

**CITY OF NORWALK COMMON COUNCIL
AD HOC AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 29, 2022**

ATTENDANCE: Mayor Rilling; Greg Burnett, Chair; Nicol Ayers, Tom Keegan, Jenn McMurrer (6:15), Nora Niedzielski-Eichner, Diana Revolus, Darlene Young

STAFF: Laura Kenny, Senior Planner; Adam Bovilsky, Norwalk Housing Authority; Steve Kleppin, Director Planning and Zoning

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Burnett called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Burnett introduced the members of the committee who were on the call, a quorum was present

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no action on this item.

IV. DISCUSS PROPOSED MISSION OF AD HOC COMMITTEE (GREG BURNETT)

The Ad Hoc Affordable Housing Committee will advise the Norwalk Common Council in its discussion and actions regarding affordable housing in the City of Norwalk, including without limitation, as required to ensure compliance with Section 8-30 of the Connecticut General Statutes, and shall bring forward issues, concerns, and recommendations to any body established to prepare the affordable housing plan required pursuant to such statute.

Mr. Burnett noted that the agenda had included the above proposed mission for this committee and asked for thoughts from the committee.

Mayor Rilling joined the meeting and said thank you to the committee and said that Mr. Kleppin could updated the committee. He noted that affordable housing in Fairfield County was anything but. He said this was an important endeavor and he appreciated the effort.

Ms. Revolus suggested adding equitable and affordable home ownership to the mission statement.

Mr. Keegan asked if they were also planning to address safety, and if there were some affordable units in the city that just weren't as safe as others. Mr. Kleppin said the affordable housing units were workforce units, and others were under the housing authority, and different programs. He said that safety could fall under building code or the fire marshal.

Mr. Keegan said he wanted to ensure that any housing they have is safe. MR. Burnett said they could draft that into the mission and noted that the mission statement could evolve over time, but this was a start to give the ad hoc committee direction.

V. AFFORDABLE HOUSING PLAN PRESENTATION (LAURA KENNY)

Ms. Kenny shared a presentation called "Housing in Norwalk". She shared statistics including the population, noting there were 38000 reported housing units in Norwalk (per the 2020 census), and there were 35,000 reported households. She said that meant there was a low vacancy rate which drove up costs. She noted she had shared a list of the 701 deed restricted affordable units, and 23000 government assisted unit. Finally, she said that homeownership rate was 58%. She noted that data collection wasn't perfect and that this were reported numbers.

She listed the main players in housing in Norwalk, noting that she had shared a spreadsheet that included all of them. She reviewed the regulations directly impacting housing in Norwalk including the Connecticut 8-30g and 8-30j. She noted she'd shared a draft of an RFP to hire a consultant to create a Norwalk specific Affordable Housing plan.

She said the 8-30J Affordable Housing plans were required by June 2022, but that there were no penalties for missing that deadline. She also noted that there was a state level committee forming to address requirements for affordable housing plans.

She reviewed the municipal action to date including zoning regulations and the affordable housing trust fund. She noted that current parking bulk, height and density regulations limited the amount of affordable housing that could be built.

Mr. Burnett asked for elaboration on the RFP for the 8-30j. Ms. Kenny noted she'd shared the working draft, and that there were firms that specialized in affordable housing plans, and they'd go through the standard city procurement. She said that she and Mr. Kleppin would work closely with the consultants to ensure the best plan for Norwalk. Mr. Kleppin said they'd reached out to the department of housing to see if the deadline could be pushed and that it couldn't be but reiterated that there would be no penalties incurred by missing the deadline.

Ms. McMurrer joined at 6:15

VI. NORWALK HOUSING AUTHORITY UPDATE (ADAM BOVILSKY, EXEC. DIRECTOR)

Mr. Bovilsky shared a presentation called Introduction to the Norwalk Housing Authority's role in affordable housing. He said that the Authority was federally regulated, but also abided by city regulations and commissioners were appointed by the mayor, with a tenant representative.

He addressed the need for affordable housing, sharing the average tenant income per bedroom, and compared it to the state data. He said that you needed to earn about \$75,000 annually to afford a two-bedroom unit in Norwalk.

He also shared the waitlist data for Norwalk, he said many were closed, and they had very little turnover. He said they cleaned up the lists every year by reaching out to people on it to confirm they still wanted it.

He shared the public housing basics and the demographics of public housing in Norwalk. He said they had 336 senior units, 401 households with children and that 87% had female heads of household. He reviewed the question is public housing affordable housing.

He said they had 1061 Section 8 vouchers and on average the Housing Authority paid landlords about \$1300 per month. He said it required three contracts, and that tenants were required to pay 30% of their income. He also said that the waiting list currently held 1256 families, and that they issued an average of 94 new vouchers per year. He noted the demographics were similar to those of public housing. He also noted that they had two-tiered payment standards. He noted the increase in rents in the area due to a pandemic influx of renters from New York.

He talked through the types of vouchers noting the NHA administered 1061 vouchers in the private sector. He highlighted that there were 15 homeownership vouchers, for people who wanted to purchase a home. Ms. Young asked if homeownership vouchers were only for purchases in Norwalk. Mr. Bovilsky said the ones they had were in Norwalk, that most people who got them stayed but they were allowed to move anywhere. He said they had very stringent requirements and that for most families it was a 15-year voucher

He said Sound Communities was a new wholly controlled subsidiary that would build affordable housing in Norwalk. He noted they currently managed eight units of deed restricted housing. He said that Colonial Village was currently undergoing renovation and were moving toward new development of new buildings on West Cedar Street. He said that it would look similar, and shared artist renderings. He shared the number of units, noting that they were building some one-bedroom

units. He said that this was the plan that had been through Planning and Zoning. He said there had been a plan that had a large community center, he said there was a smaller one still in the plan.

