

LINCOLN HOUSING COMMISSION
Minutes (Open Meeting)
Wednesday, January 6, 2021 7:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting Pursuant to Gov. Baker's March 12, 2020
Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law

Present:

(Commission members) Victoria Benalfew; Rachel Drew; Keith Gilbert; Allen Vander Meulen (Chair).
(Staff) Elaine Carroll (Housing Administrator).

Member Evan Gorman joined the meeting at approximately 7:25pm.

Chair Allen Vander Meulen called the meeting to order at 7:06pm.

Discussion on mouse situation at 75 Tower Road

Allen had a preliminary conversation with Gary's Wildlife Service regarding the cost of an attempt to exclude the mice rather than the more common poison & trap approach. Allen was told that given the nature of the home (older structure, fieldstone foundation, close to wetland), his best "order of magnitude" guess is that doing so would cost around \$2500.

Elaine pointed out that the current pest control service said that a major point of ingress for the mice is holes in the walls behind the kitchen cabinets, which are a legacy of the work done when the home was renovated several years ago. The commission agreed these will need to be patched as part of the mouse control effort, which will likely require dismounting the cabinets, patching the holes, then remounting the cabinets. Mudding/taping and painting may not be needed if the repairs are entirely behind the cabinets.

Keith said that Bemis and The Old Town Hall use another service that also specializes in pest exclusion: Aardvark Solutions. It was decided that Allen will contact both services for evaluations and quotes, and talk with Gerry O'Doherty about patching the holes behind the kitchen cabinets beforehand.

Sunnyside Kitchen Renovation

Elaine reported that the permit for the work on the Sunnyside Kitchen renovation has been completed and signed-off on by the Town Building Inspector.

(Evan Gorman joined the meeting at this point in time.)

Possible Future Major Renovation Repair Projects

Allen reported that he had discussed this with Gerry O'Doherty. Gerry felt that there were two such projects that should be undertaken in the next year or so.

The first is major renovations to 65 Tower Road: the heat, septic, roof, bathroom, and kitchen are all very old/outdated and in questionable condition. Allen noted that this issue was discussed at length a couple of years ago. The conclusion at the time was that given the tenant (who values their privacy and does not like disruptions) is perfectly happy in the current situation and uses the house's systems very lightly, it is better to not do anything for now unless the situation changes. The Commission agreed that this policy is a reasonable one to continue.

The other potential issue is the town's Handicapped-accessible unit on Sunnyside. It has only one point of ingress/egress for the tenant that is ADA compliant; and this may not be adequate under ADA regulations. Therefore, Gerry recommended adding a ramp to the rear entrance of the apartment. The commission felt this was reasonable, and that the cost would probably not be all that much to do this. Elaine will check with the Town Building Inspector to determine whether we should have two ADA-compliant entrances to the apartment. The commission will revisit this issue in our next meeting.

Rent Freeze

In discussions with the RHSO, Allen learned that the State "froze" all rents and prohibited evictions as of April, 2020 for renters under the LIP program, of which we have three such units, two of which have had their rent increased since then – although neither has paid the increased amount. The commission has also already frozen the rent of tenants who have petitioned the commission for a freeze based on COVID-related financial hardship. A review of rent increases showed that three of our tenants have had rent increases since the COVID emergency began, two of whom are in apartments under the LIP program.

There was some discussion as to whether recertifications matter during the COVID emergency since we can neither increase rents nor terminate the leases of tenants who no longer qualify. It may be necessary to validate that our tenants still qualify for affordable housing anyway, and we could give notice that their rents will increase at some point after the COVID emergency officially ends. It was agreed we will discuss this with the RHSO and Planning when they appear before the Commission at our February meeting.

In a spirit of fairness to all of our tenants, the Housing Commission voted to "Freeze" rents for all seven of our tenants at their rate as-of April, 2020 through the end of this year (i.e., 12/31/2021). Evan Gorman motioned; Victoria Benalfew seconded. Roll Call vote: Evan – aye; Rachel – aye; Victoria – aye; Keith – aye; Allen – aye. The motion passed unanimously. If the COVID Emergency is still in force at the end of 2021, we will revisit the issue of this freeze.

It should be noted that none of the three tenants who have (in theory) had rent increases since April 2020 have actually paid their increased rents yet. One is in arrears on rent payments since well before their recent recertification and proposed rent increase. Another was granted relief due to COVID-related employment issues. The third was already disputing their rent increase for unrelated reasons.

RAFT program Findings

Victoria researched the RAFT (Residential Assistance for Families in Transition) program to see whether it can help one or more of our tenants. RAFT is a DHCD program designed to short term assistance to low income families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Typically, the program can supply up to \$4,000 in aid to a family within a single 12 month period. That limit has been increased to \$10,000 for the duration of the COVID emergency.

Either a tenant can apply, or we (the Landlord) can apply on behalf of our tenant. Applications are taken through the regional housing authority for the tenants' area within the State. In Lincoln, that agency is the South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC) in Framingham. Once an application is

completed, a response can be expected within 14 days. Details can be found on the SMOC website: <https://www.smoc.org/housing-consumer-education-center.php>

Status Update: AAA Property Tax Rebate (Allen)

Allen reported that at long last the last piece of the Affordable Accessory Apartment Program (The “AAA” Program, approved at Lincoln’s 2017 Town Meeting), the property tax rebate, has been approved by the State Legislature. Our representative, Tom Stanley had been unable to get the enabling bill (Bill # H.2645 in the most recent legislative session) to the floor until the recent leadership change in the House. Once a new Speaker of the House was in place, it took less than a day to get the bill through both houses of the legislature.

Given the time lag since the rest of the program was approved, we will need to revisit the agreements made with DHCD (regarding our discussions with them related to process and regulations) and Lincoln’s Housing Trust (regarding funding) before we can start the program. We also now have the RHSO available to help us administer the program. Allen will contact Pam Gallup to see who she worked-with at DHCD; and will contact James Craig in his role as Chair of the Lincoln Housing Trust to confirm funding of the “Loan Program.”

Approval of Minutes

Evan Gorman moved to approve the minutes for the December 9th meeting as amended (by a change requested by Rachel Drew). Victoria Benalfew seconded. Roll Call vote: Evan – aye; Rachel – aye; Victoria – aye; Keith – aye; Allen – aye. The motion passed unanimously.

Evan Gorman moved to approve the minutes for the December 2nd as written. Victoria Benalfew seconded. Roll Call vote: Evan – aye; Rachel – aye; Victoria – aye; Keith – aye; Allen – aye. The motion passed unanimously.

Executive Session

Rachel Drew moved that “The Commission enter into executive session per MGL C. 39, s23B Exemption 1: ‘to comply with a general or special law to protect individuals’ privacy under C. 214, & or the public records law.’ And that we not return to open meeting.” Keith Gilbert seconded. Roll Call vote: Evan – aye; Rachel – aye; Victoria – aye; Keith – aye; Allen – aye. The motion passed unanimously, and the Open Session was adjourned at approximately 8:05pm.

Approved: 2/3/21