

Minutes of the hybrid (virtual/in person) meeting of the Affordable Housing Committee, Town of Oak Bluffs, held on Feb 7th 2023 at 4.30pm at Town Hall, Room 110.

Present:

K. Mark Leonard, Chair

Peter Bradford

Katherine Donahue

Jim Bishop

Attending:

David Vigneault, DCRHA

1 Call to order

Chair Mark Leonard called the meeting to order at 4.38pm.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

Of Jan 17th 2023 were passed, as proposed by Katherine Donahue and seconded by Peter Bradford. Peter also commented on the mention of the John Leite issue referred to – there are cars being moved off, but there are cars being moved on again; also, there are 5 Lots there.

3. Chair's Updates

Further to the last meeting, Chair had sent out the 3 Town Warrants discussed, within the deadline of Jan 27th; they totaled some 255K in all; 100,000.00 for the Southern Tier project; 100,000.00 for the Housing Trust, and 55,000.00 for the expanded Rental Assistance program; the Finance Committee will discuss these on Thursday and then it will go to the Selectmen.

4. Noyes – Rental Applications

Discussion began with questions on pet and smoking restrictions; David Vigneault said that smoking is not allowed in or around the buildings, and pets are at 1 x tenant, properly registered; pets must be adequately cared for and must not be a nuisance; tenants are responsible for their pets.

Chair asked about Applications going out; David informed that applications went out last week in the newspapers; the papers will hold off for a week in order to add information meeting details; the application is on the DCRHA site; and states that folk who need help filling out the forms should attend the upcoming information meeting; Chair said that he had sent the Application form to Wendy Brough for posting on the Town's web site; and the application has been shared with the Fire Chief and the Chief of Police.

4.2 David noted that our objective of having a municipal preference will cover those employed by the Town, and also those who live in the town and are employed by a local business.

4.3 Peter asked if a couple who live in an RV parked within the Town's limits would be eligible; David said that as long as they could substantiate town residence i.e. from voter registration to a utility bill, we can make it work.

4.4 Chair said that the 2 application assistance meetings, planned for Feb 15th evening and Feb 25th Saturday morning, would have Portuguese translation available; David is now in the process of securing locations for these events.

4.5 David has 2 staff members away on the 25th Sat; he also noted that this application is the first outreach after DCRHA's revision of the application format within the context of COVID changes in rentals and ownership; there has been an upsurge in Applications but with a high degree of 'incompletes'.

David has worked towards a higher level of efficiency and assistance, and has divided the application process into

- i. the application form itself and
- ii. A 'documents needed' list;
- iii. so if your name comes up applicants have 48 hours to be in touch and begin the process and complete it within 10 days, before DCRHA moves on to the next person on the list; while it is the sole responsibility of the applicant, this now gives them time to get the documents needed together
- iv. the appeals period is not for completing the process.

4.6 David noted that the 1st application assistance meeting will be next Wed and we need folk to attend and help; we should try to get as many helpers to attend as possible, it would be appreciated; Chair said he would attend and help, and that applications are due by the 17th March.

4.7 Chair also touched on the lottery process and that we could do it at an AHC meeting. Peter thought that in the past the BOS handled that part of it. David pointed out that BOS would handle ownership, but this is just lining up for who gets the first shot. David also pointed out that a lottery had to wait until we got the full number of applicants established. Chair reflected on which method might be better – to rank the applicants, or go with the top ten? David thought that we would have to rank all of them as it is a Town project. No further discussion on this. David expressed his thanks for the opportunity to be a part of the project.

5. Southern Tier

Chair shared that the Southern Tier project won MVC's unanimous approval last week; now scheduled for finalizing the written decision, and then on the way to the ZBA.

5.1 Peter: who controls the property at this point? Chair – the Town. Peter went on to mention the neighboring 40B project has some encroachment that has grown and this needs to be resolved before it goes to IHT.

5.2 Chair said that the owners of said property had reached out to Katie. Katie said they had asked about our meetings in March and appear to be waiting for more specific information before they attend a meeting of ours and brief us.

6. Municipal Survey

Chair informed that he had put together a 14 question survey to get a feel on the life situation of town employees; with Wendy Brough's help, the survey was distributed to town employees beginning last Tuesday; out of 200, some 75 responded. Chair went on to share a quick breakdown of the 75:

51% live in Oak Bluffs

2 live off-island

the rest are on the Vineyard

80% have permanent housing – 60% own, 20% rent

20% unaccounted for

6.2 Chair's comment to David for DCRHA: 46% are single or are a couple i.e. a 2 person family, and would settle for a 1 bedroom apartment. Peter's comment – 2 persons in a 1 bedroom apt might restrict family expansion? David responded with an actual case of pregnancy, where the tenant would like to stay on, since a baby in a crib could be workable in a 1 room; David noted that that was acceptable, and that DCRHA would work with the tenant to find a 2 bedroom as it became necessary.

6.3 Chair went on with surveyed results:

26% make 75 K

25% make 75-100 K

30% make 100-160 K

6.4 Jim asked how many participants make between 34-46 K? Chair said that 3 had reported income less than 40K.

6.5 David asked about the 1 bedroom unit count for Southern Tier. Chair provided the following on Southern Tier's 1st phase:

10 x 1 bedroom units

30 x 2 bedroom units

5 x 3 bedroom units

6.6 Chair resumed the survey results with:

75 % are paying less than 2500 to rent/mortgage

46% have children

5 % do the summer shuffle

Chair went on to say that the summer shuffle often meant a shared toilet, outside showers, no kitchen, and that the campground had also been mentioned in this context;

6.7 the question of housing for folk who have gotten a job on the Vineyard but with no housing offer accompanying, was briefly discussed. On hiring, there is no assistance for a security deposit; could the Town use 1st months wages to handle this? and once hired, could the Town assist with moving expenses; or a housing allowance? Jim felt that the Town would not be interested in bringing off islanders on island; David noted the difficulty caused by a job offer that provided no housing assistance; Peter felt that the 2 need not be separate. David also mentioned the EFA or Emergency Funding Assistance.

6.8 Peter and David spoke on getting more landlords in; could the Town give a tax credit for participation in such a program for Landlords? Jim suggested talking about this to the Town Manager.

6.9 David said that the tax rate is not the real measure; from a State perspective, all 6 towns have other municipalities above them with higher taxes.

6.10 General discussion followed.

6. Member Updates

1. Chair: Jeff of the WT Affordable Housing Committee is working on the idea of adding an Affordable Housing Committee member to the Land Bank Advisory Committee and asks if we would support such a move. Discussion followed, with no clear consensus in favor.

2. Peter on the tax abatement situation with the Town and how we should approach this – as an incentive to get Landlords to join the program. Chair mused over whether we might add this to the pilot program.

7. Public comment

No public comment.

8. Adjournment

After further general discussion on related matters, Chair entertained a motion to adjourn; so proposed by Peter Bradford, seconded by Jim Bishop. Chair Mark Leonard declared the meeting adjourned.

R G Eli
Secretary
Affordable Housing Committee
Town of Oak Bluffs