

Westport Affordable Housing Trust Virtual Meeting of April 22, 2020

Participants: Chair Liz Collins (LC), Henry Lanier (HL), David West (DW), James Sabra (JS), Ann Boxler (AB). Also participating were Housing Specialist Leonardi Aray (LA), recording clerk Robert Barboza. The meeting was called to order at 4 p.m. by the Chair.

1. Meeting Schedule: The chair confirmed that upcoming meetings will be scheduled for May 27, June 24, July 22, and Aug. 26, 2020, at times to be confirmed at a later date.

2. Invoices: JS made a motion to approve a voucher dated 4/15/20 to pay invoices from the Herald News (Gateway Media) for publication of the Sodom Road RFP; seconded by HL, the motion passed 4-0. LA provided a financial report dated 3/27/20, indicating no expenditures since the last report with the exception of the advertising invoices noted above.

3. Rental Assistance Opportunities: As requested at the last meeting, LA presented the Trust with additional information on a possible Rental Assistance Program for further discussion. The report indicated what the earnings limits would be for families at 80 to 100 percent of AMI (Average Median Income); fair market value rents; and demographic data for Westport renters. LA noted that the largest affordable housing developments – Noquochoke Village, Village Way, and Edgewater Apartments – provide 170 rental units; adding the 48 units administered by the Westport Housing Authority brings the total number of “managed” rental units to 218.

The housing specialist also offered some financial input, estimating the cost of providing 30 to 35 renters with \$500 per month in emergency rent assistance for three months would require about \$50,000 in Trust funding. He also provided a sample of a Request for Funding (RFF) form that could be used by landlords to seek aid for their tenants. LC indicated that some state or federal programs are available to help renters experiencing financial difficulties, and local funds may not be needed except in emergency situations where there is a dire need by residents. She asked what Noquochoke Village’s administration is doing for tenants who cannot pay their rent now, and what number of tenants are expected to be in need of financial assistance in a month or two.

DW asked how Section 8 voucher holders will be assessed a portion of their rents if they have lost most or all of their income. He suggested WAHTF funds should be available only as a “last resort” for tenants if landlords such as TCB can’t find help for their tenants elsewhere; he also wanted some assurances that the Trust could establish guidelines that would make the Trust eligible for any state or federal reimbursements if they became available in the future. HL wondered if the rental assistance program would need to be extended past 90 days if the COVID-19 epidemic lingers on. JS felt the Trust should set an allocation limit for a pilot program, only to be established if the Trust and Housing Assistance Office staff are not involved in scrutinizing applications and verifying eligibility. LA agreed that participating landlords or administrators would have to confirm eligibility information for their tenants if the program was going to work. JS also suggested that the Trust try to find an institutional partner that would match any funding allocated by the Trust. It was decided that discussions would continue at the next meeting, with LA continuing to investigate options for a rental assistance program.

4. Sodom Road Property Update: LA reported that he is still waiting to get the draft P & S agreement back from the Buzzards Bay Area Habitat for Humanity’s attorney.

5. HAO/Housing Specialist Report: HOPP – LA noted that no funding remains for this fiscal year, and the program is not being offered at this time. CRE-HAB – Application procedures have been updated due to the COVID-19 epidemic and posted on the web page for public access while Town Hall offices are closed. LA noted an application has been received from a household that seems eligible (CRE-HAB #1904) for grant funding to correct health code violations and other needed repairs (roof, kitchen floor and cabinets, two doors and windows, and well service). He believes a house-wide clean-up is needed before a visit can be scheduled to accurately assess the scope of work needed; JS volunteered to make the site visit with the housing specialist.

6. Chapter 61A Parcels: LA provided the Trust with release forms for two parcels of Ch. 61 land sent by the Board of Selectmen. He recommended a vote to release a 1.52 acre Ch. 61A house lot (Map 60, Lot 2C) on Sodom Road owned by Hugh McGovern, offered at \$145,000; JS made a motion to approve the release, seconded by HL, and the vote was 4-0 in favor. LA recommended release of a 10.88 acre Ch. 61 parcel (Map 70, Lot 16) at 573 Main Road owned by MJS Realty Trust, to be leased for a solar energy farm; JS made a motion to approve the release, seconded by AB; the vote was 4-0 in favor.

LA noted the receipt of the audit report on Trust funds, to be reviewed at the May meeting. With no other business on the agenda, AB made a motion to adjourn at 5:16 p.m., seconded by JS. The vote was 4-0 in favor.

Approved: 5/27/20