

Housing Coalition
(Housing Commission, Affordable Housing Trust
and Lincoln Foundation)
Regular Meeting Minutes on Zoom
April 7, 2021, 7:00 PM

Affordable Housing Trust Members: James Craig, Co-Chair, George Georges, Co-Chair, Nancy Marshall and Terri Morgan and Keith Gilbert

Housing Commission Members: Allen Vander Meulen, Chair, Evan Gorman, Co-Chair, Victoria Benalfew, Keith Gilbert and Rachel Drew

Lincoln Foundation Member: Terri Morgan, Pres., Jack Holbrook and Rhonda Swain

(Member not available: AHT: B-J Scheff)

Others Present: Paula Vaughn, Director of Planning and Land Use, Kathleen O'Donnell, Attorney; Elizabeth Rust, RHSO, and Elaine Carroll, Adm. Assistant

The meeting started at 7:13 p.m. with a determination that there were quorums for all of the boards.

Battle Road Farm:

The first matter is the small loan/grant program to assist qualified owners which the Lincoln Foundation has been working on. Terri Morgan said based on the many discussions we have had over the past months prompted by input from St. Vincent DePaul and the Council on Aging there are many needy families at Battle Road Farm. One of the ways we could help them and also help keep our housing stock in good order would be to give them a small grant for home repairs that are absolutely essential for health and safety. Liz Rust shared with us the grant programs other surrounding towns are doing and Lincoln Foundation has given those grants in past in 2007. So it is not a new idea and help has been needed because some people in the affordable units are having trouble keeping up with repairs because their income may have gone down since moving into their units. We wanted to start the program again but have the administration of it done by RHSO so that it would not look like we were playing favorites. Keith Gilbert asked where the money comes from. Terri said the Lincoln Foundation has enough money to fund six small grants of \$5,000 for people who cannot access rental assistance programs. The condo rates keep going up because this is an old place and it needs to be fixed up.

The grant is based on income level which is capped at 80% AMI and choosing the most desperate cases based on health and safety issues and does not need to be paid back. For the grants given in 2007 only one unit was sold and all others are still in their units. It does not make sense to put a lien on their property. We want these units to stay on the housing inventory and to stay livable. Some of the language in the grant program was taken from the Concord program. Nancy Marshall asked if this was made worse because of COVID-19, but Terri said she thinks it is a long-term problem because condo fees and taxes go up but income does not and sometimes it goes down when people retire. Rachel Drew said the due date says May 1 which is only 3 weeks away. Terri said it should be a couple of months for the applicant to apply and a couple of months for a decision to be made. Evan Gorman said this is a good program but seems like there are more people in need and the units are not getting any better. How do we solve this? Terri said this is a jumpstart pilot program and something we need to discuss with the Housing Coalition to help others in Town make needed repairs. James Craig said just doing this for a year could then prompt further discussion among the Coalition about what the need is and what we can do going forward.

Kathleen O'Donnell commented that Lincoln Foundation is not going to write a check to the homeowner for \$5,000, but instead pay the contractor or supplier when the job is done. Terri said that would be the case. Liz Rust said the program started in Sudbury in 2011 and they continue to run it on a 2 grant cycle per year. They have a meeting tomorrow night and they have 3 requests so there is still interest in Sudbury. They authored the program to help keep seniors in their homes but it is open across the board with 30% of the applicants from

deed restricted properties and 60-70% seniors. They probably spend \$20,000 to \$22,000 a year and it is run similarly in Concord, Bedford and Weston and RHSO administers all of them. Bedford has 80% AMI and Sudbury and Concord have 100% AMI. There are adjustments that can be made. The program usually requires three quotes but with COVID-19 it is down to two quotes but I am not sure what Lincoln has in their grant program. The applicants work with Laura Laskin in our office and she helps the applicants pull the information together to make sure the package is complete. We then prepare the packages redacted for public meeting review so that the group making the awards does not know who the owner is or the address. Once the decision is made we also make sure the owner knows that if the work goes over the \$5,000 limit they are responsible for anything over that and their money goes in first. Award letters go out either on your letterhead or RHSO's letterhead. Liz had Kathleen O'Donnell look over the grant agreement to make sure we can use public funds. This kind of program is not CPA eligible. Lincoln can use the standard grant agreement or tweak it, but that can be decided. They have a year to do the work. They are responsible for all permits and RHSO does not do any inspections or take any ownership for the work itself. Pictures are taken before and after the work and payment goes to the contractor with their W-9 form.

