

## **Hartford Committee on Housing and Homelessness – DRAFT Minutes**

**May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023; 6:00 PM**

**Hartford, VT Town Hall, Room 312**

### **Attendance:**

In-person: John Haffner (Chair), Sandy Mariotti, Alex Belenz, Jen Kravitz, Patrick Danaher

Remote: Ally Tufenkjian, Dan Nott

Public: Michael Redmond; several members of the public were in attendance remotely

Staff: None

### **1. Call to Order**

John Haffner called meeting to order at 6:07 PM.

### **2. Review Order of Agenda**

John Haffner reviewed the order of agenda. Jen Kravitz requested that a public comment agenda be added. Public comment was added as agenda item #4 after the approval of minutes.

### **3. Approve April 20, 2023 Committee Meeting Minutes**

Minutes approved unanimously via motion of Mariotti/Kravitz, with Belenz abstaining.

### **4. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

### **5. Update on Town Plan Housing Chapter Ad Hoc Steering Committee**

The Ad Hoc Steering Committee has not met since the last HCHH meeting. The next meeting will be in late May or early June. John noted that the multi-media booth at JAM is open and encouraged members to spread the word. The next community meeting for the Town Plan Housing Chapter is scheduled for June 12<sup>th</sup>; no location has been set.

### **6. Home Creators Expo – May 6<sup>th</sup>**

John gave a report on the Home Creators Expo from May 6<sup>th</sup>, which was focused on providing information and resources for homeowners interested in building an accessory dwelling unit (ADU). Approximately 140 people attended, and most participants were very engaged in the sessions and vendors that were there. There was also information on examples of policy adjustments aimed at facilitating ADU construction that the committee could take a look at. Resources compiled online will be shared with committee. Jen asked if the event would be held again, John said there is interest but no decisions have been made yet. There was discussion about the level of impact of ADU construction on housing needs; it will take time for there to be any sort of impact, and it can still be a daunting task for homeowners even with financial and educational support. Other towns, such as Woodstock, are providing additional financial support for homeowners to create ADUs for the local workforce (Woodstock is providing up to \$10,000 with funds from local option tax, which could be an option in Hartford).

## **7. Vital Communities Housing Breakfast**

John noted that Vital Communities is hosting their annual Housing Breakfast on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7:30 – 10:00 AM in Lebanon and encouraged committee members to attend.

## **8. HCHH Housing Application Reviewer Nomination**

This item was tabled until the next meeting since staff were not present to answer questions.

## **9. HCHH Workplan Development**

### *Housing Group Interview Reports*

- Jen went to the Thetford Housing Committee and plans to sit down with the chair. They are discussing similar issues in Thetford and are performing a lot of public outreach. There are some new landlords in Thetford as a result of some of their outreach; some are finding it difficult. John noted that they had spent a lot of time trying to find a suitable spot for affordable housing development but haven't been successful.
- Sandy met with a representative with the Woodstock Economic Development Corporation Housing Working Group who is distributing Town funds for ADU construction, as well as Mary Reilly from Lady of the Snow Church who provides services to low-income residents including financial assistance with rent and appliances.
- Alex – not able to connect with New London yet, but noted the very different context (small, wealthy town with no affordable housing). Their committee's focus has been on getting affordable housing developed in town.
- Ally – not able to connect with Lynn Goodwin in Lebanon, did connect with Cheri Sullivan at the Haven who indicated that HCHH representatives could attend a future Housing First working group meeting where coordinated case management is discussed. Michael Redmond noted that Lynn Goodwin has submitted a plan to the Lebanon City Council for addressing homelessness in Lebanon, and that Lynn has hired a consultant to identify a strategy for coordination amongst the "core four" communities for regional cooperation around addressing homelessness.

### *Other Follow-Up from April Meeting*

Alex noted that the motel voucher program in Vermont is ending by the end of June; Michael Redmond noted that there are about 60 households between Hartford and Bradford that are housed through this program. On July 1<sup>st</sup>, the State will revert to pre-COVID rules (more restrictive eligibility and time restrictions). Currently there are 1,600 households in the program; after July 1<sup>st</sup> there will be funding for about 150 households with an increase in the winter for hazardous weather conditions. There is a possibility that the program could be extended if the Governor vetoes the current state budget and returns it to the legislature. There are some financial programs to assist people with transitioning out of the voucher program to permanent housing; however, there are obvious challenges with that. The Haven has discussed the possibility of bringing together agencies and organizations to the table to see who can offer what resources.

There was discussion of the role the committee can play in addressing the current homelessness and housing instability challenge in the short-term. Brattleboro has brought together an ad-hoc group of organizations to address this challenge but hasn't identified many solutions. Jen noted that the general

public doesn't have a good sense of how dire things are for people. John brought up the idea of no-cause eviction protections as a short-term measure to keep people housed. Dan noted that there have been a lot of hurdles in getting no-cause evictions protections passed in the state, including lack of support in the state legislature. John noted that there is a lot of misunderstanding of tenant protections that currently exist.

The following potential action items were discussed:

- Listserv on the situation
- Reaching out to other municipalities to see how they are addressing this challenge
- Advocating for just-cause eviction protections
- Allocating ARPA funds – Ally to follow up on what funds are still available and if they are eligible to be used for emergency housing. Michael noted potential eligibility challenges – Vermont's program used other funds; would likely need to pay the going motel rate (~\$100/night/room). Ally noted that having a committee representative come to the next selectboard meeting could be helpful, as well as performing outreach to town departments
- Outreach to local churches to provide day or night programs
- Ally to reach out to Chief Sheldon to make him aware of the situation, incorporate into community safety review
- Tabling at Hartford Community Coalition Block Party – Wednesday, June 21<sup>st</sup> from 5:00 – 8:00 PM (setup at 4:00 PM) at Lyman Point Park would be a good opportunity to raise awareness. Materials could include committee charge and information on the end of the voucher program – Dan could assist with preparing one-pagers. Also an opportunity for collecting signatures.
- Attend June 13<sup>th</sup> selectboard meeting and give an update on the situation.

Members voted unanimously via motion of Sandy/Patrick to submit the following statement to the town listserv:

The Hartford Committee on Housing and Homelessness would like to call attention to the expiration of the State of Vermont's emergency housing voucher program on July 1<sup>st</sup> after the legislature declined to include continued support for the program in the state budget. According to the Upper Valley Haven, there are 60 households in Hartford and Bradford that are utilizing this program. After July 1<sup>st</sup>, the amount of funding for this program will be dramatically reduced and eligibility criteria dramatically tightened. In the view of the Committee, this deadline is a call to action for local and regional partners to identify solutions for continued housing stability for these residents in need, and yet another reminder of the urgent housing crisis that our community and region faces.

## **10. Committee Membership**

No updates.

## **11. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 PM via motion of Jen/Sandi.

*Respectfully submitted by Alex Belenz*

**Committee Membership as of 4/20/2023:**

John Haffner, Chair (through 12/12/2024)

Patrick Danaher, Vice Chair (through 11/28/2024)

Alex Belenz, Clerk (through 11/28/2024)

Dan Nott (through 11/28/2024)

Sandra Mariotti (through 4/03/2025)

Jennifer Kravitz (through 4/03/2025)

Ally Tufenkjian, Selectboard Liaison

Lori Hirshfield, Staff Liaison