

**TOWN OF BARRINGTON
HOUSING BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Tuesday, May 15, 2012, 7:00 PM

Present: Steve Martin, Chairperson

Steve Boyajian

Carla DeStefano

Molly Lee

Richard Staples

Kenneth Satterley

Mike Winitsky

Also present: Kate Weymouth, Town Council Member.

MINUTES OF MEETING

- **Mr. Martin called the meeting to order.**
- **Mr. Martin called for a motion to approve the minutes of the April 17, 2012 meeting, motion made by Ms. DeStefano, seconded by Ms. Lee, vote was unanimous to approve.**

- **Mr. Martin stated that the meeting was being held in the council chambers to allow the public a forum on the subject of affordable housing in the town. Mr. Martin then turned over the meeting to Nancy Letendre, an attorney who specializes in housing issues.**

- o **Ms. Letendre explained that the town is under a state mandate to make 10% of the 6000 housing units affordable. To qualify as affordable, the unit must be created new or be the improvement of an existing unit. Also, the unit must be sold or rented to families earning less than \$67,000 per year.**

- o **Ms. Letendre said to achieve this goal the town has developed the Comprehensive Community Plan which allows the town some discretion to change the zoning requirements on certain pieces of property. As most of the money to fund these affordable housing units comes from the federal or state government, they require that the units be deed-restricted. Also, deed-restricted properties are eligible for certain tax credits. Cary Morse of Westwood Drive stated that he believes these tax reductions are a “developer’s dream”. “Not so”, according to Ms. DeStefano, because of the deed restriction requirement. Mr. Morse asked the Housing Board to seek a legal opinion on the tax policy. Ms. Letendre said that this issue has never been challenged, “but we will look into it.” Ms. DeStefano explained there is no windfall in affordable housing, as the deed restriction**

diminishes the market value of the property. And the tax benefit is based on a formula and the developer must sign a financial document with a 99 year deed restriction.

o Scott Clarke of Old Chimney Road asked about the current number of affordable housing units. Mr. Boyajian states there are currently 160 units, which leaves quite a gap. Mr. Clarke wanted to know, “why are these projects are so dense?” Mr. Martin explained they don’t have to be, but increasing the density of units is the only way to achieve the 10% goal. Mr. Clarke asked how many units have been built since Sweetbriar. Mr. Martin replied 16. With George Street and Sowams, theoretically another 60. .

o involvement to involvement toThe committee asked the question if any money was left at the end of the project, could it be used to install bathrooms in the master bedrooms. Mr. Martin said this was unlikely as Rhode Island Housing’s standard limits one bedroom per floor, so any money left over would be returned to them. Richard Staples stated even if we could find non RHI money, RHI would object to this idea.

o Mr. Clarke asked what would happen if the town does not meet the 10% goal. Ms. Letendre said the state could withhold CDBG funding. Mr. Vaness asked if there had been any specific cases like this. No, but Ms. Letendre went on to explain that some rural communities are having difficulties trying to meet the 10% requirement.

o Ms. DeStefano stated that any developer can come into the town to try to develop a piece of property and if they are turned down, they can take their case to court, but that this is contentious and not proactive. Bill DeWhitt asked if the town can limit the units as 'purchase only'. Mr. DeWhitt suggested that the public contact their state representatives and encourage them to try to change the law.

o Ms. DeStefano stated that the income limit for a family of four is \$45,000 not \$67,000 and there is a dire need for rental units. Ms. Letendre stated you cannot mandate which housing units would be rented and which should be sold. The Constitution protects peoples rights to do what they like with their own property.

o Craig Van Ness of 30 Lillis Av. wanted to know who collects the rent at Sweetbriar. He was told EBCDC collects the rent although they do not collect a fee for this service. However, they did earn a developer's fee for developing the property.

o Mr. Van Ness wanted to know why building these high-density developments, like Sowams Nursery, helps preserve the quality of the town. And does the Comprehensive Community Plan allow for opportunities with other existing properties. Ms. DeStefano explained that the Housing Trustees are always trying to find existing lots that could help in reaching this 10% goal. Ms. Letendre explained that Sowams Nursery is zoned R-25 but is identified for village zoning, as shown in the future land-use map. This allows for a higher density

development. The owners of the property originally approached the town with a proposal to build 12 single-family homes but were turned down. Mr. Winitsky said if the intent is to try and meet this 10% goal then why not go for a high-density development and keep other lots open as green space. Mr. Hervey stated when a housing development is being proposed the developer must comply with Comprehensive Community Plan.

o Mr. Staples spoke about the Walker Farm Lane Project and how the process required numerous public hearings, giving the public an opportunity to voice their concerns and suggestions as the project evolved from schematics to design and to final plans. This project was built with federal funds for the construction phase and CDBG money for the soft costs.

