

Minutes of Housing Committee  
7pm Wednesday June 7, 2023  
First Selectman's Conference Room

In attendance: Kathy Hunter, Lewis Shaffer, Mary Dean. Special guest: Susan Jacobs, Co-Chair of 2030 Taskforce.

Susan explained the overall all purpose of the Taskforce in using the business district as a means to expand the tax base and creating a vision of what could happen in ten years. The taskforce held community events at the Brewery in Woodbridge that were well attended. The first meeting was attended by many business owners and the subsequent meetings had more resident participation. Overall, Susan feels that attitudes have changed in terms of implementing new strategies.

Reports were made to the February and April BOS meetings. There are 2 approaches they are taking: 1) Connectivity; 2) Placemaking. They will begin with the connectivity first as there is substantial funding available for and this area is not privately owned. Susan reviewed some examples and handouts of how key intersections could be reconfigured to create a more friendly, walkable environments.

Placemaking strategies included densifying the Amity Rd., Selden Street area. This would include incremental mixed-use development for short term action with long term impact. Another strategy is to promote a nature-forward aspect in the development with outdoor recreation, activities, and attractions. The Taskforce identified modifying zoning to allow residential mixed use as a short-term action.

We discussed how to proceed with zoning recommendations. Initially, the Housing Committee's recommendation was to include these zones under Opportunity Housing that would require affordable housing requirements. The issue would be to gather and measure interest from business owners because these buildings are privately owned and the town does not have control over them. Susan did indicate that some of the business owners that participated in their conversations were interested. Also discussed using design guidelines to inform the character of the development including the sidewalks and utilizing overlay districts.

There were discussions on next steps. Susan will be meeting with the Taskforce; she would also like to meet with Planning & Zoning to facilitate the discussion on zoning modifications.

There was one resident providing public comment who expressed concern on how affordable housing could change the look of Woodbridge. He and his family moved to Woodbridge because they loved the natural beauty. The Committee explained that the housing strategy that was being proposed would not change the look but was intended to preserve its natural beauty. The Committee provided some references to the Housing Plan and to other documents

posted on the website that showed examples of affordable housing indistinguishable from market rate housing.

We discussed the SCRCOG meeting on Housing and Open Space. Mary commented that the meeting didn't really hit on the main topic; for example, there was a lot of discussion on available resources that the CT Department of Housing is offering to promote capacity building to increase affordable housing in towns. There will be significant state housing development funding targeting middle income as well as market rate housing. There will also be planning help for towns through bulk purchases of planning consultancy. Kathy will reach out to Mike Santoro to see what options could be available for Woodbridge. The meeting also discussed conversion of nonconforming structures for multifamily conversion, infill, and the example of how the Salem Land Trust worked with a local Community Land Trust to negotiate a ground lease of 15 acres for affordable housing. Cathy Wick, who attended this meeting, questioned the push for new construction over the strategy of using infill sites. Ultimately, Mike Santoro emphasized that what was most important was an acknowledgement that the municipality accepts the need for housing, understanding that ways to fulfill that could be different.

Kathy discussed the meeting sponsored by TEAMS Inc., which included John Guskowski, a planner at TYCHE planning & policy group who helps towns do planning. He did provide some good action steps, many of which we are already doing. He discussed developing educational materials, hosting public information forums with builders and realtors, developing a 10-year tax abatement, and retrofitting un/underutilized buildings. Other incentives included waiving fees for affordable housing developments. He also suggested that changes be in a form of zoning text amendments that are in harmony with the POCD. When it comes time to approve the zoning amendments, supporters need to orchestrate people to tell multiple stories and anticipate and pre-empt any objections. Notices should appear in community newsletters, websites, social media.

Jocelyn Ayers, Director of the Litchfield Center of Housing Opportunities, also presented at this meeting and she had much experience with affordable housing planning. She explained that the power behind the Salisbury Housing Plan was in specifically naming sites which were town-owned property. Salisbury provides an Affordable Housing Fund of \$25K which is good for doing predevelopment testing to see if land is feasible for higher density.

Kathy had previously sent a resume for a new member of the committee, one who has a long and extensive history in affordable housing. Warren Marshall operated a company that provided housing rehabilitation services for municipalities and other agencies promoting affordable housing. The committee approved Warren being part of the committee. Kathy will forward his resume to Gerry Shaw to hopefully include on the next BOS agenda.

Lew reported that he reached out to Matt McDermott from CONECT and he was interested in planning a community conversation among the faith based organizations in Woodbridge. Kathy advised that she talked to Ben and that he has gotten booked up for the end of June but that he

had available at 7:30 on 6/26 and on Wednesday, July 5 anytime before 4 (needs to be in Guilford from 4-7).

Kathy also advised that she had corresponded with the town as she realized that the Committee was obligated to submit an annual report and since they were only reconstituted in September, that report wasn't technically due to then. Kathy wanted to make sure there were substantive actions to report by that time.

Kathy also advised that in the spirit of the Housing Committee's effort to educate residents on affordable housing, she recommended to P&Z that the state's requirement to train land use officials on affordable housing and fair housing policy should be extended to other committees and commissions and the public. This training could be extended to DEI, CUPOP, BOS, Conservation and Woodbridge residents. Kathy was in contact with Attorney Mark Branse who provided an excellent comprehensive overview of these topics for the UCONN CLEAR Academy. He advised he would be available for an in-person training. The goal is to schedule this in September.

Meeting ended at 9pm.