long time and haven't been upgraded, so like the Fairview house they would not qualify for a CFHA loan because they would meet the housing standards.

Kathy has responded to Cathy Wick's letter to keep the communication going and step by step explain why we can't use that list (assessed valuation) to meet our affordability goals in town. Ben Fink advises that we don't try to debate and get caught up in a discussion that may not change minds, just give people the facts and reports that show the answers e.g. that if you build one or two bedroom units you're not going to flood the schools and we just have to keep the conversation going for those people who don't have much knowledge yet about affordable housing but who, once they heard it, were inspired and receptive to the information and asked good questions.

7 Forest Rd. Everyone saw the letter that Kathy wrote and approved it.

Distributed materials: information put together at the request of people in the community conversations. Thought about updating the Guilford pamphlet but felt that it might be overwhelming. Reviewed the letter "Let's Talk Housing" that would go out to the people we met with, and it refers to materials. What should those be. Discussed just using the preface to the Affordable Housing Plan, which introduces us, what the planning process was and what we came up with in terms of strategies. Also, SCROG produced a 2021 demographic info of housing snapshot of town of Woodbridge (cost-burdened percentage in particular). Also ALICE population, struggling households in Woodbridge number 616 in Woodbridge. Need to understand that there are people living in our town need affordable housing. Nicole comments that she's noted that people are shocked to learn that. Elaine said that at the discussion at her house people were amazed. Lack of awareness can be addressed by our community conversations. Donavon speaks to the fact that people still feel there will be too many new children. Kathy notes that if you go back to look at the number of kids at the school in the past, mid-2000s, they were much higher than they are now. Kathy asks, isn't it a good thing for the town to grow and develop? Inspire families to move in and kids to stay. Growth is good. Nicole grew up in West Hartford, and there everyone has come back to raise their kids.

Donavon notes that even retirees living in their houses can run out of money and then things change. Kathy reports on a conversation with the Rotary Club and one member who commented on a problem she herself has: her house needs renovations she can't afford, but she's stuck there. And she said that she'd support housing like Lucy Street on the Wdbg Country Club.

One more information sheet offered for consideration: recreated a sheet from Hamden with typical things one hears and then the truth. Illustrated with examples from Madison that she thought would fit right in to Woodbridge. Group agreed they looked encouraging.

Elaine said that her group wanted everything concise, on one sheet of paper, which is hard if not impossible to do. Nicole proposes that this package is what we should be providing, and there was no disagreement. Some discussion about layout changes.

Nicole moves that we this information as our informational packet to provide during our community conversations and also for anyone who is interested in information on affordable housing. Kathy adds that this is also for those who want to continue or promote our community conversations, and as a result of discussion about that Nicole reworded her motion to:

We will adopt the information within this packet as the information packet provided to promote Community conversation and to provide to anyone who requests information on affordable housing. Elaine seconds.

Miles asks if the informational packet could be posted on the town website for availability.

Elaine asks if we have thought about a community conversation at the high school. Miles says its hard to do during the school day; perhaps a better sort of gateway could be at a club meeting or something like that that is already focused; suggests JSA (Junior State of America). He could talk to the president of that club but this is also the end of the year with exams. Perhaps we can start thinking about it for the fall. Miles says that at their last convention a few weeks ago they were talking about ways to get the school more involved in community issues, which fits right. May prove a path to reach into the student body.

Minutes: Nicole and Donavon had not been at that meeting but there was still a quorum to vote on them; Kathy provides a precis. Asked whether Lou had talked to CONNECT again but neither she nor Elaine knew.

Kathy was planning to have Susan Jacobs here to talk about her 2030 Committee, which is also recommending zoning changes in the business area. She couldn't come tonight but can come for the June meeting. There is a problem with different groups/commissions operating in silos. Mary asks if we should meet with the other committees. Noted that people from those committees did attend the community conversations, but as individuals not representatives, and Kathy noted that the chair of the Conservation Commission had not even been aware of them. Could be a follow-up to attending the conference on conservation and housing in Hartford.

Nicole emphasizes that the reality is that there are vacant properties in Woodbridge and their [future] use is going to be coming up for discussion (Conservation, CUPOP, Recreation) and it doesn't hurt to talk about your visions. Suggests that it would be beneficial to ensure it's understood that others do not intend to develop all properties. Examples suggested. It's all about communicating and compromising, coming to an agreement.

Considerable discussion followed about the desirability of different commissions and groups communicating. Group felt that doing this proactively was preferable to doing it reactively, as it would help reduce the possibility of misunderstanding about general perspectives and intentions.

Discussion followed about how to report to the Board of Selectmen, whether on paper or whether Kathy or the whole committee should be there to give the update. Kathy concerned about the possibility that the report might elicit public comment by those who feel they've never had a chance to comment on the plan itself, which would be undesirable. Nicole notes that the report has been submitted so their

comments are moot. However, Kathy wants to be able to say that the opportunity has been given, and suggests that we schedule a special meeting for the purpose of hearing their comment. Would post the agenda and give notice to those whom we know have concerns. Need to set rules in advance and see how many people appear. If we want to respond, take note of the comments and post responses on the website after a working session to develop them. Then people will know we heard them and responded. Group discussed potential dates for "Comments on the Affordable Housing Plan" in May, the final one to be chosen when the room is available.