

LINCOLN HOUSING COMMISSION
Minutes
Wednesday, January 5, 2022 7:00 p.m.

Members present on Zoom Teleconference: Allen Vander Meulen, Chair; Evan Gorman, Vice Chair; Victoria Benalfew; Rachel Drew; Rakesh Karmacharya.

Also present: Elaine Carroll, Housing Commission Administrative Assistant; Abigail Butt, Director, COA/HS.

The meeting was called to order by Allen Vander Meulen, Chair, at 7:04pm as a virtual meeting pursuant to Gov. Baker's March 12, 2020 order, as extended on June 15, 2021 with the Governor's signing of Senate Bill #2475, suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law.

1. Maintenance

Out of consideration for Abigail and the tenant, maintenance-related issues were discussed first.

a. 75 Tower Road

Evan summarized the findings and progress in addressing the mouse infestation at our 75 Tower Rd property with input from the tenant.

The onsite review on Tuesday, January 4th at 9:00am was attended by Evan, Allen, Gerry (HC Maintenance Manager) and Derrick from Waltham Pest Control Services. Gerry has done a great deal of work in sealing-up possible entry points, including all those identified by Waltham Pest Control Services. While there, Derrick pointed out additional areas of concern and a plan was put together:

- i. Remove the stove, which needs to be replaced; and order a new one.
- ii. While waiting for the new stove to be ordered and installed; and with guidance from Derrick, Gerry will seal up additional possible entry points and trackways within the kitchen, especially under and behind the cabinetry and counters. Some additional trouble areas identified by Derrick and Gerry around the foundation and entryways into the home will also be rectified.
- iii. Waltham Pest Control Services will visit the site weekly for the next month or so to monitor the situation and reset traps. Once the mice appear to have been eradicated from within the home, the new Stove will be installed and Waltham Pest Control will shift back to monthly visits.
- iv. Some potential trouble areas under the eaves of the roof's dormers need closer inspection, and rot around the window in one of them was identified. That window will be replaced in the Spring, and Derrick will confirm whether the other potential problem areas need to be rectified by Gerry.
- v. There was some discussion of the possibility of mold in the home. No indication of a major problem was seen during the inspection. Mold testing is being considered.

The Commission members expressed great concern over the additional losses and costs being incurred by the tenant due to the mouse infestation and since losing use of her stove beginning in early to mid-November. In light of these costs **Allen moved that the tenant not be charged for January's rent, and going forward that her rent be**

reduced by half until the issue is resolved. Evan seconded the motion. *Roll Call vote: Rachel – Aye; Rakesh – aye; Evan – aye; Victoria – aye; Allen – aye. The motion passed unanimously.*

- b. 30 Sunnyside: Evan talked recently with Gerry about current status of the Mold remediation effort. The tenant was upset about how Gerry's repair crew was behaving while in his home and kicked them out – halting the repair work. Gerry has lined up a new crew to go in and finish the work; and they will begin soon.
- c. Abigail asked if the Commission does annual walk-through inspections of the town-owned units. Allen answered that in his 8 years on the Commission this has been done at least 4 times, so the answer is yes -but not consistently. It was agreed this should probably be done. It was noted that Gerry is in each unit fairly frequently and does a good job of managing repairs and maintenance issues when they are identified, so there has been a general feeling that annual inspections are not absolutely necessary.
- d. Elaine noted that the family at 30 Sunnyside was asked to vacate the home and stay at a hotel for one night due to the mold remediation work, and did so without seeking reimbursement from the Commission. The Commission asked Elaine to contact the tenant to ascertain the costs incurred (including meals). **Evan moved that those expenses be deducted from his January rent (once that is ascertained through Elaine)**; Rakesh seconded. *Roll Call vote: Rachel – Aye; Rakesh – aye; Evan – aye; Victoria – aye; Allen – aye. The motion passed unanimously.*
- e. Evan reported that there are no other known maintenance issues or projects at this time.

