



DANVERS AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST

TOWN HALL, DANVERS, MASSACHUSETTS 01923
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Minutes April 15, 2015

Danvers Affordable Housing Trust: Gardner Trask, Don Gates, Sally Calhoun, Carla King and Stacey Bernson

Staff: Susan Fletcher and Francine Butler

Also Attending: Bob Hemeon and Paula Gates from Community Council.

Minutes of March 25, 2015

A motion was made, seconded and unanimously voted to approve the minutes of March 25, 2015.

Potential Partnering with Community Council – Bob Hemeon, Chairman and Paula Gates, Board Member.

Bob Hemeon and Paula Gates introduced themselves to the Trust as Chair and Board Member of the Danvers Community Council.

Trask gave a brief history of the Trust. He told them that they have a Housing Production Plan that has been approved by the DHCD which outlines the state of the affordable housing in the Town, and provides tools for going forward to encourage the creation of affordable housing. The housing production plan suggested partnering with service groups where there may be an opportunity to help each other. Trask told them about projects that the Trust has supported. The Trust is now meeting with civic organizations to see where we could benefit from each other. He asked them to explain what the Community Council does.

Hemeon wanted to ask one question. He asked if what the Trust did was similar to the work done by the Danvers Housing Authority (DHA). Calhoun responded that they were a state agency that provides rental housing and subsidies for those who income qualify. They use Section 8 certificates, which are rental based assistance.

Calhoun explained that the Trust worked with the DHA on the project on Cherry Street. It was a tax title property given to the DHA, and the Trust, through the HOME program, contributed some funding for that project.

Fletcher said that there are a number of projects that the Trust has provided some funding. The Trust is not large enough to actually do a project on our own; we look to partner with others. The Trust's mission is to create affordable housing opportunities. She said that sometimes the funding provided by the Trust is the difference between a project going forward or not.

Calhoun explained that the largest chunk of funds that the Trust has received were required from Avalon at the time of the development of the Danvers State Hospital project. The developer had to contribute \$500,000 for affordable housing to the Town.

Don Gates added that these funds have helped Habitat for Humanity with projects at Mill Street and Coolidge Road.

Trask said that the Town has a Multi-Family Affordability Provision in their Bylaws. Calhoun said that any development of five units or more requires the donation of a unit or monetary contribution to the Town.

Fletcher said that HOME funds are the Trust's only renewable income. The Town's demographics do not qualify for state or federal funding. Any monies given with this program are returned upon the sale of the unit.

Trask said that the Trust does not own properties. The Trust does not have the capacity to be landlords.

Hemeon described what the Community Council does. It was started in the early 1950's and was created by clergy, business owners, social organizations, the Red Cross, police department and school department. There was a need to help people having a hard time meeting bills, paying for heat, electricity or water. They wanted to get a group together to see how they could help, and this has continued since that time. Paula Gates and Paula Remon started the Food Pantry in the early 1990's. The Director of Social Services at the time, Mary Kelly, saw there was a need to provide food for individuals and families who were struggling.

Hemeon explained that this fell under the Community Council's umbrella of a non-profit. It has run successfully over the years. With the influx of people in the motels, the Community Council needs to figure out how they can handle the increased need for helping people with food.

Paul Gates said that they have 566 families that come through the Food Pantry. They have recently partnered with the Gloucester Food Bank. Gloucester goes into the Boston Food Bank and brings the food to Danvers. The Food Pantry is open every Monday and Thursday and open Wednesday night twice a month. People come to us if they are being evicted, can't pay water or electric bills, or need some other assistance. She said that their numbers have skyrocketed. One problem that they have seen in the last year or two is Conifer Hill. There are 90 units at Conifer Hill, and 35 families come to the food pantry. Many have come for electric help. People can't afford to live there. Hemeon said that they come to the Community Council for help to pay their bills.

Gates asked if the Community Council subsidized rents. Hemeon responded that they do not have the money to do that. They help people get by or talk to the electric company to keep their electricity on.

The Community Council is spending more money than they are making. They are looking into ways to fund raise. They do a fundraising letter at Christmas time but they are trying to get some funds on a regular basis, not just at the holidays. Hemeon said that someone has come to help them with grant writing. They understand that there are a lot of grants out there that they can access. He said that the Town has been running a recycling program, and the money is donated to the Community Council.

Calhoun asked if the money from the People to People program goes to the Community Council, and Hemeon responded that he believes it does.

Paula Gates said that the food pantry is doing great. She said that at Community Council the problem is that people come in with big problems that require big money. Pam Parkinson tries to pull together money from different sources to try to provide help.

Paula Gates said that they have a great relationship with the electric company. If people are behind in electric payments, they have to get into a payment plan. As long as they are adhering to the payment plan, Community Council helps at the end.

King said that when you help someone that does not have the means to continue, they will be back for help in a month or two. Paula Gates agreed this is a problem with Community Council as well.

