



Affordable Housing Committee

Town of Hinesburg

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Meeting Minutes – November 29, 2023 In-person and Zoom Meeting – 7:00 PM (Town Hall Third Floor Conference Room)

Committee Members Present: Carl Bohlen, Roberta MacDonald, Beth Whitlock, Dave Nagel, Andy Miller, and Dale Wernhoff

Also Present: Todd Odit, Hinesburg Town manager, and Kayla Gutfran, Member Services Business Partner at Vermont Smoke and Cure

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at approximately 7:05 PM.

Additions/Deletions to Agenda: There were no additions or deletions to the agenda.

Public Comment: There were no members of the public present.

Housing Fund Discussion, Todd Odit will join us: Todd Odit, Hinesburg Town Manager, sent Carl an email last month about setting up a special tax rate. This tax would feed a fund with the proceeds going to the Hinesburg Conservation Commission and the Hinesburg Affordable Housing Committee. Todd's thinking is instead of having to ask for a yearly funding request from the town budget, a dedicated tax rate would provide some certainty in the funding, which we could then leverage for grant applications or loans. Todd thinks the split between the two groups should be 50/50 because he sees land conservation and affordable housing as going together. His concern is that without specific projects in mind for the funds we would be raising tax dollars that might not be spent. Todd is thinking that, if we proceed and the voters agree, we collect the tax for a period of ten years and then pause and reassess the effectiveness of the fund. If it works, then the voters can be asked to renew it after the ten years is up.

Beth asked if Todd had any idea how much money may be raised by this tax. Todd responded he thinks it would be better to figure out what's an appropriate amount to raise and then set the tax rate to meet that goal. Todd mentioned the town is starting a reappraisal of properties so the grand list will probably double in a couple of years, so we would want to set the tax rate to account for that.

Roberta stated she's lived in other towns where groups were funded by a percentage of the tax rate. She was wondering what a 1% tax would raise. Todd said at the current grand list, a penny on the tax rate would raise \$65,000. In two years, that penny would rise to \$130,000. Todd said the advantage of making this a tax rate is the funds would no longer be subject to every annual budget

request. The problem is figuring out what to set the tax rate at, so we aren't asking for too much but also not asking for too little.

Carl said we had asked for \$5000 in funds from the 2025 budget and was wondering what the Conservation Commission had requested. Todd said they had asked for \$30,000. He then clarified that if we ask for funds through the general fund budget as we have in the past, any unused funds will roll back into the town coffers at the end of the year. If we raised money through a dedicated tax rate, any unused funds would stay in a reserve fund and carry over year to year for that purpose. Carl thought we already had our funds earmarked to carry over in a reserve fund, but Todd said the Select Board had yet to create a reserve fund for affordable housing.

Carl was wondering what the Select Board thought of this proposal. Todd said he's brought it up with them a couple of times. He said they support affordable housing but want to make sure the money is needed. Andy said he feels any funds we would put up would be catalytic to opening doors to additional larger funding sources. Andy also stated he agrees in concept with pairing the Conservation Commission and the Affordable Housing Committee together for this fund but in practicality thinks there will be issues. Andy thinks it will also be a challenge to get the tax rate passed. Todd agreed, saying a town survey from two years ago showed a lot of support for land conservation but very little support for affordable housing, which is why Todd thinks linking the two together would be a good strategy. Carl has heard from one of the members of the Conservation Commission and they are lukewarm to the idea of sharing a fund with us. Todd believes the town has put much more money towards land conservation over affordable housing for the last 30 years, and Carl agreed. Carl also agreed with Andy, saying that if we don't kick in any funds then a project will have a tougher time going after the big money sources. Todd concurred, saying this is just an idea that he thought of, and it's worked in other communities. (Todd left at 7:30 PM.)

Affordable Housing Discussion, Kayla Gutfran, VT Smoke & Cure, will join us: Kayla Gutfran, Member Services Business Partner at Vermont Smoke and Cure, attended tonight's meeting to discuss the issues a local employer has with employees finding adequate housing. Kayla is new to the company and new to Vermont so she can speak for both her and employees about the housing search. For herself, she looked all over the area but the closest affordable one-bedroom rental she could find was in Waterbury Center. Through company surveys, the team at Vermont Smoke and Cure says the pay is okay, and the benefits are great, but it's hard to find housing in the area. They have a lot of turnover due to absences caused by the commute, the bus schedule not aligning with their shift hours or a lack of a reliable source of transportation. They do have a lot of out-of-state applicants who would be traveling quite a distance to work here. They are looking to include relocation bonuses in their budget next year to assist new employees. Over half of their employees live within a 15-mile radius of Hinesburg. About ten percent of the employees live at home with their parents. They have had a handful of instances where employees were homeless, with one person living out of their car. This impacts the business because it increases employee turnover, putting more pressure on the remaining employees to take up the slack. Their turnover rate is seven percent per month, with the top three reasons for leaving being personal reasons, career advancement, and attendance.

