



Town of North Stonington
North Stonington Affordable Housing Committee
Regular Meeting, July 29, 2020 at 6:00pm
Via Zoom

APPROVED MINUTES

Chairman Margaret Leonard called the Regular Meeting of the NSAHC to order at 6:00 pm.

Members present: Margaret Leonard, Brian Rathbun, Patrick Colgan, Paul Buehler, and Will Mason

Members absent: Laura Degoursey

Guests: Kate Roschmann (briefly)

Staff: Juliet Hodge, PDZO

Public Comments: There were no public comments.

Additions to the Agenda: Motion made and seconded (M. Leonard / P. Buehler) to add “Meeting format moving forward” to the Agenda under New Business. Motion passed 5-0-0.

Approval of minutes: The minutes of the 6/24/20 Regular Meeting were accepted as written.

New Business

Meeting format moving forward: Members discussed resuming in-person meetings vs. continuing with Zoom meetings. The consensus was to remain meeting virtually for now.

Election of Secretary: P. Buehler volunteered to be the Secretary.

Motion made and seconded (B. Rathbun / W. Mason) to elect P. Buehler to Secretary position. Motion passed 5-0-0.

J. Hodge to draft minutes for this meeting and will provide the format for P. Buehler to follow.

Information on what Affordable Housing is and is not: Committee members discussed a memo J. Hodge had provided after last month’s meeting about the distinction between “a cheap house” and a “qualified affordable unit” and how a person’s income factors in. Just because a house sells for a low price or is valued at a low amount, doesn’t automatically mean it is an affordable house. It can only count as a qualified affordable house if the person buying it does so with a CHFA mortgage or receives governmental assistance. For a unit that was built with the intention of deed restriction (e.g. 8-30g set-aside development), then the buyer has to income qualify and the purchase price is determined by a set formula that looks at income and housing expenses that include mortgage, interest rates, taxes, insurance and utilities.

There was still some confusion about what makes a house affordable in the eyes of the state. Some members felt that if we were able to get information from residents who currently lived in houses that were valued in the range typically considered to be affordable to most, then we might actually find that they would in fact qualify as “affordable” per the income/expense criteria. M. Leonard suggested that the Committee focus on providing a place for our residents and workforce to live – to focus on creating a community where people could age in place, or young families could afford, etc. The Committee needs to agree on appropriate locations for Affordable Units to be built in town. Members also discussed the importance of promoting CHFA Mortgages as that is an easy way to bring our percentage up. The focus needs to be on housing people not on the house itself.

Members discussed creating a tax abatement in exchange for a deed restriction. Income and expense information could be gathered during this process to give us an idea about how many homes would actually qualify as affordable. This information could be presented to State Representatives in an effort to change the Statute so that the units could count.

Other ideas included promoting/allowing ½ acre zoning in select areas to create additional neighborhoods like Kingswood Meadow Wood. Conservation Subdivisions should also be encouraged as well as tiny homes or “net Zero” homes.

B. Rathbun wants to write our State Representative about the requirement for a “qualified” accessory unit to be attached vs. detached.

Housing Grant Update and scope of work with SCCOG: J. Hodge informed the Committee that they had been awarded the Planning Grant to finish the Housing Plan. She will speak with Amanda Kennedy from the SCCOG to create a scope of work.

Old Business:

Application under 8-30g: Committee members discussed the recent 6-lot subdivision application Ron Lewis submitted. J. Hodge told the Committee that the Public Hearing closed. There had been opposition, but none of the concerns raised would likely be enough to cause the Commission to deny it. J. Hodge and Attorney Avena are reviewing the accuracy of the required Affordability Plan that was submitted.

Assessing Your Community's Housing Needs workshop: M. Leonard reported that she, B. Rathbun and J. Hodge had attended the virtual workshop. She reminded the Committee members to be careful of the language they use during discussions about affordable housing and that they need to change their messaging to the public. She stated that their job as Affordable Housing Committee members was to make everyone feel comfortable and welcome in our community no matter where they came from.

Bylaw Revisions: **Motion made and seconded (P. Buehler/M. Leonard) to table the discussion on the By-laws until September.** The Committee members discussed having a workshop to specifically focus on the By-laws so that they would be ready for adoption at the November town Meeting. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

Tax abatement ordinance: B. Rathbun stated that he had not received a response from Ledyard about their Tax Abatement program. He asked Amanda Kennedy about it as well. She stated that not many towns had a Tax Abatement program.

Committee members discussed creating an on-line tool that would allow residents to determine whether they would qualify for the program. M. Leonard will work on this.

J. Hodge was asked to send members the formula for calculating maximum sales price for a qualified affordable home per the Affordability Plan.

2019 housing plan update and goals: Members discussed having a separate workshop or devoting the next meeting entirely to the 2019 Housing Plan. J. Hodge will contact A. Kennedy to see if she can attend.

General Discussion/Announcements: None

Adjourn: Motion made and seconded (W. Mason / P. Colgan) to adjourn the meeting at 7 :23pm. Motion passed 5-0-0.

Submitted by Juliet Hodge, PDZO

***Next regularly scheduled meeting will be held on August 26, 2020
Via Zoom***