

Christine Joyce

From: The Schumachers [w.g.schumacher@verizon.net]
Sent: Monday, January 02, 2006 10:34 PM
To: Christine Joyce
Cc: Megan Foley; jamese@jhu.edu
Subject: Re: Appointment with the Selectmen

Christine,

We appreciate the time slot on the Selectmen's agenda and will be happy to attend on the 23rd. Presenting with me will be Megan Foley of Habitat for Humanity- North Central Massachusetts.

We will be in touch with Peter prior to the meeting to discuss the content and presentation format.

Thank you,
-Bill

----- Original Message -----

From: Christine Joyce
To: w.g.schumacher@verizon.net
Sent: Thursday, December 29, 2005 2:07 PM
Subject: Appointment with the Selectmen

Chairman Ashton has asked me to schedule you to meet with the Selectmen for 15 minutes on the 23rd of January at 8:25 P.m. in the Faulkner Room (hearing room at town hall, second floor). Could you please let me know if you are available for this meeting so that I can reserve your 8:25 slot.

Thank you.

Christine Joyce
Town Manager's Office

**Habitat for Humanity
Presentation to Selectmen, January 23, 2006**

Requested Action

We, the Acton Project Committee of Habitat for Humanity, request that the Selectmen use the next 4-5 weeks to confirm the ability and support to place an article on the next Town Meeting warrant to convey 74 River Street – or another appropriate town-owned property – to a non-profit developer for the construction of a single or two-family affordable home with deed restrictions such that it will count toward Acton's affordable housing stock.

This request is based on the following understanding and rationale:

1. Developing diverse housing that includes affordable home ownership options for low and moderate income families is in the best interest of the town as stated affirmatively in the 1998 Master Plan Update and the 2004 To Live in Acton documents.
2. Town-owned parcels of land that do not have designated or clear best uses for conservation, recreation, or open space can and should be made available for affordable home development.
3. Based on understanding of state statutes and previous actions of other nearby towns, the Selectmen can convey a town-owned property for development with restrictions on the subsequent use if given approval to do so with a 2/3's vote at Town Meeting.
4. Conveying a property like 74 River Street for non-profit development ensures that the public purpose of this town-owned parcel would be well served by developing affordable housing in the most cost-effective means for the town.

1. Affordable Housing in Acton

Much has been said and written about the need for more affordable housing in Acton and the general goal has widespread support from town officials and residents. We will therefore devote little space to the topic; for reference, below are key excerpts from the aforementioned Master Plan Update and To Live in Acton documents.

However, we would note it has been difficult to define an effective means of promoting affordable housing that has widespread support of residents. We believe the proposed approach will be an effective means of developing 1-2 affordable homes and safeguards that it can only progress with widespread support in the form of a Town Meeting vote.

2. Appropriate Town-owned Parcels of Land

We have reviewed the list of town-owned parcels and believe 74 River Street presents a great opportunity to develop a single or two-family home for the following reasons:

- Such development would blend with the surrounding neighborhood as it lies between a recent (40b) townhouse development and a two-residence home that faces Chadwick Street.

- Based on location and size – approximately 0.6 acre – the parcel clearly has no substantive use for recreation, open space, or conservation.
- Its location in the sewer district mitigates the need for a septic system and associated costs and land/conservation concerns.
- The parcel was deeded to the town in 1981 for municipal use without restriction.
- This location is consistent with Smart Growth Principles with its proximity to commuter rail and South Acton Village

3. Request for Proposals to develop housing

We referenced Section 16, “Real property; disposition or acquisition”, of the Uniform Procurement Act. It states that a governmental body that is authorized by special law shall can declare a property available for disposition and specify the restrictions that it will place on subsequent use of the property.

It is our understanding that if a warrant article were passed at town meeting then the Acton Selectmen would be authorized to publish a Request for Proposals seeking proposals to acquire a specific town-owned property for the expressed use by a non-profit developer for a single or two-family affordable home. Restrictions could be placed on the size or other key characteristics of the unit(s) to be built, as well as the eligible household income for the purchaser.

Although not meant to suggest that the situation or circumstances is exactly the same, we thought it would be useful to provide as an example the warrant presented at town meeting in Ayer:

“SALE OF PROPERTY

To see if the Town will vote to transfer the care, custody, and control of 5,760 square feet of land located on Shirley Street, identified as Parcel 53 on Assessor’s Map 26, as conveyed to the Town by treasurer’s deed recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, Book 12589, Page 99, as held by the Board of Selectmen for general municipal purposes, to the Board of Selectmen for the purpose of renting, conveying, or otherwise disposing of said property, and to authorize the Board of Selectmen to rent, convey, or otherwise dispose of said property in accordance with such terms and conditions as are determined by the Board of Selectmen to be in the best interest of the Town; or take any other action in relation thereto.”

Additionally, the following is from the RFP used in Ayer to specify the use of the land being sold:

“The intended purpose of said disposition is to facilitate the creation of an affordable single-family home on the site by a non-profit housing developer to qualify for listing on the Town’s inventory of affordable housing under M.G.L. Chapter 40B.”

4. Non-Profit development

Affordable Housing has come and will continue to come to Acton whether through forced 40b developments, more friendly LIP projects, or cooperative development of affordable homes with agencies like ACHC or organizations like Habitat for Humanity.

A distinct advantage of working with non-profit agencies or organizations is that exactly 1 house is built for each affordable home unit. Commercial 40b developments yield 4 houses to produce each affordable unit, and the 3 market rate homes put additional financial strain on the educational system and town services.

From 1998 Master Plan Update – Goals and Objectives

Housing Goal: Encourage diversity in Acton's population by achieving a mix of homes that enhances Acton's town character and provides needed choices for our residents.

Objectives:

- ◆ Preserve the character of Acton's established residential neighborhoods.
- ◆ Promote a range of economic diversity in housing including low and moderate income housing.
- ◆ Promote a range of choice in the types of homes to allow for residents' changing capacities and preferences.

Further from the document:

The community's affordable housing effort needs:

1. Community-wide understanding of what affordability contributes to Acton's quality of life;
2. More effective strategies for gaining affordable units;
3. More funding to gain additional affordable homes and to maintain and rehabilitate existing affordable homes.

Strategies for Promoting Affordable Housing (*relevant items excerpted*)

Strategy H2

Seek opportunities to acquire buildable Town-owned properties that might be suitable for donations towards the development of affordable housing.

Strategy H4

Direct the focus of affordable housing initiatives to provide housing for the elderly, young families, and low and moderate income residents in our community.

Strategy H6

Examine how the Town's current efforts and strategies might be refined, and how additional ways might be adopted, to be more effective in achieving a diversity of housing types with a range of affordability, including but not limited to:

- encouraging more affordable housing in, or in connection with, new residential developments through duplexes, through lot coverage limitations, by allowing smaller lots in the context of average density zoning, and by encouraging offsite affordable units;
- developing deed restricted moderate income home ownership opportunities;
- establishing a community land trust and/or housing trust fund to provide housing that is not subject to the speculative market forces;
- investigating the impact of tax rates on housing affordability in Acton and incorporating this issue in programs to provide affordable housing;
- evaluating the potential for—and fiscal implications of—increased incentives for more affordable housing for senior and for families.