Roberta mentioned using Front Porch Forum (FPF) to get information on rental units out to employers, and HomeShare Vermont as a potential source for employees looking for housing. Kayla thinks being able to be a part of FPF as an employer to aid out-of-state recruits would be a good idea because you need a local address to join the forum.

Carl asked how long did Kayla's housing search take. She stated that from the time she started looking to when she found her apartment was three months. Roberta asked what percentage of her salary she was using on housing. Kayla said she's right at 30%. Carl then asked was the attendance issue a reason the employee left or a reason the employer had to let them go. Kayla said it was the latter, and it usually ends up being a no-call/no-show job abandonment situation. (Kayla left at 7:45 PM.)

Roberta said she would like us to be a clearing house for potential affordable housing for walking-distance employers in town. If someone has a place for rent, let the Hinesburg Affordable Housing Committee know, and we could share that info with local employers to give their employees a shot at getting the rental unit. Carl said it could also work in reverse, where an employer would notify us, they have a new employee looking for housing and we could help to see if any is available. Andy suggested a company could bring some value to the resource, such as securing a lease for three months and the new employee could live there. That would give the employee time to find housing or extend the lease themselves. Roberta thought that was a great idea and thinks Kayla would be open to that. Andy thinks employers will have to be proactive like that and Roberta agreed.

Carl asked if Roberta and Andy could put together a proposal that brokers this information between employers, employees, and folks with places to rent. It could be an FPF announcement, or we could contact the local economic development committee or some other group. Roberta said she would be happy to work on that. Dave mentioned the Hinesburg Business Association is dormant right now. Roberta replied that the Charlotte Shelburne Hinesburg Rotary is still going and that may be a good partner.

ADU Follow-Up Discussion: The video of our 10/26/23 ADU forum is on our committee's page on the town's website. There are some quality issues with it. We still need to add the PowerPoint presentations from the various presenters. Kathy Beyer of Evernorth contacted Mascoma Bank but they are not going to do anything specific for ADUs. Committee member Xander Patterson contacted the National Bank of Middlebury, and they are interested in an ADU loan program. Carl is going to see if Xander could invite them to our January meeting.

Framework Plan Discussion: Dave sent out a framework to try to get out to the public what our committee does and try to change the interest in town on the issue. He suggests we do a series of articles for the local papers that explain a topic. Dave thinks some of the items in the housing needs assessment and other topics that are germane to us would be a good mix. He's trying to come up with a list of the four or five most important topics to tackle first. We were all in agreement that this was a good idea to pursue.

Carl suggested we take a moment to discuss our budget request with the Select Board on 12/13/23. After much discussion, we decided to ask for \$5000 for next year and have any remaining funds from this year's budget put into a reserve fund, set up by the Select Board, for affordable housing. Beth also wondered if we could do more in-kind options in place of cash, such as impact fee

reductions, because a tax rate for affordable housing probably won't pass. Andy agreed with this assessment. Dave also agreed and wondered if there is any money in the current budget that would be helpful as catalytic money for Windy Ridge.

Committee Report for the Town Report: Dale started on our committee's annual report for the town report. He'll have something out to the committee for review in the next few days so it can be submitted to the town by the 12/15/23 deadline.

Updates on Various Topics: Carl had the following updates on various projects in town.

- Hinesburg Center Phase 2: They are still in Act 250 review, but need to run a different flood plain model that considers the latest flood data.
- Joe Laster Property: The current zoning map has the project in two different zoning districts. Alex Weinlagen, Hinesburg Director for Planning and Zoning, suggests moving the zoning line to the east so a full project buildout can occur. The Hinesburg Conservation Commission is opposed because moving the line could impact wildlife core habitat and may result in the development of an old-growth forest farther east. Carl believes that the line could be moved with minimal impact on the habitat, and Joe has stated he doesn't plan to develop the old-growth forest. With that knowledge, Carl is going to draft a letter of support for the project to present to the Planning Commission. Before submitting it, he will send it out to committee members for review after we've watched the video of the last Planning Commission meeting. Beth wondered how Joe was planning on providing the quantity of affordable units that his project would require. Carl said Joe may be compelled to work with Champlain Housing Trust to get the backing needed.
- See pages 5 and 6 of these minutes for Meeting Information memos from Carl which provide additional data.

