



NOTE TO BOS -
PLEASE BRING THE NOTEBOOK
YOU RECEIVED FROM NANCY
TAVERNIER AT YOUR
MARCH 8 MEETING.

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Acton Community Housing Corporation
Nancy Tavernier, Chairman

March 17, 2004

Board of Selectmen
Town of Acton
Acton, MA

Dear Board members:

The Acton Community Housing Corporation (ACHC) has voted enthusiastically to support the Local Initiative Program (LIP) application by Acton residents Paul Gaboury and Glen Kaufmann for an affordable housing development at 68 River St., known as Fort Pond Brook Place.

We were first approached by Paul and Glen in December 2003. They had recently acquired the property at 111-113 School St. which is a unique parcel with significant frontage on both School and River Streets. The School St. section of the parcel has a six unit apartment dwelling and barn while the lower River St. section is vacant. The lot can be legally subdivided, which has been confirmed by the pertinent town departments.

Paul and Glen are new to the affordable housing field and thus bring to it a refreshing willingness to work in a collaborative approach by listening to suggestions and concerns and then acting on them. At our first meeting, ACHC recommended the use of the DHCD LIP approval process and they agreed. We have become disenchanted with the MassHousing Starts program used by Crossroads and Franklin Place. We do not believe the MassHousing program offers the same incentives for working with the community nor the same degree of oversight by the DHCD. The LIP process is known as a "friendly Chapter 40B." It is the program that was used in the acquisition of all 16 affordable housing units in Acton prior to Crossroads and Franklin Place. Endorsing this proposal will send a signal to developers that they may find a more welcoming environment under LIP than MassHousing.

Under LIP, the Board of Selectmen and the ACHC share the initial local approval responsibility and both must sign the application before it can be filed with the DHCD. ACHC has done that. While not required, the developers have met with other town boards prior to the final application, most notably the Historic District Commission to gather input on what would be an appropriate design for the location in the South Acton Historic District. They will continue to meet with other boards once the application is signed and the project is a reality. They are still required to file for a comprehensive permit through the ZBA which will be done just as soon as DHCD grants approval. At that time, all the

town boards will be solicited for official comments and public hearings will be held. In ACHC's opinion, the reward for any developers' willingness to use LIP, could be an expedited process and we are hopeful that sufficient groundwork has been laid to allow that to happen. This is less costly to all involved. Many concessions have already been made by the developers, primarily on the issue of design.

In addition to meeting with town staff and town boards, Paul and Glen have met several times with the two direct abutters to allay their concerns, changing the original placement on the parcel to one that is more appealing to them. I attended one of the meetings in an abutter's home and was very impressed with the warmth and sincerity of the effort. ACHC also sponsored a Public Information Session on February 19 that was open to the public. All abutters were invited as well as members of relevant town boards. The session was not well attended which we consider a sign that there is no organized opposition. Ironically, there were more potential buyers in attendance than others. There is very strong buyer interest for both the market and affordable units. The design and location are very appealing.

Due to the recent revision of the HUD Area Median Income (AMI) statistics for the Boston metropolitan area, the 2004 income limit and the corresponding price of the affordable units has jumped dramatically. ACHC continues to be concerned that the selling price of the affordable units in this development at \$187,000 is effectively pricing a major target group, public employees, out of the market. However, the formulas are fixed and are based on current HUD income guidelines. The affordability analysis has been vetted by ACHC and found to be accurate.

At a future meeting of the BOS, the developer intends to present a request for sewer betterment relief to be applied dollar for dollar to the affordable units' selling price. ACHC supports this effort and will be in attendance to advocate for the Sewer Commissioners' approval. There may be other proposals available to us that would help close the gap between the actual income levels of the local target group and the HUD projections.

In conclusion, the ACHC urges the Selectmen to endorse Fort Pond Brook Place and to authorize the Chairman to sign the application. We believe Paul Gaboury and Glen Kaufmann have "raised the bar" for future affordable housing development in the town with their willingness to collaborate with the local officials. It is especially appropriate for the Selectmen to embrace this approach at a time when the Town is developing an EO 418 Housing Plan which will propose strategies to facilitate affordable housing while honoring the tradition of local approval. If there is a way to accomplish the goal of increased affordable housing without rancor, this collaborative approach is a good nominee.

Thank you for your continued leadership and support for affordable housing.

Sincerely,

Nancy Tavernier, Chair
Acton Community Housing Corporation