

**NORWICH PLANNING COMMISSION  
AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUBCOMMITTEE**

**Agenda**

**Monday, June 19, 2023 START TIME 6:30 pm**

Zoom Meeting Info:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88071589319>

Phone: 833 548 0282 US Toll-free

Meeting ID: 880 7158 9319

1. Approve agenda
2. Comments from the public
3. Discussion of NH Episcopal Diocese experience integrating affordable housing into the work of NH churches. Invited guest: Benge Ambrogi
4. Approve May 15, 2023 AHSC Meeting Minutes
5. Discuss Memo to Planning Commission re New Boston Road parcel. Possible vote to transmit the memo.
6. Adjourn

Enclosures:

AHSC Minutes, May 15, 2023

Draft Memo to Planning Commission re New Boston Road Property

**Norwich Affordable Housing Committee Meeting**  
**Monday, May 15, 2023**

**Draft Minutes (Revised, 5/18)**

**Pre-Meeting discussion**

Prior to the formal meeting convening, there were three members present (Jeff Lubell, Jeff Goodrich and Paul Manganiello), not enough for a formal quorum, and the following was discussed:

Update on Publicly Owned Land

- **Fire District Land:** Jeff Lubell met with the Fire District Prudential Committee to discuss the Subcommittee's interest in accessing one or more small parcels for building below-market-rate housing. They will follow-up after the Land Management Council receives a report examining the conservation values of the land.
- **New Boston Road.** Jeff Lubell met, in separate meetings, with representatives of the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC) and the Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP) to discuss this parcel. Both advised that the state has a preference for projects in town centers. However, the VCDP representative agreed that the project has other location advantages, notably its proximity to jobs and presence in a school district with high performing schools. Both noted the importance of addressing environmental justice concerns related to the proximity to the transfer station and town garage, which could be addressed during the planning grant by trying to find a way to enter the building site without going past the town garage. The next step is to renew discussions with TRORC on whether they would help administer the grant.

The meeting formally convened at 7:00 p.m.

Members present: Jeff Lubell, Jeff Goodrich Paul Manganiello, Brian Loeb

Members of the Public: Jennie Anderson, Bob Pape, Doug Wilberding

1. The 4/17/23 minutes were approved 3 in favor, 0 against, 1 abstention (Jeff Goodrich).
2. The agenda was approved 4 in favor, 0 against.

3. A motion to recognize the pre-meeting discussion in the minutes was approved 3 in favor, 0 against, 1 abstention (Brian Loeb)

4. Public Comment:

- Doug Wilberding flagged two parcels he wanted the subcommittee to be aware of: an individual property on Turnpike Road with a damaged home that will likely need to be replaced and land available off of Tigertown Road.
- Jennie Anderson suggested the possibility of dovetailing the affordable housing discussion with discussions now underway about Black history in Norwich.

5. Update on the discussions with faith leaders

Jeff Lubell gave an update on the discussions with faith leaders concerning Norwich's need for affordable housing. He will be speaking briefly at the Norwich Congregational Church on June 4<sup>th</sup>. The subcommittee discussed two possible future events:

- A. A small group discussion with someone from the NH Episcopal Diocese about how they have supported congregations working on affordable housing and with someone from St. Paul's in Hartford about their work supporting housing at the Haven site.
- B. A public presentation on the need for affordable housing in Norwich and the work of nonprofit housing organizations in the area, including COVER, Habitat for Humanity, and Twin Pines.

6. Announcement: Annual Affordable Housing Breakfast Invitation. June 2<sup>nd</sup> Hilton Garden Inn. Kevin Geiger and Nick Clark will be speaking.

7. Agenda items for next meeting: Information about ADUs for Norwich website, small group discussion noted above in item 5A, and planning for the public presentation identified in 5B above.

Meeting adjourned 7:45

Next meeting June 19<sup>th</sup> @ 6:30 PM

Submitted: Paul Manganiello

**DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION DURING JUNE 19 AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING. NOT YET APPROVED BY SUBCOMMITTEE**

**M E M O R A N D U M**

To: Norwich Planning Commission  
From: Norwich Affordable Housing Subcommittee  
Re: Vermont Community Development Program Planning Grant for New Boston Road Parcel  
Date: June 19, 2023

We are writing to update the Planning Commission on the status of our work addressing the concerns raised by the Selectboard when we first brought this planning grant proposal to their attention in the Fall of 2022. We have identified solutions to their concerns that we hope will allow the Selectboard to endorse this grant application and allow it to be submitted to the Vermont Community Development Program. Accordingly, we request that the Planning Commission endorse our recommendations and forward them to the Selectboard for decision.

**What is this about?** The Affordable Housing Subcommittee recommends that the Town of Norwich submit an application for a \$60,000 planning grant to the Vermont Community Development Program to investigate the feasibility of developing below-market housing on the northern part of the parcel on New Boston Road that includes the transfer station. The Two Rivers-Ottaquechee Regional Council (TRORC) has agreed to administer the grant on behalf of Norwich, should it be awarded.