He said there were several other projects in the work including the South Norwalk Train Station TOD to create more affordable and mixed income housing.

He said that low-income housing tax credits were the lifeblood of affordable housing. He said there were two different types, that the 4% credits were easier to get and more reliable. He discussed how they used the tax credits and what they did with them.

Ms. Ayers asked about plans for avoiding a ten year wait for affordable housing. Mr. Bovilsky said that for Section 8 they were applying for any new opportunities for vouchers, noting that they'd added 100. He said unless they were to implement a time limit on vouchers—which they didn't plan to do-- they couldn't expect big turnover. He said the rest was an issue of supply and demand. He said that there was a cap on building public housing but were slowly building more affordable housing. He said Norwalk had been at the cap for public housing, but the redevelopment of Washington Village meant that they might have a chance to have more public housing. He noted that building public housing was very difficult and that the federal government did not subsidize it enough.

Ms. Ayers asked about plans for safety wellness and health for the communities. Mr. Bovilsky said it was something they were working on; they were installing cameras to try to stop vandalism and the costs that go with it. He said they had exhausted safety and wellness HUD grants for most of their locations. He also said they had partnerships with the health department and other agencies and did a lot of things to help keep tenants safe and healthy. He said they were always looking for things they could do to keep tenants safe. Ms. Ayers said there was a lot of trash at some of the developments and garbage should be picked up more than once a week. Mr. Bovilsky said that the partnership with the city was critical, and that the city was obligated for trash collection. He said that in Roodner Court the trash was picked up three days a week, twice by City Carting at a fee and once by the city. He noted that there were half full trash receptacles there, and overflowing dumpsters. He said it was an issue and they were planning to do the same thing at Colonial Village where they planned to switch from cans to dumpsters. He said they'd also recently switched how the maintenance crews work, and that there was one team that just picked up trash full time.

He said that at Roodner court the tenant's association had been defunct for many years, so they'd reinstituted it and the tenant's association was now active. He said that was a model they wanted to expand to other developments to create a sense of community.

Ms. Revolus asked if there was any way to help the people on the home ownership track to connect with different programs, since the Section 8 housing didn't allow for the purchase of multi-family homes? Mr. Bovilsky said the challenge was regulation, he said the HUD program required paying the mortgage and multifamily homes were more expensive than HUD could pay. He said they'd tried things before his time for the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, but the money didn't work.

Ms. Revolus asked about the cameras and the tenant concerns about police issues surrounding them. Mr. Bovilsky said that most of the complaints came from people who were having legal issues with the authority, like people who had illegal tenants and didn't want the camera to see them. He said most tenants liked them and some were advocating for more. He reiterated that the cameras were in public spaces only, he said that they did provide direct feeds to NPD, but he didn't think anyone was watching the cameras live.

Ms. Young asked if there were plans to renovate developments after Colonial Village and if there was a timeline. Mr. Bovilsky said they had found a project manager to work on that and he hoped it would speed the project along. He said they were in the middle of the Colonial Village renovation and were then looking at Meadow Gardens and Section 18 Demo Dispo, where if things align, they could move tenants and rebuild. He said Leroy Downs needed work as well and that Roodner Court was more complicated, he said the new staffer would start working on the plans for that right away. He said King Kennedy wasn't on the list. Ms. Young said it at least needed a good power wash. Mr. Bovilsky said that maintenance was part of the plan, that there were 23 maintenance people and they'd just added an electrician and a plumber.

Ms. McMurrer asked about plans for senior housing. Mr. Bovilsky said that Leroy Downs would include new senior housing and they might be able to extend it. He said that the senior list was manageable right now, especially compared to the other lists. He said that wait time was 4-6 months.

Ms. Young asked Mr. Kleppin if there were issues with the zoning changes that would help or hurt affordable housing in Norwalk. Mr. Kleppin said that the changes wouldn't harm housing. He said they always tried to put affordable housing with access to transit, shopping and jobs. He said that the Workforce Housing Regulations used to be more focused on South Norwalk, but now any multi-family project was under the same rules. Mr. Bovilsky said that Norwalk was going to be a test city for HUD for a moving to work program. He said that they believed it would be successful, and that they hoped to hire a mobility counselor to help people understand what moving to a more expensive neighborhood would do.

Mr. Burnett said that he would like to have the Ad Hoc Committee visit Colonial Village, Mr. Bovilsky said it would be best when they were just finishing a renovation so the committee

VII. AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST FUND UPDATE (GREG BURNETT)

Mr. Burnett said that the city received funding that was earmarked for enhancing affordable housing. He said the funds were in a trust account for upkeep, building and renovating housing. He said the ad hoc committee would be tasked with disbursing the monies.

He said the amount was presently a little more than \$150,000.

VIII. NEXT STEPS/NEXT MEETING

There was no action on this item.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:45pm.

Respectfully submitted,
L Grassilli
Telesco Secretarial Service

City of Norwalk
Ad Hoc Affordable Housing Committee
Regular Meeting
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