

MINUTES

Walpole Housing Partnership Committee

November 13th, 2019 – 7:30 P.M.

Town Hall, 135 School Street

Main Meeting Room/Room 116

Members Present: Willa Bandler, Liz Barrows, Philip Czachorowski,

Andrew Flowers, Michael Teeley, Kurt Tommy

Denise Landry (nonvoting)

Others Present: Omni Development team (David Hale,

Mark Brooks, Leslie French, Joanna Hill); Community Development Director Ashley Clark; town residents

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:33 PM in the Main Meeting Room

2. Omni presentation regarding South Walpole 40B proposal

Mr Hale, of Concord, tells the committee about his past work with the nonprofit Concord Housing Corporation; Concord has been above the 10% subsidized housing mark for 8-10 years (and he notes that many other towns have also been adding affordable units recently in preparation for the denominator jump that will accompany the 2020 Federal Census). He provides examples to the committee of people he knows in Concord and elsewhere who were enabled to stay in their community thanks to affordable housing projects, including teachers, coaches, community elders, young professional families with deep community involvement, etc. Other community members mentioned include residents with disabilities, people caring for family members, and elderly people who are still able to live independently but need accessible units. He also describes other projects Omni has completed in Tewksbury and Littleton, as well as projects in Acton and Westford begun by Omni but later sold to Avalon due to the large size of the projects being more suitable to a larger company.

Regarding the units proposed for Walpole, Mr Hale says the proposal includes 192 garden-style units, 100% of which would be adaptable (ie, could be made into accessible units if needed), 5% built as accessible (with lower counter heights, etc, to accommodate wheelchair users). As required under 40B, 10% of the units will have 3 bedrooms. About 36% of the site will be open space, and they intend to preserve an existing riverfront trail.

According to Mr Hale, it is common for towns to request additional units, in order to have a project satisfy their need for units under the Subsidized Housing Inventory. He requests that, if Walpole would like this project to be larger, the town inform him before Omni goes further with plans; local residents, however, seem to only be interested in a smaller development, not a larger one.

As of this meeting, Omni has closed on an additional parcel, making their total site 57 acres, not the originally proposed 34 acres. Mr Hale claims this is a better plan overall, allowing the taller apartment buildings to be farther back where no one will see them from the street; it also enabled them to shift from a plan for 60 townhouses to 60 single-family homes, though they are seeking a partner to build those homes since they only build apartment buildings.

Ms Barrows asks if Omni has obtained approval from the Mass Housing Partnership, and Mr Hale says they expect it within a week, as MHP has all the relevant information before them.

According to current data, about 37% of local residents would qualify for an affordable unit; fewer than half of current Walpole homeowners would qualify to buy our houses today. With regard to the claim that this project will cost existing taxpayers money, Mr Hale says 40B projects usually pay for themselves in terms of taxes paid vs services town has to provide to residents. This development is projected to produce about \$1M in tax revenue. Ms Barrows notes that additional students cost the school district \$15K each, so

if 75 students are added, that's more than \$1M; Mr Hale responds that the incremental cost of students is actually more like \$3K-\$4K, since you don't need new buildings etc., just add 1 or 2 staff positions for that number of additional students distributed through the whole school system, since they are all different ages, not all in one class (K-12, it is fewer than 6 students per class year)

Mr Teeley asks what about fire/EMS? Mr Hale responds that it is typically about the same usage per capita as other town residents, just more noticeable because of concentration.

Discussing traffic, Mr Hale says the traffic study is not complete, but that he believes it will show that the proposal will not create dangerous conditions or excessive congestion. He notes that the sight lines from the proposed driveway are several hundred feet either way, and he does not believe proximity to the railroad grade crossing will be a problem. Some residents are expected to commute by train, and with the nearest commuter rail 0.8 miles away, people will be able to walk to the train if they want to (Ms Grace and Mr Czachorowski note that they both walk farther than that to the train station). Also, with retirees being one of the project's target demographics, not everyone in the complex will be commuting at peak hours.

Mr Hale believes there is essentially no chance the project will ultimately be rejected, but in response to Mr Flowers' questions about timeline if the town fights the project vs if it does not, says he expects to have permits within ~6 months if the town does not fight it, or 2 years if it does. In that time, the town remains subject to other 40B proposals; once Omni's permits are obtained, the town will achieve safe harbor, so fighting this project almost certainly means the approval of other 40Bs.

Mr Flowers and Mr Czachorowski thank members of the public for coming and advocating for the community; Mr Teeley says, as a resident of South Walpole, that he believes Omni knows their business better than we do, and applauds their professionalism; Ms Bandler, also of South Walpole, wants to see what the traffic study says before expressing an opinion; Ms Barrows says she is not in favor of this project due to its scale being too large, believes Omni's profits are too high, and she wishes Omni had consulted with the town before applying to MHP. Ms Grace appreciates the storytelling about other developments' residents, and says the plan reminds her of Swan Pond. She wants people to continue to think about lower AMI units, greener community, more public transit, more accessible units, etc, and notes that we don't want underutilized schools due to falling numbers of students if we were to reduce the family-friendliness of

Walpole and of new developments—it would be expensive to close schools, and would take jobs from residents who teach in those schools.

A 10-minute recess is taken, after which the meeting is called back to order in Room 116 at 9:13

Mr Flowers points out that locking in good affordable housing to achieve safe harbor seems like the prudent choice. Ms Grace thanks Ms Barrows for being contrarian; Ms Barrows says she likes 40B in the abstract but only because it pushes towns to build affordable housing some other way.

3. New Business

Ms Barrows attended the Zoning Board of Appeals hearing on Accessory Dwelling Units and wants to know why this committee isn't included when such issues come before other town bodies. Ms Clark says she is working on streamlining some of those processes, so that we will find out via email about upcoming issues.

For Spring Town Meeting:

Ms Grace wonders if we should prepare a package of housing-related articles including 40R Smart Growth districts in addition to a refined version of the Inclusionary Zoning articles. Mr Flowers says it would be better to do one thing at a time and get the IZB passed. Ms Clark says she has some ideas about next steps she'd like to discuss further with us; Mr Czachorowski, Mr Flowers, and Mr Tommy volunteer to be on a committee to discuss implementation strategies. Mr Flowers would like to have the IZB language finalized by January to avoid the pitfalls that kept it from going forward at Fall Town Meeting. Ms Barrows says we need a session with Town Counsel to ensure no problems there. Ms Clark notes that she is planning an article to simplify the numbering of zoning chapters so that future clerical errors etc can be fixed. Ms Barrows will talk to Planning Board Chair to try and resolve any issues ahead of time.

4. Election of a new Chair

As previously noted, Ms Grace is stepping down as Chair. Ms Barrows nominates Mr Flowers; Ms Bandler seconds.

VOTE: 7-0-0 UNANIMOUS

Mr Flowers makes a motion to acknowledge Ms Grace's accomplishments as Chair; Ms Bandler seconds

VOTE: 6-0-1 (*Ms Grace abstains*)

Ms Grace will serve as Acting Clerk beginning at our next meeting, when we will vote on a new Clerk.

5. Next meetings to be scheduled

Mr Flowers will email Doodle polls to members to schedule December and January meetings.

6. The meeting was adjourned at 10:03 PM

A motion to adjourn was made by Ms Barrows and seconded by Mr Czachorowski

VOTE: 7-0-0 UNANIMOUS

Minutes respectfully submitted by:

Willa Bandler

Minutes Approved by Committee on:

12/12/19

Chairperson Signature:

Andrew Flowers