

LINCOLN HOUSING COMMISSION
Minutes
Wednesday, September 1, 2021 7:00 p.m.

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

Also present: Elaine Carroll, Housing Commission Administrative Assistant; Rakesh Karmacharya, Guest; Abigail Butt (COA Director); Gerry O'Doherty (Housing Commission Maintenance Contractor).

The meeting was called to order by Allen Vander Meulen, Chair, at 7:12pm.

1. Candidate(s) to replace Keith Gilbert

The sole candidate to fill the position, Rakesh Karmacharya, was present. It was noted that Rakesh is a former Commission member.

Rakesh said he is interested in returning to the Commission due to his background (and that of many others he knows) who are immigrants to this country. He is especially interested in promoting intergenerational contact and diversity through housing, and believes that “thinking outside the box” will be important to achieving the Commission’s goals over the next decade or two.

Evan Gorman moved that the Commission recommend Rakesh’s candidacy to the Board of Selects. Victoria seconded the motion. . A roll call vote was taken (per standard Zoom Meeting procedure) Evan - Aye; Victoria – Aye; Allen - Aye. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Status Reports

a. Maintenance (Evan)

75 Tower Rd

One of the tenants at 75 Tower has provided a list of maintenance issues they feel need rectification, listed as follows with the discussion and actions taken relative to each. Gerry provided a summary of the status of each issue.

1) Decking – The decking needed repair, this was completed over the summer. In fact, the work was already underway by the time Gerry saw the tenant’s letter.

2) Trees – there are several trees that the tenant feels are problematic for reasons of safety or are likely to cause damage to the property. Since this is town-owned land, the DPW would be responsible for maintaining the trees that are actually on the property. (Evan will ask the DPW to come out and determine what tree maintenance needs to be done.)

3) Heating – To Gerry’s knowledge the new Heating contractor has resolved all of the issues we were having with the Navian heating and A/C systems at 75 Tower Rd.

4) Toilet – this has been an ongoing complaint since the tenant moved in. Multiple rounds of maintenance and checking, including replacing the unit, have been done. There are no mechanical issues with the unit and waste lines: it is all functioning as it should. Abigail Butt suggested that Victoria might be able to connect with the tenant as she does his recertification and learn more about what the specific issues are.

5) Driveway – this is a perennial issue that will require substantial preparation and permission from the Conservation Commission. Evan is working on this.

6) Trash – the tenant’s existing trash can is unable to stop racoons from getting into his trash. It was agreed the commission will purchase a new mini-shed that holds two trash cans for him. We will also ask the other tenant if they want a one, and it was noted by Gerry

that several of these mini-sheds already at the Sunnyside apartments are in very bad shape. He will pick up a new unit for the tenant at 75 Tower, check with the other tenant to see if they need one, and check/replace the units that are in bad shape at the Sunnyside properties.

Rakesh suggested we send a response letter to the tenant with the current status and further plans for each of his concerns. Evan will write and send such an email to the tenant.

28 Sunnyside

The tenant is doing well. She does need her bedroom floor replaced, which should be done soon. The tenant has reported that she is worried about trees in her yard, although Gerry sees no trees at any of the Sunnyside properties that would impact the buildings themselves. Evan will take a look at all the Sunnyside complex and if needed will request tree maintenance from DPW.

b. COA (Victoria)

Victoria was unable to attend the most recent COA meeting and deferred to Abigail.

Abigail reported that the Lincoln Rental Assistance Program (LRAP) is in full swing, working through their waitlist. People entering the program are very interested and excited. She feels that they will need to reconfigure their policies next year. The program was originally envisioned as a max 3 year “get you back on your feet” program. However, the majority of people entering the program is already in Affordable Housing, and is either disabled or elderly. These are not people who will be able to “get back on their feet”. So, perhaps the program should be modified to have a category for the elderly and disabled, who do not have a limited time to get assistance.

The discussion then turned to ongoing funding for the LRAP program. The town administration has informed the CPC that the town has no other possible sources of funding for the program, so if the CPC will not fund it, the program will cease to exist. Evan reported (and Abigail agreed) that the CPC is still very supportive of the program and its goals, but are concerned about having to deal with funding requests for it every year – might be better to make a long term commitment, as the CPC did for funding the Town Hall renovation.

It was pointed out that, especially in years when there are more requests than funds available, this funding of the LRAP program through the CPC could impact the amount of money transferred from the CPC to the Housing Trust (in observance of the required minimum of 10% of CPA funds going to “Affordable Housing” each year). Therefore, we should confer with the Housing Trust on any Housing-related CPC requests, such as the LRAP program.

