

# LINCOLN HOUSING COMMISSION

## MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, March 2nd, 2023, 7:30 pm

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

**Also present:** *Peggy Elder, Lincoln Housing Commission Administrator; Julie Brogan and Neil Feinberg, Lincoln residents.*

*Chair Allen Vander Meulen called the meeting to order at 7:35pm as a virtual meeting pursuant to Gov. Baker's March 12, 2020 order; as extended on June 15, 2021, and further extended on July 16, 2022 with the Governor's signing of Senate Bill #2985, suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law.*

### 1. Victoria Benalfew Recognition and Thank You

This is Victoria's final regular meeting as a member of the commission, the Commission thanked her for her time on the Commission, and congratulated her on her new position as Administrative Assistant for the Lincoln Building Department.

### 2. Housing Commission Restructuring Status Update and Plans for Town Meeting

Rachel led a review of the draft motion as written by the Town's legal counsel. It was clear that there were several areas where the proposed motion did not agree with the Commission's express intent and constraints for the reorganization.

The concerns were:

- a) Section 2, Paragraph 1: Instead of expanding the commission to 7 members, the motion proposes that the Town be allowed to expand to 7 members via some future Town meeting vote, without the need for State Legislative approval. The problem is that this will require a future town meeting vote to make this change, and leaves the Commission without adequate members to handle our existing responsibilities and mission. Therefore, expansion to 7 members needs to be part of the current motion, not left for a future effort (and another Town Meeting vote).
- b) Section 2, Paragraph 2: The Commission feels it is important to expand the Commission to add members as empowered representatives of two specific constituencies who are directly impacted by the work and mission of the Commission. The intent was to have one representative appointed representing those in Lincoln who are often in need of support services, particularly (but not exclusively) older residents, hence the requirement to nominate a person to the Commission who will represent this constituency. A second and separate (though overlapping) constituency are those who are residents of affordable housing in Lincoln, hence the requirement that this second representative be a resident of such housing in Lincoln.

Rachel will modify the passages in question to match our intent, review the changes with Allen, and then work with Tim Higgins, Jennifer Glass, and Town Counsel, to phrase it correctly.

### **3. Housing Commission CPC Funding Status Update and Plans for Town Meeting**

Allen noted that all of our proposed funding for our several renovation and repair projects will be coming through the CPC. No ARPA funds will be provided. *(He forgot to mention that he will be making some “backup slides” on these projects and their funding for use at Town Meeting, if needed.)*

### **4. Tenant Recertification Status Update**

Victoria reported that all Tenant rent change letters were sent out earlier this week.

One tenant, who failed to submit any recertification documentation despite repeated requests, has been sent a letter informing them that their rent will increase to HUD’s “Fair Market Value” for the area as of May 1 (roughly double their current rate). The letter gives them 60 days notice of the increase. We hope they will use this time to submit their documentation and complete the process.

### **5. Housing Choice Act Workgroup Status Update**

Rachel was unable to attend the most recent HCAWG meeting, but thanked Jennifer for providing the link to a video recording of the meeting, which she watched later on. Most of the work right now is focused on developing a communications strategy to gather opinions and input. They were also given a grant to hire a Technical Assistant to help the group “walk through the process [of determining what zoning changes to make, and where in town] and to do it right.”

Around eight towns have not complied with the HCA’s requirement to submit a letter of intent by January of this year, outlining how they plan to achieve compliance. Some of these towns are benefitting from the new MBTA South Shore rail line, and it may be they see no benefit to complying with the act at this time.

Lincoln, like many towns, are raising concerns with the State that the HCA mandates compliance based on the towns having MBTA service, but there is no commitment (yet) from the state (or the MBTA) to maintain if not improve service in these same towns.

The new Technical Assistant uses an automated tool to help the town determine whether what a town is proposing conforms to HCA terms, whether certain properties are eligible, and whether particular zoning and building code requirements might need to change (or not). This takes out a lot of the effort that would have gone into Lincoln Staff learning how to do this – and model it – on their own. Major timesaver.

### **6. Maintenance & Tenant Status**

#### *a. Radon remediation status*

No report.

