

**CITY OF NORWALK
AD HOC AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH, 20,2025
VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

ATTENDANCE: Nora Niedzielski-Eichner; Chair, Nicole Eaddy, Nicole Ayers, Darlene Young, Heather Dunn, Jalin Sead

STAFF: Michelle Andrzejewski

OTHER: Steve Kleppin; Director of Planning and Zoning, Steven Ivan; Housing Development Project Manager Josh Goldstein, Adam Bovilsky; Executive Director, Norwalk Housing Department, Barbara Smyth; Council President, Greg Burnett

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner, called the roll as reflected above.

III. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting: February 20th, 2025

**** MR. SEAD MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES.
** THE MOTION PASSED WITH FOUR IN FAVOR AND ONE
ABSTENTION (MS. AYERS).**

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No members of the public wished to participate.

V. OLD BUSINESS

A. Norwalk's Affordable Housing Action Plan - Next Steps (Norwalk Housing Authority and Redevelopment Agency)

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner discussed the affordable housing plan approved by Economic and Community Development. She stated it would be moving to the Common Council for full approval.

Mr. Bovilsky gave a brief history of the action matrix document. He noted since its first draft in August things have been additions. He felt certain additions needed to be assessed to determine if the Housing Authority was the right department to be handling them and whether additional funding would be required to get them done. He reviewed the items he felt were not under the housing authorities' preview. Mr. Bovilsky indicated some of the matrix items required clarification. He commented on the support they get from the city in the area of public housing but added they haven't supplied substantial capital funds towards public housing in some time.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner stated the need for a chart that shows all their available funding streams. She expressed the need for Community Services to have a comprehensive list of current contacts at each affordable housing site to streamline the process. Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner hoped that Ms. Andrzejewski could coordinate with the Community Services Department on that. Ms. Ayers said that that would be the purview of navigators of the Community Hub. She registered her concerns with the document saying it needed to be more than a list, something tangible and organized in a way that is easily accessible. She said she agreed with Mr. Bovilsky saying that normal public housing should not be the head or facilitating this. She gave multiple reasons but said the major reason was a need to define affordable. She felt it should be directly attached to the city's website as well as other tangible ways to access the information. Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner thought agreed feeling it's an opportunity for anyone with relevant data to coordinate with the community services hub.

Mr. Bovilsky talked about the streamlining of the application prospect for prospective workforce housing residents was something the Housing Authority wouldn't be able to take on. He stated the Housing Authority doesn't deal with most of the landlords who have affordable housing. He described issues like software differences that could make streaming the prospect very difficult. He said one application process would be great but under the circumstances, it would be very difficult to accomplish.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner brought up the idea of a simple pre-application process to gather the basic data on whether the wait listy is open for units they may qualify for. She stated that this part of the process has been redirected to planning and zoning.

Mr. Bovilski commented on the section covering home ownership counseling and educational programs. He discussed the system which is currently supported by HUD and provides HUD approved counselors. He noted they refer people to the approved counselors at HFD or BNC. His recommendation was to get the word out that for first time home buyers those are the two locations they should be reaching out to.

Ms. Ayers felt they shouldn't be sending their residents outside of the city to get resources. She wanted to know if there was a way to rectify that. She suggested making arrangements with the existing programs to be in Norwalk for at least one day to provide their services. Mr. Bovilsky said if they could work that out he would be glad to host them at the Envision Center regularly.

Ms. Young stated she agreed. She felt the Envision Center would be ideal. Mr. Bovilsky mentioned the Open Door Shelter was a good space in south Norwalk for working on financial independence. Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner asked Ms. Andzrjewski if the action item could be updated to include reaching out to HFD and BNC and see if they can coordinate their presence in one or more of Norwalk's available spaces. She also mentioned inviting them to the May forum with the hope of developing a more continuous relationship going forward. Ms. Young mentioned NAKA. Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner was unsure if they worked in the Fairfield County area but said she did plan to follow up. Ms. Ayers said she had. Made an appointment with them to go through their process but had to cancel due to the weather. She indicated she didn't have the time available to reschedule. Her impression from speaking with them was they may not be as affected by funding cuts as one may think. She noted it would be worth getting in touch with them.

Ms. Dunn recommended Chief Daniels would be a good person to work with.

Mr. Bovilsky then brought up the collaboration with Brownfield Remediation and Development. He explained the relationship with Brownfield. He then asked if they were only looking for sites owned by the city for development. Mr. Ivans stated they were coming out with a GIS map. created by a consultant based on previous assessment data plus additional information they have

Acquired. He said it will list potential city owned Brownfield sites. He noted it will be posted so interested developers can have access to it. Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner said they were going to reassign this item to Redevelopment.

Next Mr. Bovilsky discussed education of the community members about the availability of state and local resources to support development of affordable housing. He stated the Housing authority would need funding to staff up Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner noted both The Housing Authority and Redevelopment would need more staff to do this on a larger scale.

Mr. Bovilsky discussed the creation of a low-interest or forgivable loan program to provide financial assistance for affordable housing developers. He stated the housing authority isn't funded for this. He noted it was something that Redevelopment does. Mr. Ivans said it was something they could participate in. He noted the financial difficulties that arise with smaller developments as compared to larger developments. He said the Redevelopment Authority would be happy to look into more homeowner focused development.