James Craig said the issue before us is that Lincoln Foundation would like RHSO to administer the program and they have provided an estimate of \$2,400 to do the work. The issue is that since Lincoln Foundation will be tapped out, the \$2,400 would come out of Housing Trust funds. We currently use CPA funds to pay for our agreement with RHSO on a year by year basis but this would be above and beyond that assigned amount. Do we want to vote to transfer at least that amount of \$2,400 to the general fund in order to fund this or just be able to administer this for the upcoming year? George Georges felt there was a lot of paperwork and interaction with applicants and wondered if \$2,400 was enough. Liz said it is only 5 grants and is a pilot program. She has worked with Terri already on some of the documents so that amount is good to go. It is an estimate and we work on an hourly basis but that is our best guess from doing similar work. Nancy asked what the alternative would be to this and Terri said it will be the Lincoln Foundation volunteers doing the work and it would not be as professional. Kathleen said this kind of work is best done by someone like the RHSO or a person hired by the Town as a housing consultant and not by a Town employee.

James said there is about \$600,000 in the AHT funds so it is safe to say we could absorb the \$2,400 for this year. The Housing Coalition should meet on a more regular basis so we can hear updates on how this is going and proactively decide where we may want to go based on the results of the pilot program. James Craig made a motion that the Housing Trust vote to transfer \$2,400 from its funds to the Town's general funds for the purpose of covering the cost of adding hours to the RHSO contract in FY21 for RHSO to administer the small grant program on behalf of the Lincoln Foundation. George Georges seconded the motion. Roll Call Vote: George Georges-aye; Keith Gilbert-aye; Nancy Marshall-aye; Terri Morgan-aye; James Craig-aye.

Update from Housing Commission on Affordable Accessory Apartment Program:

Allen said that Pam Gallup put the Affordable Accessory Apartment Bylaw (AAA) together and a month before she passed away the last piece of the program made it through the legislature after about 3 years of being on hold, and it was signed by the Governor at the end of January, which is the tax rebate program. Now that it is in place we need to come back to see if the AHT funds originally committed are still there. Basically the AAA program allows people to turn excess space or an unpermitted apartment into a dwelling unit, which originally was a way to keep us above the 10% SHI. Now with the tax rebate program, it would also give some relief from their property taxes and also encourage diversity of housing as well as enabling people who could not afford to live in Lincoln scattered throughout Town rather than centralized in one or two spots. The program was coordinated with DHCD. In January of 2017, the AHT offered \$125,000 for the grant program with the idea being if you create an affordable unit you could apply for a forgivable loan of \$25,000, which after 10 years on the program would be forgiven. The program with all its pieces is now in place. We would need RHSO to get the administrative portion up and running and then we could launch the program. This would have kept us above 10% through 2020 but that was before Oriole Landing.

Kathleen said this was based on a similar program in Carlisle and she would be surprised if there were more than one or two units that have gone through the program. It has not been widely successful in the number of towns that have adopted it. That may change because accessory dwelling units are now easier to create under the new Housing Choices Act and the tax rebate program may make it more attractive because of higher property taxes. Carlisle does not have the tax rebate or grant programs. Allen said he is still getting questions about the program. Pam was hoping to get 5 homeowners from the initial effort. James said the Planning Board has a zoning amendment coming before Town Meeting concerning accessory apartments. Paula Vaughn said we are seeing people coming to the Planning Board for recommendations for accessory units for multi-generational living, caregivers, adult children that may have handicaps and currently the Zoning bylaw requires the structure to be at least 10 years old and any addition can only be 10% of the existing house, which is putting a burden on modest-sized houses. This means the revised zoning bylaw will get rid of the 10 year age requirement so the structure or addition can be new. To lessen fears that we are opening the floodgates they are putting a cap of 5% of all residential units and accessory apartments count as residential units. We are also putting in an exclusion so that any affordable unit will not count toward this 5% cap. Paula had a discussion with DHCD and they could not tell me of any communities that had been able to make a go of the AAA program. If you do the program through DHCD it would count on the SHI. James said we are not going to get to the bottom of this tonight. We also need to get back to a regular meeting schedule. In 2017 the Housing Trust was supportive of an outlay of \$125,000 but then we spent a million dollars on Oriole Landing, which now puts us over 10% for the foreseeable future. This is something we need to discuss with the Trust and Coalition to see what our priorities are going forward. Liz will give Allen an estimate for the cost of getting the AAA program up and running. Allen also said we should discuss the fact that the Rental Assistance Program and the RHSO draw from the CPA funds and if these are sustainable ways to fund these programs.

