

LINCOLN HOUSING COMMISSION
Virtual Meeting Minutes
Thursday, January 25, 2023 7:00 p.m.

Members present via Zoom: Allen Vander Meulen, Chair; Evan Gorman, Vice-Chair; Rachel Drew; Victoria Benalfew; Terry Perlmutter (COA&HS Liaison); Donald Fonseca (Affordable Housing Liaison).

Also present: Peggy Elder, Housing Commission Administrator; Julie Brogan, Lincoln citizen.

Chair Allen Vander Meulen called the meeting to order at 7:08pm 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. Housing Commission Restructuring: Review of Town Counsel Feedback

Allen shared the current status of our proposed Article for Town Meeting 2023, in which we will propose a restructuring and expansion of the Housing Commission. Dan Pereira informed Allen that the article will be a single motion on the Warrant for the meeting, and that Town Counsel Joel Bard will provide language for a motion that implements the guidelines we supplied.

Commission members expressed the importance of reviewing and approving the final draft of the proposed motion in advance of Town Meeting. Peggy Elder informed the Commission that the final wording of all articles in the Town Meeting will be sent to the printer on morning of Monday 2/27. Therefore, after reviewing Commission Member schedules, it was determined we will need to meet to review and approve the motion's language in a special HC meeting on the evening of February 16th.

The commission will request that the motion be completed and presented to Allen well in advance of February 16th for him to distribute to the Commission members. We will also request that Joel or his representative be available (if needed) to meet with us on the 16th if we feel a dialog is necessary. Peggy will inform Tim Higgins, Dan Pereira & Joel Bard of this.

2. Tenant Recertification Status

The RHSO has completed its work, and the rent rate change notifications are now able to be prepared and sent to our tenants. The tenants will be required to sign and return the TIC sheets detailing the results of the recertification, and will also need to sign their new leases at that time.

All tenants took advantage of at least one of the Income Deductions offered as part of the restructured recertification process. One tenant has not submitted any documentation at all for the recertification, despite repeated requests from us, and assurances from them that they would do so. This tenant's rental rate will be going up to market rate, which is double their current monthly payment. We will go through the recertification process with them and re-set their rate, if they ask us to do so within a reasonable amount of time.

Allen presented an analysis of the rent changes and their impact. In the last few years prior to COVID, the Revolving Fund has generally received around \$55,000 from rents. We will be slightly above that level in the coming year (around \$57,000). Although there was a very wide variation in Housing Commission Meeting Minutes Jan 25, 2023

terms of rental increases (and decreases) among our tenants, only two residents had rate increases (besides the one who failed to respond). One of those increases was quite substantial due to a much higher income on the tenant's part. The other increase brought the tenant back to roughly the same rate they had at the start of COVID. The average rate increase – after 3 years of the COVID rent freeze – was a 2% increase above their current rate for all tenants who completed their recertifications. The commission agreed to compassionately respond to tenants' challenges of the new rental rates (if any of them do so).

Victoria will coordinate with Peggy and Elaine to prepare the tenants' rent notification letters, which will include the TIC forms and new lease agreement they must sign. Peggy will send them to the tenants after Allen's review, and over his signature, and will coordinate the process of ensuring that all tenants return their signed TIC forms and leases within a reasonable amount of time.

3. Housing Choice Act Workgroup Status Update

Rachel stated the workgroup has not met since the Housing Commission's last meeting. Yesterday, Jennifer Glass has posted a Summary and FAQ on LincolnTalk about the Workgroup's work. This post outlines the group's plans for soliciting community input and timeline for generating a proposal for Zoning Changes to approve at the 2024 Town Meeting – one year from now. The post lists all members of the group and encourages Lincoln Residents to contact them with their questions or feedback. The workgroup's next meeting will be February 7th.

4. Maintenance & Tenant Status

There is nothing of significance at this time regarding tenant maintenance or related issues.

5. ARPA and CPC Funding Application Status Update

Allen and Evan presented our Funding request to the CPC last Thursday (January 19th). The presentation was favorably received, with no major concerns or questions other than asking for assurance that we have budgeted enough so that a supplementary request will not be needed or these projects in the future. (As discussed in detail in prior Housing Commission meetings, our total request is for \$257,775 for the four proposed projects.)

Allen noted that there were very few other CPC requests this year, which meant there is plenty of money available for all applications they've received. In fact, after a discussion with COA&HS Director Abigail Butt, the CPC decided to increase funding to the COA&HS's Lincoln Emergency Rental Assistance program (sponsored by the Housing Commission) by \$30,000 over their original request of roughly \$60,000. The increase was approved after the CPC confirmed the need, and that funding the program at this higher level should be sustainable for the next several years. (These funding requests will need to pass at Town Meeting.)

The CPC's public hearing to approve the list of projects & funding is tomorrow evening (Thursday, January 26th).

