

Belmont Housing Trust Minutes for 11/20/08

In attendance: Judie Feins, Roger Colton, Nancy Marsh, Ann Verrilli, Ann Silverman, Jonathan Jacoby

Inventory of BHT files—Jonathan will collect Housing Trust material from Nancy, Judie and Roger, inventory what has been saved and ask the Town Clerk where it might be stored in the future.

Capacity Innovation Grant—Roger represented the BHT for interviews of consultants to plan for a new five-town Housing Consortium, resulting in the hiring of Louise Elving of VIVA. The next significant step is a working meeting on Dec. 8 to get input from the five communities.

Roger reported that there is strong interest for the idea of a multi-community development organization. It may be a good solution for Belmont and for the groups in other communities that are too small to take on large projects. Nancy, Ann S., Roger, Judie, Ann V. and Jonathan will attend on Dec. 8.

Waverley Woods—Nancy reported that Maloney Properties is busy accepting and vetting applications and selecting tenants for the Waverley Woods apartments. Seven units are filled and forty-three families are still being processed. There is a good range of ages and minority representation. Nineteen to date are from Belmont. It has been difficult for prospective tenants to make a decision since the units are still under construction and not easily available for viewing.

The upper units are essentially finished; move-ins will be scheduled for December 1 and 15 and January 1. All units are to be filled by January 31, 2009. A grand opening will be held early in 2009.

Work on the Belmont Housing Authority parking lot is to start this week.

Roger suggested contacting Phyl Solomon to see if she would coordinate a gardening project in the spring.

There was discussion of the incomplete sidewalk on Trapelo which is the Town's responsibility and questions raised about who will maintain the sidewalk.

Plans and Priorities—Picking up from last month's start on a review of what the Trust is going to work on in 2009 and beyond, Judie presented a comprehensive list of ideas and prospective projects from the past two years. The subject of available resources for development was addressed first. Ann Verrilli reported that the BHA has hired Bernard Stewart to explore the idea of making 25% of their vouchers project-based, which might make a few unused vouchers available for an affordable housing project. Roger pointed out that Belmont will have HOME funds again in two years and mentioned the Cushing Square overlay district as a possible development site. The multi-community development organization might also offer some cooperative planning.

Potential developments were discussed briefly:

- Cushing Square—not clear where things stand with planning.

- Uplands—the current direction of the housing market may make the O’neal rental project more likely; however, there may be another development in the works for the Faces property on Route 2.
- Underwood Estate—nothing new is known.
- Oakley Neighborhood/Our Lady—the developer who made an offer is no longer interested and the property is back on the market, possibly at a lower price. It was thought not likely that any of the affordable housing developers contacted before will be interested.
- Sandler Skate—Jay Sklut is reported to have said that there is no movement.
- PureCoat property—Judie reported they want to sell; it is generally assumed that there is serious site contamination.
- Transfer station—apparently slated for town recreational use.
- Waverley Square—there will be a meeting on Nov. 25 at the Butler School to discuss a retail, office and parking development for the “air rights” site over the MBTA tracks.
 - Belmont Center—Roger suggested that if the Cushing Square parking lot development is successful it might encourage a similar project in the Center.
 - BHA property—Ann Verrilli did not think there would be any Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP) funding available for a planning grant.

The discussion then turned to an acquisition strategy for underutilized properties with the possibility of MHP money to look into potential projects—either tear-downs or 2- or 3-family houses for conversion. Prices may be coming down, although Judie reported that foreclosed properties are being snapped up.

An effort to get on the ballot and adopt the Community Preservation Act for Belmont is worthwhile in light of the potential funding for affordable housing.

The Comprehensive Plan is also something that the BHT will need to keep its attention on.

There was agreement that the BHT should return to the public outreach it has done successfully in the past. The CPA was thought to be a good topic to organize a panel to address in the next few months.

The issue was revisited of a fee for condominium conversions as well as incentives for owners to accept deed restrictions making their property affordable. Roger argued that the condo fee idea is an income source, an answer to the problem of properties lost to the affordable market and a basis for presenting the supporting arguments for affordable housing. Roger agreed to look into what is required to implement such a plan and spearhead this effort. Judie wanted to pair it with an incentive plan that offers a more positive approach to promoting affordable housing.

Finally, it was agreed that the BHT does want to meet with the Selectmen.

Inclusionary Zoning—The draft inclusionary zoning rules and regulations from the Planning Board were reviewed to provide answers to the questions raised by Carla.

Affordable Shelter Fund—Roger reported that the fund had a good balance, thanks in large part to one particularly generous donor. He has funded several grants recently for oil, gas and electricity, and expects to circulate appeals for donations when winter sets in.

Submitted by Jonathan Jacoby