Hemeon said that they assist people at the holidays with gifts or gift cards. They put together a list of children that need help, and it is disbursed to local businesses and organizations. Hemeon said they get a lot of donations of toys and gifts through the year by the Highland School. When the blast happened, Community Council disbursed the funds that were raised. They met with families to provide help. The Community Council recorded every penny received and disbursed out to the community.

Paula Gates said that the Community Council and Food Pantry are tied into the guidance counselors at the schools. They have provided glasses, back packs and coats.

Calhoun felt that King made a good point that affordable housing is defined by federal regulations. The units at Venice Street are going to sell for \$186,000. They are two three-bedroom units. The income limit for a three-person family is \$62,750. The question is will someone with that income and three kids are able to afford that unit.

King is okay with the Venice Street project because the unit will be owned. The two-bedroom units at Conifer Hill are renting for \$1,500. Bernson agreed that this was not affordable. King explained that this was considered affordable by federal guidelines. Fletcher said that she is going to check to see what the rents are for the units.

King said that Conifer Commons is getting \$1,500 per month for rent. The landlord is getting a large portion for Section 8, and Section 8 can go anywhere. Fletcher believed Conifer Commons was a project-based Section 8 project because it was funded through tax credits.

Paula Gates said that the Food Bank helped deal with the families in the motels, since the food is now purchased at a huge discount. Hemeon said that Community Council was purchasing the food at retail, and the food bank has helped with the cost. He said that the food purchased at the food bank for one

month cost \$774.08. That same food purchased at Market Basket would cost \$2,309.15, which is a savings of 66.5%. Paula Gates said that Community Council's treasurer purchases food at the food bank on line the night before it goes on sale.

Hemeon said that Gloucester is transporting the food from the food bank. Paula Gates said that Gloucester helped Community Council through the process.

Trask said that the Trust's money is earmarked for affordable housing. They are trying to help people get into an apartment or a home of their own.

Paula Gates said that people fill out a form and their problems are assessed.

Hemeon said that Pam Parkinson from the Senior Center tries to find housing for people. This may be another alternative to look at.

Fletcher asked if Community Council receives funds that are earmarked. Could the Trust provide funds for a specific purpose? Hemeon said that when funds are earmarked for the pantry or holiday gift giving, it is put away for that purpose and that purpose alone.

Calhoun said that disability is a problem. If a person has a disability, social security disability does not kick in for six months. The assumption is that states will have a short term disability in place, which Massachusetts does not. She knows of a family where the father needed a lung transplant. Paperwork went into Social Security and people contributed funds to help with their mortgage payments until they were approved.

Paula Gates said any funds they receive from the Pillsbury Fund needs to be spent on the elderly and documented very carefully.

Bernson asked how Community Council does intake. Paula Gates said they depend a lot on Pam Parkinson. Community Council has a form that needs to be filled out. They never give anyone money. We pay the landlord or electric company directly.

Hemeon said that from January through March 24th, Community Council took in \$22,674 and expenses were \$21,378.

Gates asked if there was any breakdown for rental assistance. Paula Gates said that those numbers could be determined.

Fletcher asked if there were people that Community Council would have liked to help, but they did not have the funds. Paula Gates said that they do not have those types of funds. They give small amounts. The Food Pantry is tangible, and people donate to it. People understood when we were helping Danvers people with the explosion.

Calhoun suggested that they could have an ad hoc arrangement. They can leave it loose on a case-by-case basis.

Gates reminded everyone that the Trust's mission is affordable housing.

King asked if Community Council were provided funds, would they be in a position to help someone for a year to get on their feet.

Trask asked if this qualified for the Trust's mission for providing affordable housing. They would be trying to help someone who is in an affordable unit stay in it.

Bernson said that if someone is injured at work, they could lose their home waiting for their long term disability to kick in.

Calhoun said that the Trust's mission was established for a specific purpose.

A discussion ensued regarding affordable housing.

Gates said they need to determine if the Trust's mission is broad enough. They will find that out when Fletcher sends them a copy of the Trust document.

Hemeon said that they can help people based on the Trust's guidelines.

Calhoun felt it was amazing what Community Council did.

Bernson asked if the 566 families were per month or per week, and Paula Gates said that was the number of registered families. Hemeon said that most people don't want to use it, but they end up there.

Paula Gates said that they deliver to disabled and elderly.

Calhoun asked what the qualifications were for the Food Pantry, and Paula Gates responded that it is open to anyone from Danvers. She said that when they help people with bills or payments, they are very careful. Paula Gates said that a lot of people come in, and they do not want to be there.

Calhoun said that the Trust would look at what their proposal would be.

Trask said that the Town Manager is coming to the Trust's next meeting. The Trust wants to see if they can reduce building permit fees or planning board fees (soft costs) to allow the developer to produce affordable housing.

A motion was made, seconded and unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Tish Lentine
Clerk