

NORWICH PLANNING COMMISSION
AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUBCOMMITTEE

JOINT MEETING & PUBLIC HEARING FOR VCDP PLANNING GRANT APPLICATION

Minutes

Draft 3/20/2024

Members present:

Planning Commission: Jaan Laaspere*, Bob Pape, Ernie Ciccotelli, Vince Crow*

Affordable Housing Subcommittee: Jeff Lubell, Brian Loeb, Creigh Moffatt, Paul Manganiello*

Members of the public:

Pam Smith (Selectboard), Mary Layton (Selectboard)*

Jaci Allen, Jennie Anderson*, Susan Barrett, Rachel Coombs, Joe Denny, Jon Felde*, Linda Gray, Elliott Harik*, Peter Orner*, Arline Rotman*, Geof Smith*, Amy Stringer*, Kate White*, Tim White*, Steven Zubkoff, and several other remote attendees who did not comment

*Attended remotely

March 19, 2024 at 7:00 pm

1. Approve agenda

At the opening of the meeting, neither the Planning Commission nor the Subcommittee had a quorum, so no vote to approve the agenda was required. Mr. Crow, Ms. Moffatt and Mr. Manganiello joined once the meeting had progressed to agenda item 2, so both groups then had a quorum.

2. Public Hearing on a proposed Vermont Community Development Program planning grant to assess the feasibility of developing affordable housing on town-owned land on New Boston Road.

Mr. Lubell presented slides with data showing the need for housing in Norwich and regionally, as well as the elements of the town's Housing Strategy, which is incorporated into the Town Plan. Mr. Loeb described the Subcommittee's study of town-owned land, the location and attributes of the chosen site, the parameters of the VCDP Planning Grant program, and the work streams included in Norwich's application.

Mr. Laaspere moderated comments and questions from those in attendance, both in person and remotely. All members of the public who spoke did so in favor of the town submitting the application as described at the hearing.

Mr. Manganiello stated that his property abuts the parcel in question, and in particular the side with the transfer station, and that he considered the transfer station a good neighbor and would welcome more residents to the area. He expressed support for moving forward with the proposed planning grant.

Ms. Coombs expressed support for moving forward with the proposed planning grant. She stated that she supports the town taking action on an important issue rather than waiting for the state to address local challenges; that the Starlake community (an affordable homeownership development in town that uses the community land trust model) contributes to the beauty, complexity and richness of the town, and she expects another such neighborhood would do the same; and that the lack of affordable housing in town today is causing harm to families, particular those with children who lose their housing and must relocate.

Ms. Barrett expressed support for moving forward with the proposed planning grant. She stated that she also lives on New Boston Road, and that she encourages residents to be open to diverse housing types and affordable housing. She is concerned with the recent increase in property taxes, driven by the change in per-pupil weighting for education taxes, and supports town efforts that could ameliorate that impact.

Ms. White stated that she is also concerned about the property tax issue and is supportive of the proposed planning grant.

Ms. Rotman remarked that neighboring communities have moved ahead of Norwich in terms of responding to the regional housing need, and she is worried about harmful impacts to the environment of local employees having to commute from far outside the regional job center. She said she supported the proposed planning grant.

Ms. Allen commended the Subcommittee for its work and said the proposed planning grant would be a small but important step for the town.

Mr. Harik said he supported the proposed planning grant and hoped members of the Selectboard heard the voices of support for the application.

Ms. Gray said that a diverse community creates a thriving community and she supports the proposed planning grant. She asked about the timing of the application and about the town's plan to manage the grant. Mr. Loeb explained that the town plans to submit the application for the April program deadline and that it expects to hire an experienced consultant to manage the grant, including procurement for technical services.

Mr. Smith, the deacon at the Norwich Congregational Church, voiced his support and said that in other towns where housing options have been insufficient, the local economy suffers.

Ms. Anderson, the priest at St. Barnabas Church, voiced her support and said the church's presence in town made her feel accountable to help the town achieve its goals.

Mr. Felde spoke of the generosity of town residents who support area organizations such as the Upper Valley Haven, and that he is in favor of the application because it responds to the underlying challenge in the region and the need for adequate housing for everyone.

Mr. Laaspere concluded by remarking that he had heard the widespread support for the application among attendees, that he would draft a letter from the Planning Commission endorsing the project, and that he encouraged the Selectboard to move forward with submitting the application.

3. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn by Mr. Pape, seconded by Mr. Ciccotelli. Meeting adjourned at 7:52PM.