

Sherman Housing Commission

Special Meeting, May 5, 2014

Present: Steve Roffwarg, chair. Michelle Hansen, Jeanette Perlman, John O'Connor. David Berto, consultant. Lynne Gomez, clerk.

Guests: Gertrud Berger, Betty Biro, Carol Faure, Geof Gwyther, Lisa Billbrough, Jill Finch, Carol Faure, Lorna Barrett, Beth Trott, Selectman Andrea O'Connor, George Linkletter. A representative from New Fairfield Housing Commission.

Minutes: Minutes of the March and April Housing Commission meetings were approved as read.

Overview: This special meeting was called to answer questions about the pending Affordable Senior Housing vote on a lease resolution.

Steve outlined what the upcoming vote is about. Those eligible for voting include anyone with \$1000 or more property value in Sherman. The vote is to allow the Sherman Housing Trust to enter into a lease agreement with the town that will allow the trust to seek outside funds. If the vote is positive, and the trust can go forward to raise funds and apply for non-profit status. Applying for non-profit status costs several thousand dollars and the trust does not want to do this until the voters have spoke to move forward on gaining site control of the property.

Steve said the trust can use pre-development funds to pay for the application for non-profit status. The non-profit organization, yet to be created, will allow Sherman to apply for state and private funding to finance Affordable Senior Housing. Steve said Housing is looking to build 12 to 14 units to start. There is a 3-4 year timeframe to raise the money.

David Berto said it would take a few months to get the first application in and then another year and a half to do engineering. He added that it would take 2 to 2.5 years for funding to be obtained, followed by a year of construction.

Steve noted that the vote is the first step. Gaining site control is the first step. Then funding can be sought. The complete lease, or "clean" lease (because it is the final draft) is available for review on the town website under the Housing Commission. A summary lease, which is only one page, will also be available to review.

Who can live in these proposed units? Residents must be 62 years or older. Income restrictions.

Forum: There is a forum planned for public questions and presentation on Saturday, May 31 from 10 a.m. to 1 pm at Sherman School Cafeteria. A representative from the Local Initiative Support Corp. will be there, as will David Berto. The Town Meeting is planned for Friday, June 6. The Referendum (vote) on the Lease is set for Saturday, June 14. Absentee ballots will be available.

Update of recent meetings: Steve attended the Commission on Aging meeting last week. Beth Trott, director of Social Services, has written a letter to the editor in the Citizen News supporting Affordable Senior Housing. Steve has spoken at the Democratic Town Committee and hopes to be invited to the RTC as well. Steve does not look at Affordable Senior Housing as a partisan issue, it is an issue for all of Sherman. Anyone who meets the qualifications should be able to apply and live in the housing.

Steve added that the housing commission believes strongly that seniors who want to remain in Sherman should have a place to live.

The Housing Commission is looking to reach out to all audiences in Sherman, including the SPTO, the JCC, Park and Rec, etc. Michelle Hansen noted that the Housing Commission's website now includes the lease, maps, etc., for review.

Access: The access road to the property being proposed is right along the stone wall that lies east of the Hunniford property.

Property: The proposed site for Affordable Senior Housing is about 3 football fields away from the soccer fields and community gardens. Steve noted the maps. A separate road will take traffic to senior housing, surrounded by open space. Housing will not be visible from the road. Steve showed pictures of what the housing units could look like, although no decisions have been made. He added that the housing can be beautiful and the goal is for designs that the town can be proud of.

Planning and zoning: Planning and zoning will be involved in the project the entire way through. P and Z needs to deal with zoning, etc.

Garages: Steve noted the interest in garages. Housing Commission thinks garages are a fine idea. It would depend on the amount of state and private funding Sherman could attract. Roxbury, for example, had lots of extra money raised locally.

Vote: If the vote on Site Control, (approving the lease) fails, the project is over.

Competition for Funds: Sherman gets very few dollars back from the state of CT. Sherman residents have been putting tax dollars into the state coffers for years, but getting very little back. This project could be an opportunity to get tax dollars back into Sherman. These housing dollars have been going someplace, just not here. Berto said the federal government used to provide funds for affordable housing, but does not do that anymore. Connecticut's governor comes from an affordable housing background and understands how important it is for local economies. In excess of \$300-million is available over 10 years in Ct. Right now the funding is available, but it is very competitive. It is financed by state taxpayers. Berto wants to help Housing put in as strong an application as possible to get some of that money for Sherman.

Berto said every 6 months there is a deadline for housing applications and usually 6 to 8 get funded, out of a pool of about 20. You have to have a really good application, he said.

