

LINCOLN HOUSING COMMISSION
Minutes
Wednesday, February 9, 2022 7:00 p.m.

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

Also present: Elaine Carroll, Housing Commission Administrative Assistant; Abigail Butt, Director, COA/HS; Brandon Kelly, Lincoln Town Facilities Manager; Dan Pereira, Assistant Town Administrator

The meeting was called to order by Allen Vander Meulen, Chair, at 7:06pm 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. Introduce Brandon Kelly, New Town Facilities Manager (w/Dan Pereira)

Dan Pereira introduced Brandon. Discussion covered tasks the Facilities Department does (and has done) in support of the Housing Commission's units, and possible future areas where we might benefit from Brandon's skills and the department's resources. Brandon will look into when the septic tanks for our 7 town-owned rental units were last pumped and let us know. We might utilize his expertise in preparing-for planned renovations and landscape repairs at 75 Tower Rd.

2. ARPA Status Update (Allen)

Allen attended the ARPA Public Meeting held via Zoom on Feb 2. No Housing projects are in the list of projects approved to go forward. There was uncertainty and flux in guidance regarding the usage of ARPA funds which did not clear up until recently. So, there was significant concern that the projects we proposed did not qualify. Those issues are now resolved, and we are eligible.

There are uncommitted funds remaining – about \$350K. The Select Board will not add new projects to the list at this time, in case of cost overruns on projects already approved. However, it is likely that, a second round of funding proposals will be considered. In anticipation of this, the Housing Commission will prepare several of the possible projects so that we are ready to submit.

3. Maintenance

Evan reports the Mold Remediation work at 30 Sunnyside is completed. Dan and Evan will coordinate on moving forward on the insurance claim. Dan will inform Allen of the total bill for the work and how much is covered by Insurance.

The first phase of mouse infestation remediation work at 75 Tower is nearly complete. A replacement stove has been ordered and should be installed within the next few days.

A second phase will consist of replacement of a window in a dormer, and other exterior repairs needed due to rot/degradation and possible wildlife intrusion. We hope to complete much needed landscape and driveway work there before next winter. This will require approval from the Conservation Commission. Allen will contact the Conservation Department's new Director and arrange an onsite visit with her and Evan to look at the issues and begin the process. Evan said he will take pictures of the current problematic icy/eroded state of the driveway and email those pictures to Elaine and Allen.

4. Abandoned vehicles/Final Warning Letter to Tenants

A "Final Warning Letter" has been drafted by Allen, but will need to be passed-by town counsel for vetting before we send it out to the two tenants who appear to be in violation.

Both vehicles have been sitting for a very long time – years. Getting them operational is far beyond the financial reach of either tenant. Abigail Butt recommended finding the titles to these vehicles, then selling them to a towing company for \$100 or so, which would then go to the tenant.

Allen will send the “final warning letter” draft to Dan Pereira, who will work with Town Counsel to vet both the letter and our plans for removing the vehicles. The COA&HS will work with the impacted tenants to help dispose of them.

5. SLPAC & Diversity

a. SLPAC Update

Rachel reported that the Rural Land Foundation (owners of the Lincoln Mall) has decided they are willing to consider redeveloping the Mall area themselves. The effort along this line is in its beginning stages.

SLPAC is working with the Planning Board and Board of Selects to develop and review the draft of the Town’s response to the DHCD’s draft guidance for the Housing Choice Act. Feedback to the draft can be provided to Rachel.

b. Proposal: Revising Mission Statement

Rachel recently sent out a draft that restates and consolidates the several past mission statements we know of. The new statement reaffirms the HC’s missions of overseeing the town-owned rentals, setting policy, and as caretaker of the town’s SHI. It also emphasizes the commissions’ role as an advocate-for and enabler-of increased diversity through housing options. The current draft is as follows:

“The Lincoln Housing Commission seeks to ensure that a diverse range of housing options are available in Lincoln to meet the needs of current and potential future residents. The Commission fulfills this mission by developing and advocating for policies and programs that add to and fill gaps in the current supply of housing. It also monitors the supply of housing affordable to households with low- and moderate-incomes, in compliance with state policy. The Housing Commission also serves as administrator for all town-owned rental housing units.”

Previously, Abigail has suggested that Rachel run the draft past the IDEA or WIDE groups, which she will do. Abigail also suggested we explicitly state that we are welcoming and inclusive: promoting equal opportunity and more diverse housing.

All Commission members were asked to review the draft and provide at least an affirmation to Rachel that they have done so, if not suggestions or changes.

c. Proposal: Expanding Housing Commission

The Commission agreed we need an empowered voice on the Commission representing those who are living in income restricted housing. Most Housing Authorities have such a representative, since they are the ones most directly impacted by the work of the commission. Abigail seniors should be represented for similar reasons. Allen pointed out that we had such a Liaison in the past, and suggested it might be wise to do so again. However, to add voting members (instead of just Liaisons), a Board of Selects approval is needed, and perhaps Town Meeting or State-level approval as well. Allen will discuss this with Jennifer Glass & James Craig.