2. Status Updates:

a. **CPC**

Evan reported that Housing-related funding requests: RHSO and Lincoln Rental Assistance Program (LRAP) are on the CPC agenda for tomorrow's meeting (Thursday, January 6th) Program. Abigail will be speaking to the CPC on behalf of the COA&HS's application requesting \$60,000 for the LRAP program.

Abigail then summarized what will be in her presentation to the CPC and will email the presentation slides to the Commission members once they are done. (NB: she did so the next morning.)

She noted that Assistant Town Administrator Dan Pereira, working with the COA&HS's MSW Intern Kelly Cross, put together and administered a survey to evaluate the LRAP program – and that this forms the heart of her presentation and recommendations. (Abigail emailed the results of that survey to the Commission members earlier today.) The levels of participation in the survey (nearly 100%), and the extremely positive results, were impressive. Abigail has never before seen such positive results in a survey of an existing program. This speaks both to the effectiveness of the program, and the level of investment and satisfaction of those involved.

Abigail also noted that since around the time the program was launched until now, the “Housing Cost Burden” for renters in Lincoln has dropped from 65% of household income to 55%, and the LRAP program probably had contributed to this drop. It was noted by Abigail and Rachel – who are both familiar with this data– that these (65% & 55%) figures are both derived from the American Community Survey’s 5 year estimates (2010-4 & 2015-19), which – like all aggregate studies – have caveats in terms of data quality and relevance.

Abigail went on to say that last year’s doubling of funding for the LRAP program by the CPC last year pretty much eliminated the waitlist. However, since the new funding proposal was submitted to the CPC this fall, the waitlist has grown quite large again. The Pandemic is a major factor for this.

Despite these successes, the LRAP program’s participants are still paying far more than they should for housing. They should be spending 30% of their income on housing – not an average of 55%, as is currently the case. Many of those applying-to (or already in) the program are already in Affordable Housing, and their situation is unlikely to change or improve in the next few years. In light of this, Abigail is proposing a number of changes to the program, as described in her presentation, to ensure that people get the help they need for as long as they need it – but not indefinitely - without unfairly compromising the availability of this aid to others.

Abigail and the Housing Commission are both reluctant to ask for additional funding to cover the funding gap: the CPC has been very supportive, but there was clear concern over funding this program indefinitely, even though subsequent efforts have proven there are no other possible funding sources. Another factor is that expanding the program would require more administrative effort on the part of the COA&HS staff – administering each application and beneficiary requires a significant amount of staff effort and oversight; and no such additional staff time is available.

- b. Out of consideration for Abigail’s time, the agenda item for later in the meeting regarding **“What to do with Subsidized condos that don’t sell”** was discussed at this point.

Allen reported that he’d had a conversation a few weeks ago with Pete Lowy, who runs Codman Farm, about finding affordable housing units in town or nearby for Codman’s several employees. The outcome of this discussion was a proposal that recognizes that many of the “Affordable Condo” units in Northern Lincoln are very difficult to sell. Allen has proposed to the Housing Trust and RHSO that when these units fail to find a qualified “Affordable” buyer, that before these units go on the open market, that they be offered to local institutions like Codman Farm, Drumlin Farm, DeCordova Museum, or the Food Project, who might be looking for space they can provide to their employees.

It was generally agreed this was a good suggestion, and it will probably be on the agenda for the next “Housing Coalition” meeting, which is likely to occur in early February.

- c. **Parking Policy** (Allen)

The second notification letter went out in early December. It was very similar to the first letter but says that the policy [that all cars parked there regularly must be licensed, registered, and that the primary driver(s) must be named on the lease] is now in force. The letter refers the tenants to the COA/HS if they are having difficulty repairing or selling their vehicle.

One of the two tenants has committed to moving their abandoned Van in the near future. The status of the other vehicle is unknown. The next letter, which will probably go out next month, will be specifically to tenants with vehicles that are still in violation, and will give them a deadline for bringing their vehicles into compliance.

d. **Mission Statement** (Rachel)

Rachel has conferred with James Craig about the process of revising or rewriting a Mission Statement. James replied that while the Board of Selects will want to review any changes once the process is complete, there are no requirements for the process itself.

