

Minutes

Housing Trust Fund Task Force

April 26, 2016

- 1) Call to Order – The meeting was called to order by Chair Debbie Ingram at 7:35 a.m. The following Task Force members were in attendance: Debbie Ingram, Charlie Magill, Jeff Fehrs, Kenn Sassorossi, and Benjamin King.

Staff Present: Ken Belliveau, Planning Director; Rick McGuire, Town Manager.

Others present: Maura Collins, Director of Policy and Administration with Vermont Housing Finance Authority.

- 2) Minutes: April 19, 2016 - No corrections were made and Chair declared them accepted.
- 3) Discussion:

Maura Collins

Mr. King asked about possibility of incorporating affordable housing into future housing development in Williston. Mr. Belliveau briefly explained the town's growth management system. He assured Task Force members that there is still room in the future for affordable housing units to be constructed within the growth management system.

Maura Collins was introduced. She explained there appears to be more room for growth in the rental market than homeownership and the households are more likely to be smaller. As these individuals age, they will be looking for affordable housing units to transition from rental to homeownership. Demand for smaller more affordable units will be in demand for the first-time home buyer and perhaps for baby boomers who are looking to downsize. She noted there will likely be an increase in diversity in the region.

Mr. Belliveau explained that the type of housing in Williston has been shifting in recent years to smaller units. Within last 4 years, there have been 220 apartment units constructed.

Ms. Collins suggested the National Housing Trust Fund project is a very good resource. She noted that State has already provided authorization for municipal trust funds in Vermont and Vermont already has a state housing trust fund. She distributed a handout that lists a series of questions that the Task Force may want to address as part of its mission.

According to Ms. Collins, housing trust funds are exploding in popularity nationwide. These programs can be used to help fill in the gaps left by other existing programs. Trust Fund money can be used for a variety of programs geared towards affordable housing. She emphasized the need to look at the data to see where the Williston's needs are.

Concerning funding sources, Ms. Collins stated there is a long list of potential funding sources. She advised Task Force members to understand the strengths of the community and

to use those strengths for funding. She noted the choices can be overwhelming. Defining affordability may be a good place to start. She concluded housing trust fund money can be used to be creative and flexible.

Mr. Sassorossi suggested finding a niche that is not being addressed already. He also suggested having a discussion with Charlie Baker concerning the region.

Ms. Collins explained that the lower the income group targeted and the more need we try to address, the higher the cost. The amount to be raised will not likely match the needs. There are existing programs for the lowest income groups but there is a group in the middle (renters) that have no governmental programs to provide assistance. She stated that while the lowest income groups have programs, these programs come nowhere close to meeting the needs of this group.

Ms. Ingram asked what discussions are being held concerning affordable housing and the Town Plan. Mr. Belliveau responded that several approaches have been considered including exempting affordable housing from the growth limitations. Ms. Collins commented that the availability of government subsidies are very limited which provides a limit on the number of projects that can be completed in the region each year.

Mr. Belliveau noted that there has been some push back from people asking why new developments don't have affordable components. He also stated defining affordability has been problematic. There is significant opposition to doing away with growth management. Ms. Collins suggested having someone from the Planning Commission join the Task Force.

Ms. Collins concluded the work is important and worthy and she wants it to succeed.

Mr. Sassorossi suggested the need to discuss what process will the Task Force use to begin to answer the many questions involved with establishing a trust fund. Mr. Sassorossi left the meeting, with apologies.

Mr. McGuire mentioned that affordability should take into consideration the cost of transportation between residence and work. Ms. Collins stated they are developing models to integrate that very cost into the cost of housing. She noted that concept will need to be promoted as part of an educational effort.

Task Force members thanked Ms. Collins for her assistance and she left the meeting.

General Discussion

In response to a question, Mr. Belliveau explained that the number of homes that are in the range of \$250,000 or less is minimal.

Jeff Fehrs left meeting, with apologies

Ms. Ingram suggested Charlie Baker as the guest speaker for the next meeting. She also requested the Chair of the Planning Commission be invited to attend the next meeting. She suggested Task Force members review the web site suggested by Ms. Collins.

Ms. Ingram asked if there is any data that shows where people live versus where they work. Mr. Belliveau stated there is some information on this and he agreed to prepare it for the Task Force. He described Williston as a net importer of labor in general but an exporter of high priced labor and an importer of lower priced labor.

It was suggested by Mr. Belliveau that the Task Force may eventually wish to invite developers to a meeting. Mr. Magill suggested having a discussion on who each Task Force member would like to help and share what he termed their “personal bias”.

- 4) Next Meeting: The next meeting was set for Wednesday, May 11th at 7:30 a.m.
- 5) Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 a.m.