

Minutes for Acton Community Preservation Committee Meeting, 3/18, 7:30 pm - 10:15 pm, Acton Town Hall

Attending: Walter Foster, Peter Berry, Catherine Coleman, Andy Magee, Joe Nagle, Peter Grover, Alison Gallagher, Susan Mitchell-Hardt, Mimi Herrington, Wayne Klockner, Roland Bartl

Absent: Chris Shaffner

Guest Speakers: Nancy Tavernier (ACHC) and Betty McManus (AHA) for Affordable Housing

Visitors: Residents from neighborhood abutting 520 Main St., site of proposed 40B development.

1. Introduction

a. Secretary's Report: The minutes from 2/27 were reviewed and accepted unanimously.

b. Future Meeting Schedule

The April 1 CPC meeting was canceled.

April 15: Presentation by members of Historical Commission, Town Hall

April 29: Presentation by members of Recreation Commission, 7:30 pm, Library Meeting Room

May 6: Presentation by members of Open Space organizations, 7:30 pm, Library Meeting Room

c. Old Business

- Annual Report: A section on the CPA and CPC will appear in the Town of Acton Annual Report to be distributed at April Town Meeting.

- Re: April Town Meeting - The CPC decided in favor of not making a presentation on the CPA from Town Meeting floor as we are not ready to answer questions. The Annual Report will suffice.

- The CPC will make a presentation on the CPA at Fall Town Meeting.

2. Overview of Federal and State Housing Programs - Peter Berry

Peter Berry gave an overview of the history and present state of Massachusetts and federal housing programs.

3. Handouts:

- Roland Bartl/Affordable Housing/Acton Master Plan, etc., 2.5 pages;

- Nancy Tavernier/Affordable housing background info - 3.5 pages

- Betty McManus/Info on Acton Housing Authority - 4 pages.

4. Acton Master Plan Affordable Housing Profile and Priorities/40B Projects - Roland Bartl. See Roland's handout for bulk of presentation.

- Town Meeting adopted affordable housing overlay over the town - Roland stated that it hasn't worked very well - the Planning Board will review it.

- A consultant has been selected for the Community Development Plan whose focus is on housing needs assessment and strategies to produce affordable housing. Originally the process was to run from Feb. to 12/31. The deadline will be extended as work will not begin until April.

- New possibility: Inclusionary zoning - it requires every developer to put aside funds or include affordable housing in each development.

5. Acton Community Housing Corporation, Nancy Tavernier - Chair

ACHC was started in the mid '80's. Peter Berry was a founding member. In 1996 it became a town board to facilitate affordable housing opportunities in town with priority to Acton residents, children of Acton residents, and employees working in Acton.

- It differs from the Housing Authority which is a state organization; ACHC is a town board.
- Acton will never get to 10% - most towns won't. Whenever a new home is built, we are behind, but the ACHC will peck away at the goal.
- There has been a drastic drop in the age group from 25-35 in Acton because this group can't afford to live here.
- An average of 125 people apply for one housing unit.
- ACHC have sold 16 deed restricted homes to income eligible homeowners (at no profit) since 1985
- ACHC has put out an RFP to develop the Towne School into 18-20 rental units - studio - 3 bedroom apartments for income eligible people.
- They like small projects, scattered around town. See handout for potential allowable uses for which CP housing funding may be applied.
- The ACHC recommends projects which create affordable housing for the moderate income homeowner, and facilitates aesthetics and landscaping.
- The Vaillencourt House is an example of a town owned property which could be converted to affordable housing. It's historic, has no septic system, doesn't meet setback requirement, lot isn't the proper size, has foundation problems, and serious structural problems. It could be an affordable rental property for the town. It needs \$250,000 for renovation costs.
- Discussion of potential allowable uses to which CP housing funding may be applied: See handout.

Project selection:

- Andy pointed out that in Bedford their strategy is not merely to focus on open space but to choose projects that have some other funding. He suggests trying to think of multidisciplinary projects.
- Walter added that we need the groups who bring the proposals to be the project manager
- Communication and keeping the channels open are very important.

6. Acton Housing Authority - Betty McManus, Executive Director

Betty has been with the AHA for 23 years, and she's committed to helping those who live and work in Acton.