In response to Allen’s suggestion that we talk with Thomas Stanley (our Rep to the State’s House of Representatives), Abigail said she will ask about this in the Housing Legislative Task Force meeting she’ll be attending later this week; some State legislators will be attending that meeting. The ARPA program’s funds – of which the town is getting \$2 million – might be of help, especially for the LRAP program.

c. SLPAC & Diversity (Rachel)

Rachel was absent and therefore unable to provide a status update.

d. Housing Trust – Evan

A Housing Trust meeting has not been scheduled yet, although a Housing Coalition meeting will be held soon. (*The Housing Coalition meeting is at 8:00am on September 23rd, Housing Commission members need to attend so that we have a quorum.*)

Evan's appointment to the Housing Trust is currently pending the review and approval of the Board of Selects.

e. AAA Program – Allen

No new developments to report.

d. Recertifications (Victoria)

Victoria conferred with Diana, who sent Victoria a cover letter and some other paperwork to support the process. They plan on sitting down together to go over the process soon. Allen pointed out that the process is already underway.

Elaine said that all but 28 and 30A Sunnyside have already turned in at least some of their paperwork. The need at this point is to coordinate with Liz Rust at the RHSO and make sure the tenants finish gathering their documentation together and turn it in within a reasonable amount of time.

3. Discussion: ARPA Brainstorming (per Tim Higgin's email of August 9th)

This money is intended to be infrastructure and recovery-related. Positions cannot be directly funded. But, money could be given to organizations that are engaged in helping those impacted by the COVID shutdown.

Abigail is on the Town's ARPA Task Force, and could act as a Liaison on behalf of the Housing Commission, if we provide her with a written list of items or ideas, such as funding for the LRAP program or perhaps a similar fund the Housing Commission could use to help its own tenants.

When asked for his opinion, Rakesh expressed concerns about how these needs are long term, but the ARPA program is a short term fix. Not a good idea to fund LRAP, or any such program, using a one-time government grant.

Other possibilities (raised by Victoria) include child-care programs, or summer camp scholarships. Abigail agreed that Summer Camp scholarships are a really beneficial proposal, since many parents in town rely on this for childcare during the summer, and the program is expensive. There are some funds available for this through the Parks & Rec commission, but far from sufficient. Many families get some help from Parks & Rec, then go to other sources, such as St. Vincent DePaul, for more.

4. Rental Freeze

Abigail mentioned that one of our tenants (one of two who completed their last recertification early, before the COVID shutdown in March 2020) is currently struggling to pay their rent, and has approached the COA for help. The amount of help they have requested matches the amount their rent went up as a result of the last recertification. The problem is that the last recertification did rental calculations in strict accordance with DHCD regulations, meaning that medical expenses are not deducted from income when making the rental calculation. Apparently, when Pam was doing recertifications (prior to 2020), she “grandfathered-in” those tenants whose leases began before DHCD changed their regulations to prohibit medical deductions. This was not done in the 2020 recertification, much to the consternation of at least two tenants.

The commission also agreed that it wasn’t fair that the two tenants who completed their recertifications early last time around be in effect penalized (having their rent raised) for doing the right thing.

After much discussion, the Commission agreed that out of a sense of fairness to those who completed their recertifications on-time last year, the commission will retroactively freeze the rental rate on all tenants to what their rent was as of January 1, 2020. And, that this freeze will remain effective through December 31, 2021.

Evan Gorman made the motion, Victoria Benalfew seconded. A roll call vote was taken (per standard Zoom Meeting procedure) Evan - Aye; Victoria – Aye; Allen - Aye. The motion passed unanimously.

Elaine will send out a letter to the tenants affected. It will be noted in the letter that what will happen to their rents after the end of this calendar year is still to be determined by the Housing Commission. Any credit the tenants receive as a result of the retroactive freeze will be applied to their present and future rental payments.

5. Car Policy – Allen

Other than noting some activity with one of the vehicles – the tenant appears to be emptying it – there have been no inquiries or concerns raised by the tenants with regards to the new car policy. Abigail reported that the COA has not received any requests for assistance, either. The tenant at 26 Sunnyside is planning on selling their vehicle, may need help locating or replacing their title to it. Allen plans to send out a reminder notice in about a month, reminding tenants that enforcement for the new policy will begin on December 1st.

6. Approval of minutes from August 4, 2021

Victoria moved to accept the August 4th, 2021 minutes as written. Evan Seconded. A roll call vote was taken (per standard Zoom Meeting procedure) Evan - Aye; Victoria – Aye; Allen - Aye. The motion passed unanimously.

7. Schedule

Upcoming meeting dates were reviewed: the Housing Coalition meeting on September 23rd at 8:00am, and the next Housing Commission meeting on October 7th at 7:00pm. Both meetings will be via Zoom. There was no further discussion, nor any need to vote on either of these.

8. Adjournment

Victoria moved to adjourn the meeting. Evan seconded. A roll call vote was taken (per standard Zoom Meeting procedure) Evan - Aye; Victoria – Aye; Allen - Aye. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 8:37pm.

Submitted by Allen Vander Meulan

Approved: October 6, 2021