Rachel Drew moved to ask the Council on Aging and Human Services to appoint a new Liaison to the Housing Commission; and to explore adding a Liaison representing income restricted housing; then work towards converting these two Liaisons into voting positions as soon as possible. Evan Gorman seconded.

Discussion: in light of Victoria Benalfew's absence, and her position as the Housing Commission's Liaison to (not from) the COA&HS, this vote will be subject to Allen's confirming with Victoria that she approves of this change, and whether she has any concerns or considerations with regards to this change, since it will mean her current role with the COA&HS will become moot. Roll Call Vote: Rakesh Karmacharya - Aye; Evan Gorman – Aye; Rachel Drew – Aye; Allen Vander Meulen – Aye. The motion passed unanimously. Once Allen talks and Victoria, and if she approves of the Liaison change; Abigail will work with the Council on Aging & Human Services to nominate and approve a Liaison. (When contacted the next day, Victoria endorsed this.)

6. **IDEA**

Rakesh is in contact with IDEA and will attend their next meeting on February 15th.

7. **Tenant Recertifications**

In light of Victoria's absence, discussion on this is postponed until the next meeting.

(At this point, Dan Pereira and Brandon Kelly left the meeting.)

8. **Tenant Issues**

The Fire Department filed a 51-A Adult Protective Report for a tenant and a protective report for their dog too, stating they had observed the tenant is unable to adequately care for themselves or their dog. If not resolved, the tenant could lose their apartment and emotional support animal, which would be a disaster for them.

The opinion of our maintenance contractor Gerry is that there is not an ongoing problem, but there are often problems when a caretaker (for whatever reason) does not show up as scheduled. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the tenant is hiring their own caretakers rather than through Minuteman Senior Services. (Minuteman has the resources to arrange for backup coverage when a particular caretaker is unavailable.)

It was agreed that COA&HS will work with the tenant, the animal shelter, Minuteman Senior Services, and the Board of Health to help the tenant navigate and respond-to these challenges. The Housing Commission will add aids at the apartment to make it easier for the tenant to live there, including helping the tenant take better care of the dog, and simplify winter access and mail delivery challenges for them.

It was noted that as Landlord, the Housing Commission (unlike other organizations) has the right to enter and inspect the apartment. Doing this regularly may be necessary to ensure that things do not "spiral out of control" again in the future.

9. **Discussion: potential new Policy for "Affordable" Condos that do not sell**

Several Affordable Condominiums been out up for sale recently, with more likely to come on the market soon. It has been difficult to find qualified buyers for a variety of reasons. If a good faith effort to sell them fails, the unit can then be sold at market rate: it will remain counted on our SHI even though no longer owned by an income-qualified buyer. As a result, we maintain the letter of the law but are no longer fulfilling the spirit of it.

Allen has been contacted by some local nonprofits looking for housing that their employees or clients can afford. It might be possible for the town to facilitate the offering of these units to such organizations for purchase, then used to house their employees or clients. The units would remain on the SHI; and would also provide housing to those who cannot find affordable housing in the town. A model such as that used with Oriole Landing might work well, where the town “loans” the organization funds for the purchase or rehabilitation of the property in return for what is (legally) an unlimited-term interest-free mortgage: creating a lien that is paid back only if the property falls off the SHI.

This will be discussed at tomorrow morning’s Housing Coalition meeting. Another proposed solution will be presented by the Lincoln Foundation as well.

Some brainstorming was also done as to ways to support and encourage the development and protection of affordable (small “a”) housing in town. Ideas included facilitating the formation of a council of local organizations interested in promoting and supporting affordable housing; reaching out to specific individuals who have a strong interest in affordable housing (Rachel Drew has already been keeping a list of such people as she identifies them).

10. AAA Program Funding Approval

The commission reviewed the quote from the RHSO for launching and administering the AAA program. This amount was \$4800, plus an estimated \$1500 to \$2000 more for required advertising for the lottery used to build the program’s “ready renters list.”

Rachel Drew moved to approve the releasing of the necessary funds from our revolving fund for this purpose. Rakesh Karmacharya seconded. Roll Call Vote: Rakesh Karmacharya - Aye; Evan Gorman – Aye; Rachel Drew – Aye; Allen Vander Meulen – Aye. The motion passed unanimously. Elaine will inform Tim Higgins. Allen will ask Liz Rust to provide a status update at our next meeting.

11. Approval of Minutes from Jan. 5, 2022

Rachel Drew moved to approve the Jan 5, 2022 minutes as written. Evan Gorman seconded. Roll Call Vote: Rachel Drew – Aye; Evan Gorman – Aye; Rakesh Karmacharya - Aye; Allen Vander Meulen – Aye. The motion passed unanimously.

12. Adjourn

Rachel Drew moved to adjourn. Rakesh Karmacharya seconded. Roll Call Vote: Rachel Drew – Aye; Rakesh Karmacharya - Aye; Evan Gorman – Aye; Allen Vander Meulen – Aye. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 9:05pm.

Approved: March 2, 2022