

Acton Community Housing Corporation
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TO: Acton 2020 Committee
FROM: Nancy Tavernier, Chair, Acton Community Housing Corporation
SUBJECT: Responses to Acton 2020 questions
DATE: February 23, 2011

The Acton Community Housing Corporation (ACHC) is please to provide the following responses to the questions asked by the Acton 2020 Committee.

The ACHC is a quasi-public board created through special legislation granted by Home Rule petition in 1996. ACHC members are appointed by the Board of Selectmen and charged with facilitating the creation of affordable housing opportunities for moderate income households with priority given to Acton residents and employees working in Acton.

What are you working on?

ACHC has had a relatively quiet year due to the economic slow-down experienced in the housing market, affordable housing included. The committee continues to meet on a monthly basis to review proposed affordable housing projects, discuss ways to acquire additional affordable units, develop programs to assist first time homebuyers, and act as the liaison to the town for affordable housing developers.

At this time, there are two projects beginning construction. The vacant Towne School building on Mass. Ave. will be developed into 15 rental units, all of them affordable. ACHC has been helping the developer navigate through all the final approvals. The other housing development is on Parker St. with one existing farmhouse and four new construction single family homes, including two affordable units. This should be completed in the summer. There are currently no new developments in front of the ACHC.

What are your main projects?

The ACHC has a Community Housing Program Fund receives annual funding from the Community Preservation Committee. Some of the projects we have funded and will continue to work on are:

- Condo buydown, which involves subsidizing the selling price of existing units, making them deed restricted and finding eligible buyers for them. This has had very limited success.
- Down payment and Closing cost assistance to first time homebuyers of affordable units
- Sponsoring education and financial literacy classes for homebuyers and homeowners
- Creating new affordable units through land acquisition and development
- Providing funding for minor capital improvements for existing deed restricted units

- Partnering with the Acton Housing Authority to buy existing condo units for the AHA's low income rental program.

What are your main goals?

- Increase affordable housing opportunities in Acton.
- Insure viability of current homeowner households such as financial literacy program, first time homebuyer education program, and capital improvement plan.
- Increase awareness of affordable housing needs
- Persevere by standing tall on the issue of affordable housing

What do you see as challenges and opportunities coming up in the future?

- We need to be the primary liaison between the State and Town for affordable housing opportunities.
- We need a broader Public Relations approach to better market the need for affordable housing and to dispel the myths of 40B development.
- We want to create opportunities to leverage affordable units in non-40B developments by working with developers and the permit granting boards, Selectmen and Planning.
- We want to keep the younger generation in Acton because we believe a town with housing and economic diversity makes for a healthy and more livable community.
- We need to address concerns about the environmental impact of housing density. Can we make Acton greener by using Smart Growth principles?
- The statutory requirements of 10% affordable housing is a major challenge. We are currently at 7.2% but that will decrease when the new 2010 census numbers are used in the calculation. We will need 300 more affordable units to meet the 10% challenge.

What long-range plans are you working on or contemplating working on?

- We would like to do another ACHC controlled development such as the 3 unit Willow Central development but we need access to land. We are hoping that a piece of town owned land will be made available or private land will be donated to ACHC.
- We would like to continue to help the Acton Housing Authority and Habitat for Humanity acquire more units in the town by utilizing our Community Housing Program Fund.
- If we find there is buyer interest, we would like to reconfigure our Condo buydown program into something that might be more acceptable to first time homebuyers.

What are the things that you would like Acton citizens to know about the town (in the context of what your committee works on)?

- First time homebuyers of affordable units are working families whose incomes must support a 30 year mortgage, generally in the \$50,000 to \$60,000 range.
- Main issues facing Acton in area of affordable housing is the production of a diversity of housing types, sizes, costs and mixed income buyers.
- The high cost of housing in Acton continues to drive people out of the town and prevents even our own adult children, town and school employees from buying here.

- Affordable housing is a core value in a community. Community character depends on affordable housing for a diverse range of households.

Do you have any long-range planning documents you can give us for input? If not, would you be willing to draw some up?

ACHC's efforts to facilitate affordable housing focuses on the Priority Needs identified in the 2004 Acton Housing Plan called "To Live in Acton"

- Affordable rental units for very-low and low-income families.
- Affordable rental units designed for low-, moderate- and middle-income senior citizens and persons with disabilities.
- Affordable homeownership units for moderate-income families.
- Affordable homeownership units in a range of residential use types and sizes for moderate and middle-income seniors.
- Homeownership units at below-market prices, affordable to middle-income homebuyers.