Berto said the project proposed in Sherman has all the ingredients to make a good application, including the fact that it is a small town only asking for 12-14 units. Trends recently are to grant to smaller towns.

Private Developers: A private developer could come into Sherman and develop housing, with NO input from the town. They only have to work with P and Z, but can do any design they want. Jeanette Perlman noted that the proposed project gives Sherman residents a voice in the design and the management of the housing. The end result: the housing can be something the town is happy with. That is not the case with a private developer.

Sherman residents' preference: Giving extra points for Sherman residents has been included in the lease, to the degree that it is legal. There is a federal Fair Housing Act. Priorities do not translate into guarantees.

Veteran's Preference: Berto noted that there is a move on behalf of the state government to give priority to veterans, but this has not happened yet. Vets will be prioritized through future state affordable housing funding, but no projects have been built yet.

Who would move to Sherman? Berto noted that studies he has seen in the past 20 years show that 80 to 90 percent of people moving into Senior Affordable Housing are either from the immediate area, or have relatives there or have connections there. Anyone in the USA could apply to live at the Sherman Affordable Senior Housing, because it is a free country with Fair Housing Statutes. Carol Faure noted that her research in visiting local Affordable Senior Housing units, showed that only people from the immediate area have moved there.

Discussion followed on the positives of the proposed location, including proximity to emergency services.

Private developer vs. Sherman Housing Commission: Lisa Bilbrough asked the question: If less than 10 percent of housing in Sherman is deemed affordable, can a private developer come in and override local planning and zoning laws to create affordable housing?

Yes, said David Berto. The State Affordable Housing Appeal Statute has been on the books for 15 years now. Sherman indeed has less than 10 percent of its housing as affordable. If a developer comes forward with a project that meets the Affordable Housing Regulations, and is subsequently denied by planning and zoning, (even for zoning regulations) then the developer can go to court and the court will find in favor of the developer. Unless the court finds a procedural error or a health and safety issue with the design. It is the statute that some developers have used to exempt themselves from local control and planning.

Until the town gets that 10 percent of affordable housing, the statute is still in play, according to Berto. The precedent has been that the courts look more favorably on the town if they see some activity toward providing Affordable Housing, instead of none at all.

Andrea O'Connor noted that a private developer only needs to make a portion of their housing affordable. Even if only a small part is affordable, private developers can bypass local zoning.

No more Subsidized Rent: Subsidized rent programs have been stopped by the federal government and no longer exist. For example, in Roxbury and Washington senior housing, some people pay \$800 per month, others pay \$300 per month for the same size housing because they started with subsidized rent and it was grandfathered and will continue for the 40 year term guaranteed by Congress. However, the federal government is NOT providing any funding anymore for new projects. The project of Sherman would not have subsidized rent, because the program no longer exists.

Rent: The project will set a *series* of rents, which together, will cover expenses of the housing. The rents will differ in order to have the ability to have some rents for people at one income range and rents for some people at other income ranges. This will provide the widest opportunity to have people live there. This is the range the state is looking for. All within the affordable range of income.

Top level of income: Affordable housing, according to the state statutes is, people making 80 percent of the area median income, based on whatever the median income is at the time.

Funding Sources: More than one funding source will be needed to make the project work. The state is not interested in funding projects 100 percent. Grant money, low-income state bond money, and investment money will be some of the options. If it is a Federal tax credit project, which is the most common source of private funding, either a large for-profit corporation or a syndicator of for-profit corporations would attract funding to the project in exchange for tax credits that they take off their federal taxes.

Hiking trails: Geoff Gwyther noted that hiking the trails shows that the place earmarked for the housing is already overgrown and little used. He suggested flagging the area earmarked for development. Steve liked the idea. Plans to include a walking tour prior to the May 31 forum. Property has been checked out regarding perc and deep and civil engineering and structural integrity and boundary lines.

The property: Steve called the 67-acre town-owned property a jewel. The project will not take away from the property, but add value. The asset will be improved. Andrea noted that property was bought by town for municipal use. And it will earn taxes from the rentals.

Is this the only vote? Vote will give the go ahead, the rest will go through commissions.

How do you get one? Application will need to be filled out. There will be a window of time for applying. Evaluation of applications will include income eligibility and standard process to evaluate applications. There will be an independent management company which will decide on the applications.

The units: some units may be in the 600 square foot range, up to over 700 square feet. This has not been determined yet. It depends on how much money town attracts. For example, the units in Roxbury are just over 600 square feet.

Maintenance: There will be a maintenance budget as part of operating budget and capital improvement budget as part of the management company.

Next meeting: Monday, May 19 at 5:30 pm at the Senior Center.

Motion to adjourn: made and seconded.

Submitted,

Lynne Gomez, clerk.