

**Town of Westbrook, CT**  
**Affordable Housing Plan Subcommittee**  
**Special Meeting**  
**Thursday, March 4, 2021, 7:00 p.m.**  
**VIA REMOTE ACCESS – ZOOM Meeting only**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Marilyn Ozols, Chair; Elizabeth Carpenter, James Crawford, Bill Neale, Linda Nolf and Kate Sullivan (All 6 members were present).

**OTHERS PRESENT:** First Selectman Noel Bishop, Tony Cozza, John Hall, Pat Marcarelli, Andrew Schatz (arrived at 7:26 p.m.)

**ALSO PRESENT:** Eric Knapp, Planning, Zoning and Development Coordinator and Glenn Chalder, Consultant from Planimetrics

M. Ozols called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

**1. Introductions**

M. Ozols introduced everyone who is on the Subcommittee. Ozols indicated that she anticipates that this Subcommittee would be meeting for approximately 6-8 months. She emphasized that they are looking for public input throughout this entire process.

The Town was awarded a grant to put this Affordable Housing Plan together. The deadline for this plan is June 30, 2021, and the Town is seeking an extension through year's end to complete the process. The State deadline to complete the plan is June 30, 2022. M. Ozols said they hope to have the Plan completed before then. By statute, this Plan has a 5-year horizon meaning that it must be updated every 5 years.

Glenn Chalder from Planimetrics will be working with the Town to develop this Plan. He said that RiverCOG is simultaneously working on their Regional Plan.

There is a page on the Town Website with information about the Affordable Housing Plan Subcommittee and it includes the materials provided for this meeting and will continue to be updated throughout the process.

**2. Overview of Introductory Materials and Proposed Approach**

Prior to this meeting, G. Chalder distributed a Draft for Review and Discussion, Briefing Booklet #1, dated 3/4/2021, entitled, "Planning for Housing Choices" which has the following sections:

**Overview**

**Overall Goal – Seek to provide for a variety of housing choices in Westbrook for people and households of all ages and characteristics.**

**Reasons for Addressing Housing**

- Zoning Authority Requires Consideration of Housing Needs
- Plan of Conservation and Development Must Consider Housing Needs
- Everyone Needs Housing

**POCD Housing Strategies**

- Policies and On-Going Programs
  - Encourage Housing Diversity
- Action Steps

## Encourage Housing Diversity

### Proposed Scope of Work

- Kickoff/Scoping Review
- Prepare Baseline Information Request (Planimetrics)
- Review Meeting with Steering Committee
- Prepare Preliminary Strategies Report (Planimetrics)
- Review Meeting with Steering Committee
- Refine Materials/Prepare for Public Input (Planimetrics)
- Community Input/Feedback
- Review Meeting with Steering Committee
- Finalize Affordable Housing Plan (Planimetrics)

### 3. Potential Issues/Potential Strategies

G. Chalder solicited input from the attendees.

B. Neale offered to try to find a copy of the zoom tape of a RiverCOG planning meeting on affordable housing with a number of speakers including a representative from the National Home Builders Association. They talk about how zoning regulations being different in each of the 169 municipalities in CT can be a challenge.

J. Crawford offered to invite Bob Fusari to an upcoming meeting. B. Fusari is an experienced builder who has worked on affordable housing developments.

J. Crawford went on to discuss additional issues:

(a) Some families living in academic rentals are unable to maintain housing stability in the summer months, and they live in their cars or at campgrounds until the academic rental becomes available again at the end of September. Many of these families have school age children.

(b) In 2020, lumber prices went up 20%.

(c) There has been a change in housing demand which may be COVID-related.

(d) There should be consideration to changes in the Zoning Regulations to allow for more diversified housing options.

Elizabeth Carpenter from Westbrook Social Services said housing is the biggest issue she sees. People can't afford where they're living. She's very concerned about the moratorium being lifted on evictions because she sees people who are months behind in their rent. There are families living in difficult situations which can include living situations without proper utilities, too many people in an apartment, etc.

Tony Cozza stated that it is important to consider the substantial number of residents in Westbrook that are in the "A.L.I.C.E" population, Access Limited Income Constrained Employed.

The Subcommittee discussed asking developers to join a meeting to talk about what they look for when choosing a location for development and what makes a development attractive.

G. Chalder suggested holding listening sessions where a variety of people are invited to a meeting to discuss a particular topic from various angles.

G. Chalder said when the Plan is done, it will provide guidance for the Town moving forward, to apply for grants, and to help residents understand the important issues.

The Subcommittee discussed investigating the idea of potentially converting existing buildings into affordable housing.

G. Chalder discussed what was considered "affordable housing" under the State's definition. He stated that Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH), such as mobile homes, may provide housing for people that meet the state income requirements, but they do not count towards the Town's percentage of affordable housing because they are neither subsidized by the government nor are they deed restricted.

The Subcommittee noted that many of the elderly are looking to downsize. This type of housing may require handicapped access and other accommodations which can be more expensive.

The Subcommittee discussed how, while it's important to hold landlords accountable for substandard living conditions, the situation needs to be handled delicately, so people who need the apartments don't get evicted.

#### **4. Meeting Schedule**

The Subcommittee decided, by consensus, to meet on the first Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m. These meetings will continue to be virtual until further notice.

#### **5. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:14 p.m.