

Housing Committee Minutes September 25, 2023

Members present: Sally Cedarholm, Caren Rossi, Carey Brown, Andy Robertson, Nick Taylor. Visitors included Marc Beliveau, David Houston and Wayne Lehman from the Planning Board and Will Downey from Barrett Planning Group.

Absent: Amanda Gourgue and Deb Sugarman.

Meeting called to order at 12:01pm by Assistant Chair Katrin Kasper.

The first order of business was a review of Barrett Planning's draft of "Housing Opportunities Planning Barriers Audit" as presented by Will Downey.

Andy Robertson raised a concern that the statement about new residents in Lee being primarily older and wealthy didn't seem accurate, noting that families with children comprise the largest segment of new residents. Caren Rossi agreed adding that the school district has always been a big draw for young families. Carey Brown concurred.

Marc Beliveau discussed the sequence of steps that will need to be followed following the audit review, he also recommended a title change for the zoning regs. Grid page (pg. 2).

Carey Brown questioned what the actual definition of wet soils is? Nick Taylor replied citing DES and state agency guidelines and definitions. Marc Beliveau described state vs. town wetland protections noting that requirements like buffer distance can vary greatly.

Sally Cedarholm questioned what exactly the housing grant money is being used for. Sally also wanted to know when the planning board would be bringing a warrant article for ADUs forward, expressing concern about overloading voters with housing information in 2024.

Will Downey explained that the process should take place over more than a year to avoid an information overload. Marc Beliveau explained that some items can be cleaned up by the planning board without the need to go on the warrant, the planning board can hold a public hearing and then make changes.

Katrin Kasper clarified that it appears nothing will be going on the 2024 warrant with regard to housing. Marc Beliveau said that's probably correct, the group has plenty of time for a survey, public meetings, hearings, etc... noting that the educational piece is an important part of the process. Marc does not want the process to slow down but does want ample time to engage the community.

Sally Cedarholm recommended having a presence at the Farmers Market next summer.

Marc Beliveau wants to take care not to appear to be promoting something the group is not, he feels perception will play a big part in successful advancement.

David Houston asked Will Downey "What's on the survey for questions?" Will responded that the questions he uses are general in nature and designed to get people thinking about affordable housing in broad terms. Typically he presents a set of options to gauge appetite and presents multiple options for any single barrier.

Marc Beliveau inquired as to when might be a good date for a public meeting?

Katrin Kasper asked if the survey will reach people who are not Lee residents? Will Downey said "yes" that is the plan. He recommended including town employees who live out of town, large employers who have non-resident employees and posters with QR codes at the market or Dunkin' Donuts.

David Houston questioned the use of QR codes, noting that they could be abused by parties with a particular agenda or bored teenagers.

Marc Beliveau expressed concerns about confidentiality, he feels it's important that any survey documents clearly state how data will be kept and who will be viewing it. Will Downey stated that no individual comments would be identifiable.

Marc Beliveau proposed re-scheduling the Housing Public Meeting that was postponed to Wednesday Oct. 25, at 6:30 pm in the upstairs meeting room at the PSC.

Katrin Kasper asked if the meeting could be recorded? Andy Robertson replied that he could record and livestream the meeting on the town's Youtube channel.

Caren Rossi will send all present copies of the proposed survey questions. Will Downey will accept input on the questions until Oct. 11, he has a comment form template he will forward.

Nick Taylor inquired if Will Downey was going to use what he was presenting today at the public meeting? Will replied yes, with some edits and a title change. Nick suggested that definition of the term "barrier" with neutral connotations should come earlier in the presentation rather than later There was general agreement amongst the attendees.

Marc Beliveau wants to be prepared for public questions that might not be data driven like "Why are you even doing this? Lee is fine the way it is." He feels it's important to note that other communities are looking into the same problems and that lack of housing is a real, statewide challenge.

Will Downey noted that SRPC has lots of data on towns in Strafford County except Lee, Katrin Kasper said that's because Lee wasn't a member of SRPC until last year.

Katrin Kasper suggested having town employees share their stories of housing difficulties.

Will Downey will use median incomes and housing prices for the region as opposed to just the town.

Caren Rossi will send out meeting invitations.

Katrin Kasper made a motion to adjourn at 1:10 pm, Sally Cedarholm seconded the motion all that were in favor left.

Minutes recorded by Andy Robertson, Lee Town Administrator