o Mr. Parker, a Barrington resident, said the community is anxious about the proposed project and asked what would be the annual cost in revenue to taxpayers for 600 affordable housing units. He is interested in the long term plan and that it needs to be transparent.

o Les Costa of 3 Colonial Ave. wanted to know if the town is under a mandate to change zoning requirements to allow the development of affordable housing. Ms. Letendre said the state cannot say how, but does say you must. Mr. Costa asked, if because of the proximity to water and open spaces are these organizations stakeholders in the town. The answer is yes, all town agencies must sign off on any

specific development. Mr. Costa asked about these developments and their effect on property values. Ms. Letendre said there have been other developments with no apparent impact on property values, because they are in your neighborhood. Ms. DeStefano encouraged the audience to stay involved if a developer wants to develop a piece of property. At times the process can be contentious, but in the end it can be a development that the residents in the area are proud to live next to.

o Elizabeth Deschenes of 16 Commonwealth Ave. asked if we can go for single units on scattered sites to save these larger land areas. Mr. Martin answered that we don't have the bank account to buy houses, we must go with what is available. Also, we have made public announcements asking for people to donate any unused lots for a tax credit. Mr. Staples said we are always looking for any ideas or strategies from the public that could create more affordable housing. That includes vacant lots, structures and the like.

o Bill Lamolt wanted to know what other efforts are being made to gather other scattered sites and if there an urgent time frame needed for final acceptance. Mr. Staples explained we are looking at in-law apartments and undersized lots, keeping in mind that any housing units need to be compatible with the existing surroundings. Mr. Staples then used Sweetbriar as an example. The process for developing Sweetbriar was instructive, in the end EBCDC did eventually appeal their case to the State Housing Appeals Board. The

urgency question is governed by the need to provide 600 affordable housing units within the time frame defined by the state.

o Mr. Lamolt wanted to know if this board, along with the planning board and town council are predisposed in allowing EBCDC to build affordable housing on Sowams Nursery and why so dense. Mr. Staples stated that an R-25 zone does not designate affordable housing, however, with village concept as out lined in the Comprehensive Community Plan, it could allow for the number of units proposed. However, the number of units would be determined by the developer.

o Kevin Doyle of Lillis Av, asked what role does the board play. Mr. Martin stated, advisory. Mr. Doyle stated he had heard that the owner had signed a purchase and sales agreement with a limit of 40 units. If is it true, do they have to be rental housing. Mr. Martin answered no, they could be rental but not necessarily, it has to do with where the funds come from.

o Barbara Donovan , a senior, I feel that seniors are being discriminated against. We need our own community in the town. Mr. Martin answered, I agree with you, the problem is any housing being build with federal money must be designated for families and not seniors only. Mr. Staples added that this issue often surfaces at the board meeting. Also, the need of housing for people working in the

town. Mr. Martin sited the example of Walker Farm Lane which cost \$1.2 million in subsidies to create 11 houses. And on the subject of housing for seniors, this has been an issue as long as I have lived here.

o Brian Valentine of 52 Sowams Road wanted to know if the development moves forward can we ask that it be sustainable and will it comply with “LEED”. Are we still using the 2009 Comprehensive Community Plan? Mr. Martin stated that 2011 plan is the most current.

o Mr. Van Ness asked does affordable housing bring people out of poverty; ownership seems a better way to create equity. Ms. Letendre stated there are many other economic factors involved. Mr. Staples said the goal is to create a “ladder” of housing opportunity. From homelessness to rental and then ownership. It normally takes an income of \$45-50,000 for a family to be able to buy a home. The hope, with increase in income, is a family can afford a more conventional mortgage which then allows them to move out, thereby, creating a ladder for the next family. Mr. Van Ness then asked has Sweetbriar resulted in families moving away from the area. Ms. Letendre stated all communities need to create affordable housing, several towns have inclusionary zoning including in-laws apartments. Barrington developed the Comprehensive Community Plan.

o Mr. Staples suggested that “housing works.ri.org “is the place to go for more information.

- **Mr. Martin called for a motion to table the rest of the agenda items until the June meeting, motion made by Mr. Staples, seconded by Mr. Boyajian, vote was unanimous to approve.**

- **Mr. Martin asked Mr. Amaral to update the committee on his progress in finding a piece of property for Habit for Humanities:**

- **Mr. Martin called for a motion to adjourn the meeting, motion made by Mr. Staples, seconded by Mr. Boyajian,. vote was unanimous to approve.**

Next meeting is scheduled for June 19, 2012 at 7pm