#### *b. 30 Sunnyside Furnace Repair Status*

The new system went in smoothly and on time, the tenant did not need (or want) to move out while the work was done, although this was offered: the weather was warm, so there was no need to move out.

The air returns on the existing furnace were inadequate and would likely cause reliability issues with the new furnace and was a health issue due to blowing dirt and dust from the

basement through the house. Therefore, since it was necessary and also because the cost of the project with this remained within his authorized limit, Evan approved the additional work needed to rectify the situation..

c. *Other maintenance issues*

Some repairs to the septic system serving 28 Sunnyside were authorized by Gerry. Apparently, they were needed due to excessive water levels. Allen recalled this being an issue reported by the Septic Maintenance company when we had the systems pumped and inspected last fall.

**7. Planning Board Activity Update (The Commons, Accessory Apartment Zoning Updates)**

Allen reported that The Commons has withdrawn their application for a permit to expand, which was expected to be a major item of discussion at Town Meeting this year. Although there were some issues in terms of understanding and conforming to the town's process and zoning requirements, the main issue was that the project had not been adequately vetted with The Commons' own residents. They are taking a step back to solicit input from their residents and address the concerns in a revised plan, to be presented at a special Town Meeting (hopefully) in the Fall of 2023.

The Planning Board is working on some Accessory Apartment Zoning Bylaw updates. None of these directly impact the Housing Commission, but are mainly to streamline the process of granting Special Permits – which at present require what is essentially a rubber stamp approval from the Planning Board, and then is passed on to the Zoning Board of Appeals for a second review and approval.

**8. Liaison Status Reports**

a. *Select Board and IDEA*

Jennifer reported that a second IDEA training session was held yesterday, and that after town meeting there will be a town-wide survey, working to feedback and input from as many people as possible.

b. *Affordable Housing Liaison Status Update*

Donald has been invited to be on the Climate Action Committee, and noted that the Housing Commission was – to his knowledge - the only town board or commission not represented there.

Allen noted that Donald had tried to file papers as a candidate for election to the Housing Commission, but could not because he is not a U.S. Citizen. However (and as confirmed by Peggy) he could be appointed to a seat on the commission, as long as he is a Lincoln resident.

c. *COA&HS Status*

Terry reported that the COA&HS is continuing to work to extend the Snap program to make locally grown agricultural (i.e., Farmer's Market) products more accessible to those receiving SNAP benefits. Codman Farm has been a valuable local resource in support of supporting SNAP for locally grown food. Other local farms are not currently SNAP providers; this is likely due to them not being open enough each day (and only seasonally); and not supporting electronic payment (i.e., EBT) transactions. The state has now increased the funding from

about \$25 per person per month to \$50. This is a significant increase, but still far short of the need.

d. *Community Center Building Committee Update*

No report at this time. Evan was unable to attend the most recent meeting, and has limited time to spare for this. He asked if others on the Commission might want to take this on. ...Neil (later in the meeting) said he would like to do so, once he is elected.

**9. Commission Vacancies & Candidates / Q&A for Candidates**

Julie thanked the commission for inviting her, and looks forward to joining the commission following the upcoming election.

Neil, by virtue of his long experience as a volunteer in town government, and his experience as a journalist, shared a number of thoughts, questions, and suggestions, with respect to the proposal to expand the Commission, and its presentation at this year's Town Meeting.

This provoked an extended discussion that was both fruitful and beneficial: providing ideas for refining the presentation itself, and ways to inform the town, such as a handout available at the meeting, a recorded presentation (or slide deck) for the Town Meeting website (which Peggy can upload for us), and perhaps also publication on Lincoln Squirrel and LincolnTalk. ..."A little outreach will go a long way." Compromise positions (if converting the Commission to an all-appointed body proves to be controversial) were also discussed.

**10. Other Business**

No other items.

**11. Approval of Draft Minutes**

Allen moved to approve both the January 25 and February 16 minutes as written. Evan seconded. Roll Call Vote: Victoria – aye; Evan – aye; Rachel – aye; and Allen – aye. The motion carried unanimously.

**12. Adjourn**

Rachel moved to adjourn the meeting. Evan seconded. Roll Call Vote: Allen – aye; Rachel – aye; Evan – aye; and Victoria – aye. The motion carried unanimously.