

Monday, Nov. 3, 2014
Westport Affordable Housing Trust Fund

Present: Liz Collins (LC), Elaine Ostroff (EO), Craig Dutra (CD), Brian Corey Jr. (BC), Warren Messier (WM), James Sabra (JS). Housing Specialist Leonardi Aray, recording clerk Robert Barboza.

A 6:15 p.m. joint meeting was held with the Board of Selectmen (BOS); The Community Builders (TCB) representatives Eliza Datta, John Economou, and John Frazer; Town Administrator Tim King, at Town Hall. Chairman of Selectmen Antone Vieira Jr. started the session by reporting his positive impressions of the Oct. 28 visit to Lake Street Terrace, Chatham, built and managed by TCB. The Noquochoke Village plan would fill a void in Westport's housing inventory for affordable rentals, and he would be supporting the development moving forward, he said.

LC thanked the BOS for meeting with the Trust and TCB, and thanked Mr. Vieira and Mr. King for visiting the Chatham site. She reported several residents also went on the site visit, and offered valuable feedback on the experience; requested votes by BOS on two action items: an extension of the purchase & sale agreement deadline to June 2016, and allowing TCB more flexibility on the affordable unit mix for the proposed development.

Ms. Datta advised those present that TCB was not successful in earning approval for state affordable housing tax credits for Noquochoke Village, which was not unusual for first-time applications, and that TCB received "very good feedback" from state Dept. of Housing and Community Development on the application. The next round of tax credit funding program has a February deadline for pre-applications and an April 2015 deadline for full applications, she said.

Mr. Vieira told his board he was "very impressed with the quality, very impressed with the tenants" of Lake Street Terrace, said it would "fill a need in our community" to have a similar apartment development. Mr. King echoed his opinion that the proposed plan was a good one, and would help Westport deal with its lack of affordable housing. Mr. Dutra (CD) noted TCB had a solid record as a builder and long-term manager of such affordable housing sites.

Selectman Sullivan voiced his "philosophical problem" with subsidizing affordable housing in general, and indicated he would vote against further extensions of P & S, or other support. Ms. Datta and Mr. Economou spoke about the local preference practices for Westport residents and the extensive screening process for prospective renters, including background checks, criminal record checks, and investigation of past landlord references.

The extension of the P & S deadline to June 2016 passed on a 4-1 vote, with Sullivan dissenting. The allowance of TCB changing the affordability mix from 90 percent affordable up to 100 percent affordable if needed passed on a 5-0 vote. The motion to have the Westport Affordable Housing Trust Fund seek a subsidy of up to 10 percent of the total number of affordable units (ie, five units unrestricted) passed on a 5-0 vote. The discussion on seeking town meeting approval of the transfer of the Perry and Quinn land to the Trust was not voted on at this time.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.