6. 2014 Housing Plan Revision?

Allen pointed out that our "2014 Housing Plan" document (written the help of a consulting firm at that time) is nearly 10 years old. It should be revised every 5 years or so, and too big and complex

to be done by the commission members on their own. So, after we fill the vacancies on the commission (i.e., following the election) we should assign a commission member to spearhead this effort, which will include applying for a grant to cover the cost of the project.

In response to questions from Rachel, Allen noted that the 2014 document has been a valuable resource in terms of informing subsequent debates in town regarding affordable housing – such as the Oriole Landing project, and has provided a sense of direction in terms of the development and needs/nature of affordable housing here in Lincoln. The new document would presumably use the 2014 document as a starting point. This effort will be launched following Town Meeting.

7. Liaison Status Reports

a. Affordable Housing Liaison Status Update

Donald Fonseca reported that the new email address (HousingLiaison@LincolnTown.org) is now active. The next step will be to publicize it. This generated some discussion on the general need to update the Commission's page on the LincolnTown.Org website: much of the information there is either poorly presented or very out of date.

It was determined that we will need to work with Peggy to refresh the web page, which will include adding the information about the new Liaison contact information, and our revised mission statement. Once that refresh is done, Donald will publicize the new email address, and his role, on LincolnTalk and perhaps elsewhere.

b. COA&HS Status

Terry Perlmutter reported that Abigail is focusing on food insecurity, and is working with Codman Farm to provide distributions through the SNAP program. Codman is planning to staff this effort with their own people. Participants in the program will be receive roughly \$40 to \$60 per week (year round) of fresh vegetables and other food items from Codman's store.

Also, Carlee Castetter (a COA&HS employee) will be a regular presence at the Lincoln's food pantry (perhaps once a month?) to help folks learn about different support programs (LRAP, Snap, etc.) that they might be eligible-for, such as rental assistance & etc.

Terry also noted that the COA&HS is working with Terri Morgan and the Lincoln Foundation to raise funds in support of those challenged by the recent very large increases in Condo Fees and special assessments at Battle Road Farm and Minuteman Commons. The COA&HS is applying for a grant from Codman foundation to help in this endeavor.

Rachel supplied the link to a fundraiser the Lincoln Foundation has also launched as part of this effort. That web page is <https://www.thelincolnfoundation.net/bridge-the-gap-campaign>.

c. Community Center Building Committee Update

Evan reported that he has been attending the CCBC meetings, but is finding the meetings to be very long, complex, and detailed. Evan had accepted this Liaison position with the understanding that he would have a co-liaison (Victoria), who is now unavailable, since she is stepping down from the Commission as a result of becoming a town employee. As a

result, the workload is far more than he can do on his own, and there seems to be little relevance or benefit to the Housing Commission and its mission at this time. The commission being down two members is not helping this situation.

Rachel noted that the question of why or how the Housing Commission should participate in the CCBC was raised at the State of the Town Meeting.

Evan was encouraged to minimize his participation for now. He will also contact Jonathan Dwyer (current CCBC Chair) to determine how much (and when) Jonathan feels would be best to participate in the near term – if at all; and if/why the CCBC feels we should continue to participate in the long term. We will revisit the issue once the commission is back up to full strength.

d. IDEA Status

Allen noted he recently forwarded an email from IDEA to all commission members. The email asks all members of town staff, boards and commissions to take IDEA's survey. Allen encouraged commission members to do so in the near future.

8. Commission Vacancies & Candidates / Q&A for Candidates

The Commission welcomed both Donald's and Julie's interest in becoming Commission members. Both expressed their thanks for being invited to tonight's meeting. Neither had any questions for the commission. Allen noted that the deadline for "pulling" nomination petitions is fast approaching, which means it might be difficult to get the filled-out petitions returned to the Town Clerk's office in time. An alternative would be to run as a write-in candidate, which, for an uncontested seat, should not require a large number of votes.

9. Approval of Minutes from Jan 5, 2023 meeting

Rachel moved that the revised draft of the minutes for the January 5th be approved without further changes. Evan seconded. Roll Call vote: Victoria – aye; Rachel – aye; Evan – aye; Allen – aye. The motion passed unanimously.

(Evan Gorman left the meeting at this point due to other commitments.)

10. The Commons

Allen reported that he attended the joint Planning Board and Select Board meeting last night, where the proposal for the expansion of The Commons was presented. The current owner is proposing adding 38 new units to the complex, but only 2 of these units would be "affordable." Allen outlined the current proposal's main features and observed that much more work and refinement is needed. He feels it unlikely it will be ready in time for a vote at this Spring's Town Meeting.

11. Adjournment

Rachel moved that the meeting be adjourned. Victoria seconded. Roll Call vote: Rachel – aye; Victoria – aye; Allen – aye. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 8:06pm.