**When is a decision needed? The next deadline for submitting a grant application is September 12, 2022.** In order to meet this deadline, we will need an initial discussion with, and then a decision by, the Selectboard by these dates:

- 1. First, the Subcommittee and Planning Commission need guidance as soon as possible, but ideally before July 22, as to whether the Selectboard is generally comfortable with the idea of submitting this grant application.** This will give the Subcommittee and the Planning Commission the guidance needed to prepare the grant application and to schedule the required public hearing about the proposal. To meet the September 12 submission date, **the public hearing must be noticed no later than August 23 and held no later than September 7.**
- 2. Second, a Selectboard vote to approve the application must be held no later than September 11 so that the application (if approved) can be submitted by September 12.**

Please note that these are the last possible dates to make the September 12 submission deadline. Ideally, things would happen sooner so that we do not risk missing the deadline. The next application date is Feb. 6, 2024, though the Feb. submission date ended up being canceled in 2023; if this happens again, the next deadline would be April 9, 2024. We are advised that it can take several rounds to be approved, which argues in favor of an early submission.

**What is required from the Town to submit the application?** There are three main requirements:

- A public hearing must be held no later than September 7.
- The Selectboard must approve the application for submission.
- The town must agree to provide a 10% match of \$6,000.

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**What will the grant do?** The grant will provide funds for site planning to determine whether the development of below-market housing is feasible on the site, where exactly the housing would go, whether the site is likely to have adequate septic and water capacity, what other regulatory constraints apply, and how many units the site can hold. The grant would cover public outreach to get input from the public about the proposed site plan. It would also cover the expenses associated with subdividing the parcel, should a decision be made to move forward with the housing development.

We anticipate that all of the units will be permanently affordable to the targeted income group. The final mix of incomes will be determined during the planning grant process. A requirement of the planning grant process is that at least half of the units be aimed at families with incomes below 80% of the median income (currently \$67,200 for a family of 3 or \$74,650 for a family of 4).

**How have the Selectboard's prior comments been addressed?** When we discussed this issue in the Fall of 2022, Selectboard members raised two issues: (a) concerns about buried trash at the site and (b) environmental justice concerns regarding the proximity of the site to the town garage and transfer station. We have worked hard to address these concerns and believe we workable solutions to both of them:

1. **Concerns about buried trash.** Per Jeff Goodrich, the former landfill site was south and not north of the current transfer station. No one we have spoken with has any recollection of a landfill site north of the current entrance to the property from New Boston Road. We have spoken with Neil Fulton who described finding some buried trash bags north of this entrance, but he agreed that no buried trash bags have been found in the far northern corner of the site that we are targeting for possible development. Out of an abundance of caution, however, we have identified a way to test for and address the possibility that there is buried trash near our site that we recommend be followed before a final decision is made to site housing on the site. The process would generally work as follows:
  - a. First, Norwich would apply for and execute the planning grant to determine if housing is feasible on this location and exactly where it would be located.
  - b. Assuming below-market housing is feasible, we would work with TRORC to identify a path forward for conducting environmental assessments to assess whether there are environmental concerns with the site. This process has five main components:
    - i. Norwich is not eligible on its own to apply for assessment and remediation funding because it would be the responsible party for any environmental problems found on the site. Accordingly, as a first step, we would identify a prospective purchaser for the property, which would be eligible for funding for assessment and remediation. One organization that has done this before is the Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation. We have spoken with them and believe that if development were determined to be desirable and feasible on this site they would be open to considering this role.

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- ii. The next step is assessment: first a Phase 1 and then a Phase 2 Environmental Assessment. The Phase 1 looks at the historical records, while a Phase 2 Assessment involves physical inspection of the site.
  - iii. If any environmental problems are identified, the next step would be remediation. Funding is available from Vermont for this purpose for entities not determined to be responsible for causing the problem, which is why we need the prospective purchaser.
  - iv. If no remediation is needed, or is remediation is determined to be needed and then completed, the site would then need to be subdivided to include the area targeted by the Phase 2 assessment, and formally conveyed to the prospective purchaser. At this point, a certificate of completion would be provided under Vermont's BRELLE program indicating that the site is determined to be safe for future development.
  - v. The purchaser would then return the site to the town for future development.
- c. While this process is cumbersome, it has the advantage of ensuring that the site is safe for future residents, providing funding for assessment and clean-up, if needed, and providing, through the BRELLE program, legal protection for the town against future claims. The evidence that we're aware of suggests the site is not on a landfill and that any buried trash in the vicinity is a minor issue that can be addressed through a modest clean-up effort. If we're right, and the town wants to proceed with housing, we'll then have the green light to do so. If we're wrong, and there a larger problem there than we are aware of, the town retains the ability to change its mind and prepare to use the land in another way, such as for solar panels.
2. **Environmental Justice Concerns.** Several members of the Selectboard raised the concern that people entering the site would have to pass by the town garage and transfer station. We plan to implement several approaches to address this issue. First, we will aim to site the development in the far north corner of the site, as far away as possible from the garage and transfer station, and orient it in such a way that residents experience the woods around them, with minimal or no view of the garage or transfer station. Second, during the planning grant we will investigate the feasibility of entering the site through entrances that do not involve passing by the town garage. For example, the entrance to the site could be placed further north on New Boston Road, near the right of way for Olcott Road or the site could be accessed from Union Village road and then Olcott Road. In either case, the site would not feel like it is particularly close to the garage or the transfer station. These solutions, if determined to be feasible, would require agreements with one or more adjoining land owners.

**If you have any questions, please reach out to the Subcommittee chair, Jeff Lubell, at [jefflubell@yahoo.com](mailto:jefflubell@yahoo.com). Thank you for considering this request.**