Consider Next Guests to Discuss Affordable Housing: As stated above, Xander will check with the National Bank of Middlebury about attending our next meeting.

Approve Minutes from October 25th: We reviewed the 10/25/23 minutes. Roberta motioned they are to be approved and Dave seconded. They were approved by voice vote.

Motion to Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:45 PM.

Next Meeting –

January 24th – Time and topics to be determined; see agenda on the town website.

Respectfully submitted,

Dale Wernhoff
HAHC Secretary

Further information on Some Agenda Items (November 2023)

Housing Fund Discussion with Todd Odit

I sent Todd the questions below that were raised during our discussion of this idea at our October meeting.

1. How would the fund be managed and shared between the two purposes? Would there be a minimum floor amount for each purpose if funds were approved for a project or use?
2. What is the proposed article wording?
3. What happens if the article is not passed in terms of HAHC keeping a budget request at \$5000 instead?
4. Is there any indication of how the Select Board views the proposal?
5. Is there any indication of how the Conservation Commission views the proposal?

Tobi Schulman of the Conservation Commission emailed me asking what the HAHC thought of the idea. I replied that we had questions and had invited Todd to our Nov 29 meeting. I told her she was welcome to zoom into our meeting. Her email did say that the CC is a “bit cool” to the idea.

Affordable Housing Discussion with Kayla Gutfran of Vt Smoke & Cure

Roberta had initiated meeting with folks from VS&C. The person she first met with has since left the company so Roberta met with Kayla in mid-November to get her perspective on the impacts on the company due to the shortage of housing as well as any other housing related issues.

ADU Forum Follow up Discussion

The quality of the Zoom recording was disappointing as there are times when the speakers are difficult to hear and understand. A number of the questions from the audience are also hard to hear. But a good deal of the recording seems worthy of posting on our HAHC webpage. I asked Joy to post last week. Getting it from Zoom as a recording was not easy last year, so hoping she will be able to get it posted without a lot of difficulty. Once posted, we can do a FPF post and email the attendees.

Kathy Beyer contacted Mascoma Bank, and unfortunately they were not willing to establish a special ADU funding program. They indicated that they viewed their Home Equity Loan program as able to serve that need. I will be checking with the VSECU to see if any interest.

Is there any other follow up we should do? The ADU checklist?

Framework Plan Discussion

I emailed Dave’s draft on November 26 with comments of mine for our discussion.

Committee Report for the Town Report

Dale planning to get us a draft for our review.

Updates on Various Topics

I will send a separate email on this today or tomorrow.

UPDATES ON VARIOUS TOPICS

HAHC December 13 Budget Meeting with Select Board

We don't have a time yet, but we are to meet with Select Board on December 13. Our current request is \$500 for operating and \$10,000 that would go into a Housing Fund. Depending what we decide as a committee after our discussion with Todd about his idea to establish a tax to establish a joint Housing/Land Conservation Fund, our request on December 13 might be different.

Windy Ridge Project Fees

See separate email from Alex that I forwarded on November 28. Alex essentially confirms that the project will pay the Town a high amount. We considered this as a key factor in our discussion of at some point granting funds to the project from the Town RLF and/or a Housing Fund.

Windy Ridge Project Community Partnership for Neighborhood Development application

The project received a \$100,000 award. ACCD received \$2.48 million in requests and had only \$900,000 to award.

VHFA Rental Revolving Loan Fund

Report from Andy at a future meeting.

Haystack Crossing

Black Rock Inc, the developer of the project is owned by a larger corporation, and that corporation is planning to eliminate Black Rock. If that happens, the Haystack Crossing project will be sold to another developer. Right now there are negotiations with the O'Brien Brothers, who are building out the O'Brien Farm project in South Burlington off Route 116.

Oct 30 CCRPC Meeting

Carl will provide a summary email in December. Next meeting is planned for April, 2024.

Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity & Mechanicsville Road Property

Green Mountain Habitat (GMH) is very interested in the property, and I have passed that info on to Todd so he can see if the owners are open to talking to GMH.

ARPA Funding

I have not seen or heard anything about any further decision by the Select Board. We should ask Todd for an update when he attends our Nov 29 meeting.

Sabina Parent Mobile Home Situation

I have been very involved in trying to get Sabina's MHIP grant moving forward as her home has gotten to the point where she does not think she can remain due to the cold weather. I involved Brian Pine (Burlington CEDO) and his wife (former mobile home advocate) who have known Sabina for over 20 years. It looks like things are finally moving forward but until all work approved is completed, I won't feel certain.

CVOEO Striving For Equity Project

Carl will provide a summary email in December of the 2 meetings I joined.