- They receive the bulk of their funding from the State and the federal government and some funding from the United Way and other organizations.
- The Housing Authority's mandate is to provide low income housing - only rental units and it subsidizes low income renters - 326 households in all.
- They were created in 1970 by Town Meeting.

See handout for more information.

Unfounded Fears about Abutters:

- There was potential to build affordable housing on Willow St. property, however the project was vetoed out of fear.
- In Sudbury Town Meeting awarded \$320,000 to build 16 units of private housing on town owned land - abutters were upset. They had a sight selection committee to involve the abutters to get a feel for what the town is looking for.

Misc.

- Westford Housing Authority: They hired a consultant for \$75,000 - they want to add to an elderly housing site.
- Roland stated that buying down housing stock would be popular provided subsidies were provided so market rate of \$300,000 could be paid to a buyer so that the buyer gets a mortgage for \$150,000.

Comments and Questions:

- Mike Patten of 87 Nagog Hill Rd. stated that he is concerned about diversity in housing. He asked about the process for reviewing a 40B project. As stated before the plan circulates to all town departments; then goes to BoA for a public hearing. The Planning Board and Building Commission can have input on the decision. If the decision is a hardship to the developer, the developer can appeal to the State.
- Mike asked what do AHA and ACHC do to make sure that partners have the best interest of the town at heart. Nancy said that the AHA is not in partnership

with the developer. AHA is the first group that developers come to with the layout, conceptual design, and number of units, and they make suggestions. They look at the affordability of the project, and they can negotiate. They have no statutory authority. Developers trust the AHA.

- Mike observed that the rural quality of a town will be compromised - by leaching fields, etc.
- In response to a question from John Earle of 114 Nagog Hill Rd. Peter Berry suggested that the CPA is a vehicle which could be used to be proactive in creating attractive and appropriate affordable housing.
- Andy Magee responded to a question from Mr. Earle about the proposal process. Andy indicated that going back to the loan officer model, that the CPC will ask people/groups to bring us their proposals.
- Joe Nagle queried what if a proposal is funded and it doesn't work out?
- Roland stated that this is a financing appropriation at Town Meeting and it is good for 3 years - you don't have to use it all. It goes back to the CP fund.
- Roland indicated that as local zoning restrictions, etc. get tougher, we will see more 40B's.

7. Next Steps

- **CPA Report Writing Process**
- Subcommittees will write the sections of the report about the 4 community preservation areas.
- The report will enumerate priorities
- There will be weighted criteria.
- The report will be drafted over the summer and published in the early fall.

Report structure:

- Walter saw the report writing as more of a criteria process
- Walter's view is that we gather constituent pieces that are largely done and bring it together to become overarching criteria.
- Peter observed that Stow broke the report down by area.
- Andy stated that Bedford has Section 4, "Selection Criteria" - Under Open Space; they have 9 goals; same for Historic Preservation, etc.; then a selection criteria. They have a project submission process which proves you can do your project

ACTION: Andy will make 3 copies of the Bedford Plan for Mimi, Alison, and Susan.

Brief discussion of projects and funding:

- Joe stated that CP funds should be used to leverage monies from the federal government - we can write contingencies into the appropriation article

The following subcommittee assignments were made:

Open Space Section: Andy, Chair; Susan

Community Housing: Joe

Historic Preservation: Peter Grover

Recreation: Alison

Communications: Catherine & Mimi

We discussed the benefits of cross fertilization where one would go on a committee whose subject was unfamiliar.

ACTION: Leave these decisions to the Chair.

Presentations:

We will invite representatives to come, tell us about their history, what they've done, and their priorities.

ACTION: We will write a report about what they told us.

(See b. Future Meeting Schedule)

8. Communications/Public Relations

- Earth Day, May 3, 12-4 pm, at Conant School. Catherine and Mimi will put together display/handouts. Susan has some materials.
- Mimi: We will need to make an RFP (1 page) to the committees and make an RFP in the Beacon; set guidelines, discuss criteria

- Website: We could buy the name (preserveacton.org) and have a link to the town website.

ACTION: Catherine will talk to Mark Hald, Town IT person.

9. New Business:

Action Item: Walter will send John Murray an e-mail before the next meeting about appropriating funds for administrative purposes prior to the fall.