Update on South Lincoln Planning process, including implications of the recently enacted Housing Choice Act:

James said it looks like we have been able to secure funds to conduct a comprehensive review of the septic situation in the South Lincoln Station area and have been able to reach out to Community Builders who run Lincoln Woods and they are going to sort of join us in a review of the septic. They own the system and we need to know what the current condition of the septic system is, what additional capacity could it reasonably take on and if they are willing to work with the Town in allowing that capacity to be utilized if the Town votes to approve some zoning changes in that area to allow for additional growth there. The other timely thing is the new Housing Choice legislation. Paula said she will break it down to two acts. The first is how many votes you need to pass a zoning bylaw. Normally it takes a two-thirds vote but when zoning bylaws are about housing that vote has been reduced to a majority which is a huge difference. It is very difficult to get a two-thirds vote when different groups can pick apart different parts of the project. Any zoning in South Lincoln could possibly only require a majority vote. We will be looking to put together a coalition of different groups in Town that would be supportive of some mixed use or denser housing there near transit to help support the Mall, to further goals of diversity and include green energy. We are hoping to get these groups around the vision of a vital walkable pedestrian friendly Town center.

The second part of the Housing Choice Act is about MBTA communities which Lincoln is one. What the act says is an MBTA community shall have a zone of reasonable size which is yet to be determined within half mile of a train station that allows up to at least 15 units per acre by right. It is supposed to be family friendly so no one bedroom units. We are still waiting for guidance from DHCD. The Town will negotiate with DHCD and the MBTA to see if the proposal will meet the intent of the legislation so it is a bit up in the air. We had a presentation from Town council and he thought it was going to take months to get a handle on what the Town is really going to be expected to do. Because we are a MBTA community and because we want to do something in Lincoln Station, this dovetails nicely with this legislation. We are hoping we can put something together that the Town will support and like to see. The penalties for not complying with the laws are that we cannot apply for Housing Choice grants or Mass. Works grants, which are significant money for infrastructure that we could use if the Town wants to do some development in the Lincoln Station area for septic and water. Lincoln was

also designated a Housing Choice community on March 31, which gives us exclusive access to Housing Choice grants and points on Mass. Works applications for grants. This is an automatic change at the State level that affects cities and towns as well. James said it is important to make sure the Housing Coalition is updated on what is going on to have the ability to help shape and influence what we are trying to do there. We have the added factors of having to comply with some of the requirements of this new legislation so we do not lose out on any grant opportunities. It is an exciting time to potentially bring something before the Town to shape and transform that area for decades to come. Hopefully we will continue to provide regular updates and have opportunities to have regular meetings as well as planning special events and forums, and look out soon for a survey going out Town wide once it is finished. The Housing Coalition is going to play a major role in this as well and be on the lookout for opportunities for formal participation by our housing groups.

Update on the Town's Diversity and Anti-racism Initiative:

James said the Board of Selectmen recently approved the creation of a diversity and anti-racism task force. The charge is available on the Town website along with a request for volunteers. We are hoping to get this up and running shortly. From discussions early this year and late last year there has been a lot of talk about how we could work to increase diversity in Town through different housing choices that we could put together. Certainly the affordable apartment zoning change and looking at South Lincoln as an area for housing opportunities certainly plays a part in this. If any of you have not seen the charge or are interested in volunteering, I would urge you to go to the Town website or the Lincoln Squirrel for an application. The focus on diversity and inclusion is moving along on a lot of different fronts and I encourage everyone to participate in as much as possible because it brings a very different prospect. James also said we should be meeting more regularly to stay on top of everything that is happening. The next AHT meeting will be the first or second week in May.

At 8:30 p.m., Allen Vander Meulen made a motion to adjourn the meeting. James Craig seconded the motion. Roll Call Vote: Nancy Marshall-aye; Terri Morgan-aye; James Craig-aye; Allen Vander Meulen-aye; Evan Gorman-aye; Victoria Benalfew-aye.

Submitted by Elaine Carroll

Approved: September 23, 2021