Allen mentioned that with Town Meeting coming up soon, and James retiring from the Board of Selects immediately afterward. So, there is some urgency to getting this done soon, before preparation for Town Meeting becomes the Board of Select's sole focus. Rachel make sure this happens.

e. **Housing Trust** (Evan)

Evan reported no activity at present, other than the efforts to have a "Housing Coalition" meeting in the near future – of which the Housing Trust is one of the three member organizations.

f. **SLPAC** (Rachel)

Rachel reported that work continues on Phase II of the Wastewater Treatment Plant evaluation (regarded maintenance needs, and possibly expanding capacity to better support development in the Lincoln Woods & Mall area) is well underway – with the final report will be presented to a joint SLPAC / Planning Board meeting on January 11th.

Another facet of SLPAC's efforts is to reach out to groups in town to put zoning in place that will better support new business and development in the area – in part in response to the Housing Choice Legislation that became law last year, and also to improve the viability of businesses in the Lincoln Station area. The law's language is not fully defined in many respects; and exactly how that language will apply to Lincoln and other towns in the Commonwealth is still being worked-out by DHCD. Initial proposals have been made, but many towns find the proposed guidelines severely problematic: the guidance will clearly need a great deal of discussion and refinement before being finalized.

g. **IDEA** (Rakesh)

IDEA has been informed that Rakesh is now officially the HC's liaison to them, but he

has not yet been contacted by the group – or informed of any meetings or events. He will contact Jenn James to get “into the loop” with them.

h. COA/HS (Victoria)

Victoria reports no activity other than what was already discussed here with Abigail.

i. ARPA (Allen)

Allen is aware of no major developments since we informed the ARPA task force of the amount of COVID-related expenses we’d like to see reimbursed.

j. Finances (Allen)

Allen developed a spreadsheet of our month to month Revolving Fund balances reaching back to July of 2020 and distributed this to the commission members. Our balance has been on a slight upward trajectory throughout that time. We do not expect this to continue due to the recent cuts we’ve made in rents for several tenants. We should also see a big drop in our balance the next month or two due to the major projects currently underway at 75 Tower and 30 Sunnyside.

Questions were raised with respect to a tenant who has a history of not refilling her oil tank, which has resulted in the oil running out; resulting in burst pipes and expensive repairs. There is concern this might happen again. We contacted the Oil Company a year ago about this, and they are aware that they should contact us if the tenant runs into any difficulties with keeping an adequate supply of heating oil on hand.

3. Projects & Policy:

a. SHI Recalculation

Rachel reports that the data needed to calculate the SHI has not been officially released yet, although it will be soon (expected March to May, 2022). Housing at Hanscom is not included in DHCD’s calculation of Lincoln’s SHI, and we will need to make sure that remains the case. Further, the SHI denominator (# of housing units in town) can vary quite a bit due to which homes the Census Bureau determines is a person’s “primary residence” and also how many accessory apartments are found by the Census Bureau – which has little to do with the number of Accessory Apartments permitted by the town. Currently, given the construction of Oriole Landing, we can tolerate a significant level of variation in these numbers at present, unlike in previous decades.

The Census Bureau has released how many households and Housing Units are in the non-Hanscom part of Lincoln, which is likely close to the number that will be used for the denominator on the SHI.

Rachel then calculated that given the Town’s current SHI of 298 units and the Census Bureau’s determination (though not yet official) that there are 2,334 non-Hanscom housing units in town, our current SHI should be almost 12.8%

4. **Approval of minutes from November 3, 2021**

Rachel moved to approve the November 3rd minutes as written. Evan seconded. Roll Call vote: Rachel – Aye; Evan – aye; Rakesh – aye; Victoria – aye; Allen – aye. The motion passed unanimously.

5. **Next Meeting**

It was agreed that the next scheduled meeting (February 2nd at 7:00pm) does not need to change.

6. **Adjournment**

Rachel moved to adjourn, Evan seconded. Roll Call vote: Rachel – Aye; Evan – aye; Rakesh – aye; Allen – aye. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:50pm.

Approved: February 9, 2022