Ms. Young had questions about property acquired through eminent domain. Mr. Kleppin and Mr. Ivans both said they would have to go back and see the status of those transactions. It was further explained that there were already plans in place in order for the land to be taken by eminent domain.

Ms. Dunn asked if Redevelopment's scope was the whole city or just targeted answers. Mr. Ivans from Redevelopment stated they have plan areas where they have authority. He explained they could help out with things outside the plan areas in a limited capacity. In plan areas they can give comment and feedback or require certain design aspects to be considered or implemented outside of P&Z's own review.

Ms. Ayers wanted to know if some of the properties from the yearly tax sales can be taken for affordable housing. Mr. Kleppin noted they were trying to put together some draft legislation that would give the Housing Authority right of first refusal on tax properties. He indicated that is currently not allowed. He also noted he didn't see why any qualified entity couldn't take part. Ms. Ayers said a speaker she heard at a public forum on the subject said Norwalk needs to look into private non-profit, public partnerships to address public housing. She wanted to know if they could write the legislation draft with a wider scope so it covers more than Norwalk Public Housing.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner discussed the challenges faced by the committee. She noted the number of constituents that they don't want more apartment buildings or apartment buildings being built at the current scale. She felt the message she was getting was the economics don't work when building on a smaller scale. She wanted to discuss the economics and why it's so hard. Mr. Bovilsky said the main resource for affordable housing is low income housing tax credits. He

Explained they have to use the prevailing wage which is a more expensive way of building a development. He pointed out they can't get the per-unit cost down. He noted the state would not consider a project unless there were at least 35 to 40 units. He summed up by saying the main tool they use can not be used for developments with fewer than 35 to 40+ size developments. Mr. Bovilsky also noted the number of people hired to do a 5-unit building is the same for a 150-unit building. He explained it's a tremendous amount of resources to be spent on structures that house one or two families. He stated their tax lean system is profitable for the city but limits the amount of property available to the city.

Mr. Ivan discussed rent restriction and it's affect on maintaining the property and noted that a larger number of units offsets that. He pointed out that you needed enough rent revenue to maintain the property.

Ms. Ayers wanted to make clear she was talking about tax sale properties being rent-to-own opportunities for people in the mid-income range. Ms. Dunn pointed out that the people who are affected by the tax lean are having trouble paying their taxes. She said most likely they are elderly or disabled. She stated she was opposed to taking somebody's house away because they are struggling financially and can't pay their taxes and giving it to someone else who's struggling. She felt they should be working on helping people stay in their homes. Ms. Ayers said she was talking about properties that are passed return. She said they should use the houses that don't sell at auction. She felt they should be put in a program to help other people.

Mr. Bovilsky discussed the graduated homeownership program. He stated they use their Section 8 program as a homeownership program for eligible families. He explained what is involved when you are part of the program. He said that most of the Section 8 tenants either don't qualify for a loan or don't want to risk it. Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner expressed looking for options other than a federal program.

Mr. Bovilsky discussed working with Westcog to further the housing goals. He stated they are lobbying against the state on their low income housing tax credit program. He noted the program as it stands could make it nearly impossible to develop affordable housing in Norwalk of a certain size.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner requested Mr. Ivan to give a quick summary of redevelopment items.

Mr. Ivan stated they don't own much brownfield property. He said he thinks with the city's input they are able and willing to help with any targeted projects. He discussed the best way to operate when the city identifies a property they want to work with. He indicated they would be happy to look for grant opportunities to help leverage the sale of the property. He listed several other ways Redevelopment could help in various situations. He said they needed the city to identify what they are looking for from Redevelopment by way of affordable housing to initiate the

Conversation.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner brought up the 10% number for workforce housing. She was curious why they were capping the expectation for developers at that number. She also wanted to know what was sustainable expectations for developers. Mr. Ivan said ultimately comes down to money. Mr. Ivan said he would run it past Mr. Bovilsky and have him email a more detailed response.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner requested an update on the 80% issue. Mr. Kleppin began by saying that the Planning and Zoning Commission had passed an amendment that came out of the affordable housing plan. It states that if someone develops a two-bedroom unit it counts as 1.5 workforce units. He explained how if you qualified for workforce housing by being at 80% or less of the standard median income and you get a raise that puts you above the SMI you can remain in that workforce unit as long as you make less than 90% of the SMI. He noted that the unit would no longer count against the 109% maximum. Mr Kleppin said he added a clause that those units would be eligible provided 12% of the city's units meet the affordable housing criteria. He also discussed a bonus provision where developers can get an extra 5% above the maximum density if they designate those units as 80% to 90% SMI.

Ms. Young asked how long the deed restrictions lasted for. Mr Kleppin responded by saying 90% are perpetuity.

Ms. Eaddy wanted a further explanation on what the numbers translate too. Mr. Kleppin said the SMI was based on family size. He elaborated saying if you make 80% or less of the SMI you would qualify for worforce housing. He then said if you have housing and a raise causes your income to rise to under 90% SMI you would still be allowed to stay in that unit.

B. Affordable Housing Account - Next Steps (Discuss recommendations for committee membership)

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner requested the committee members please consider further recommendations for the committee membership. She also requested they familiarize themselves with the circulated information.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business to discuss

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VII. DISCUSSION

There were no additional topics to discuss.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. AYERS MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted
China Mayhew
Telesco Secretarial Srvices