

Town of Richmond Housing Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: June 26, 2024

Time Started: 5:30p

Time Ended: 7:01p

Keith Osborne, Host, Town Planner

Present: Nick Blanchet, Virginia Clarke, Mark Hall (Chair), Andrew Mannix, Matt Parisi, Connie van Eeghen

Guest: Carl Bohlen (Chair of Hinesburg Housing Committee), Benjamin Avery (for profit developer, lives in Hinesburg)

Absent: (None)

Committee is approved at 5 members, 2 alternates (5/16/22); quorum is 3

1. Welcome and troubleshooting
 - a. Re-introductions to Nick Blanchet: living in Richmond about 4 years, with dog and 3 kids, works as a software engineer
2. Adjustments to Agenda - none
3. Approval of the May 22, 2024 meeting minutes
 - a. Accepted as written
4. Discussion with Carl Bohlen, Town of Hinesburg Affordable Housing Committee Chair, and Benjamin Avery, also from Hinesburg
 - a. Hinesburg's affordable housing committee has existed for many years (18 years); what was done to lay the groundwork for supporting affordable housing in Hinesburg?
 - i. Started in 2006, Carl started this based on similar work in Montpelier
 - ii. The housing issues since then have only magnified, not just due to COVID-19
 - iii. Starting the committee was relatively simple with a supportive Selectboard
 1. Started with nine members, then down to seven, up to nine with two vacancies now
 - iv. Key facilitators: SB support; Town staff support
 - v. Key barrier: uncertain support from Town residents
 - b. How has town support for affordable housing been cultivated over the years?
 - i. Haystack is an unusual case study (247 units): creative solutions to move through permitting process while prioritizing the type of housing needed – this is a project of Benjamin Avery, developed over the last 10 years
 1. About 100 units need to be put up for sale; senior units for rentals
 2. Similar to development in Williston in which 20% are affordable (at 100% AMI)
 3. Current interest rate at 8% makes this very difficult now; when this comes back down, it will be do-able again
 - ii. Developers in Hinesburg are required to meet with the housing committee; percentage of affordable housing is required – this is called “inclusionary zoning.”
 1. In some communities, this just a “check the box” action
 2. In Hinesburg, the Housing Committee goes to the DRB and speaks in support of the developer’s plan – it’s a good process. It’s a way to support housing, whether “Affordable Housing,” workforce housing, senior housing, etc. Included in “inclusionary zoning,” in Hinesburg, is any project with at least 10 units
 3. Do developers resist restrictions on their forecasted income due to lower rent units?
 - a. Minor pushback, but bylaws have an “out clause,” by creating an “equity program” that allows ownership
 - b. Developers can adjust their margins on other units to support the lower units
 - c. If all the units in a project are “affordable” , e.g. 30 units that are all AF, then project must be subsidized, as for-profit developers could not afford this. It’s easier with a variety of units, e.g. Haystack (senior care, AF, smaller carriage homes with perpetual affordability). The larger and more diverse the project, the easier it is to fund affordable units.

- d. Hinesburg affordable housing projects are all based on non-profit entities/developers; for profit developers would need federal or state funding support
- iii. In addition to Selectboard and municipal staff:
 - 1. Attend DRB meetings, providing written comments, read the minutes or write ups
 - 2. Write monthly articles in local newspaper, republished in weekly newspaper, to highlight housing issues and updating by regional planning commission (lack of affordable housing; lack of “housing for the middle”)
 - 3. Plan to go to voters for funding, based on a small fund started by community block grant received for an economic development project and a Cathedral Square project (total \$50K in a revolving loan fund because a food facility, “VT Smoke and Cure,” moved to Hinesburg); not much from ARPA funds. Grow the fund with small amounts each year, either from other projects or from the taxpayers – may put into budget for next year, perhaps tied to a specific project
- iv. Town residents: may have raised issues, not necessarily just about housing but any issue, for example from neighbors (Green Street project – needed to be redesigned with help of non profit developer – resulting in an additional 42 units) Benjamin Avery’s suggestions for encouraging housing projects:
 - 1. Different towns challenge such projects over time. Develop a realistic process, with the DRB, zoning regulations, related committees – where there is support for community input and the regulations and process are aligned.
 - 2. There will always be a NIMBY in the community; that’s not the town’s issue. Developing a good process is.
 - 3. Benjamin Avery: Would love to work in Richmond, especially the high density properties, but property owners need to have a realistic view of what is possible; lots of potential in Richmond with good water/sewer infrastructure, infill regulations, walkable downtown, etc. Creating attractive development is very possible.
- c. What have been the most beneficial partnerships nurtured outside the town/community?
 - i. Carl used to work in the housing field, so met with the key players: developers, non profits, senior housing... meets with them periodically, especially as committee members have changed. Includes bank from Middlebury, mobile home park, state representatives, funding opportunities, town residents familiar with the field, community members who support AF (like Richmond’s Molly Dugan at Cathedral Square; Miranda Lescaze at Champlain Housing Trust), other committees within the town
- d. Hinesburg Committee: meets ~once/month, plus other board/committee meetings
- e. How to identify potential properties: real estate representatives bring opportunities up for consideration, and the developer does a quick zoning, density, and infrastructure assessment, along with an estimate of what to pay for the land
 - i. Issues in Richmond
 - 1. Infrastructure development
 - 2. Scarce flat lands
 - ii. Issues for the developer
 - 1. Rising costs
 - 2. Never ending cascade of fees (including fees to help protect threatened bird species such as bobolinks) before getting to permitting, all of which add costs which get passed on to the end buyer
 - iii. Opportunities: every community has possibilities, whether for large (80 units) or small (8) projects. Richmond has favorable PUD rules.
 - 1. Create a plan for slow, continuing growth, using a structured process that ensures that rentals or equity program provide value to the residents and continued low barriers to housing for the community, in the context of the current market.
 - 2. Streamline fee schedules for additional inclusionary housing

3. Make the process as easy as possible; Hinesburg and S Burlington are challenging; Essex and Williston are not
 4. Work collaboratively with developers; not “us and you.”
5. Discussion of RRLF
- a. Buttermilk was not approved for the rental revolving loan fund opportunity in June of 2024
 - b. Is another “tool in the toolbox,” recently set up by the state to support work place housing
 - c. Buttermilk needs ~\$8m; this would have provided ~\$1m of that, with a match from the town or a local employer
 - i. They were asking for \$500K from the Town, which could come from a housing fund if we were to develop one, as a gift or some compensatory action
 - ii. Matt: how different from VHIP support, a grant program that matches funds – unknown
 - d. It is our plan to develop a framework for subsidized housing; this can be part of that
6. General Updates and discussion – Committee – not discussed; hold for next time
- a. Committee priorities and focus through 2024 – Refine
 - b. Setting the environment/pathway for subsidized housing in Richmond
 - i. Housing Definitions
 - ii. Continue building out Chair Hall's doc
7. Other business, correspondence, and adjournment
- a. Next meeting: July 24 at 5:30
 - b. Proposed agenda to include: Framework for housing development (Mark’s document)
 - c. Agreed to adjourn at: 7:01

Recorded by Connie van Eeghen