

Town of Agawam
Housing Committee
Minutes
July 29, 2020

Members Present: Paul Jenney, Corinne Wingard, Mario Tedeschi, Millie Parzychowski, Vincenzo Ronghi, Mark Paleologopoulos

Members Absent: Jeremy Casey

Others Present: Marc Strange, Director Planning and Community Development

Meeting, held by Zoom, called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Vice Chair Parzychowski .

1. Welcome and Introductions:

2. Approval of Minutes of February 25, 2020 meeting:

Motion to approve by Member Tedeschi, second by Member Jenny, all in favor except Member Paleologopoulos who abstained.

3. Election of Officers:

Motion by Secretary Wingard to elect Member Mario Tedeschi as Chair of Committee. Second by Vice Chair Parzychowski. Nomination accepted by Member Tedeschi. All in favor.

Motion by Member Ronghi to elect Vice Chair Parzychowski Vice Chair of Committee. Second by Secretary Wingard. Nomination accepted by Vice Chair Parzychowski. All in favor.

Motion by Member Ronghi to elect Secretary Wingard Secretary of Committee. Second by Member Jenney. Nomination accepted by Secretary Wingard. All in favor.

Chair Tedeschi asked Vice Chair Parzychowski if wished him to take over meeting which she did.

4. Review of Duties and Responsibilities of Housing Committee as Specified in Ordinance Creating Committee:

Chair Tedeschi asked Secretary Wingard to read the nine Duties and Responsibilities in the Ordinance.

1. Completion of periodic local housing needs studies.

Secretary Wingard noted last Housing Needs assessment was done in 2016, and would need to start thinking about doing next study.

2. Development and implementation of housing action plan.

Secretary Wingard stated Plan completed. Covers years starting FY 2018. Member Parzychowski stated goes through FY 2022.

3. Review of and making recommendations on housing proposals that include the creation of housing opportunities that are affordable to households of all income levels and abilities that are seeking local support or permitting.

Vice Chair Parzychowski stated felt committee should be more informed, instead of reading about permits, Planning and Zoning in the Agawam Advertiser news.

Member Wingard asked if could put process in place so housing committee knows when application for permit for housing.

Member Ronghi stated regardless if given information, impossible for us to do that without appropriate zoning rules as no motivation for developer to do anything to give away money. Council has not provided tools for any motivation for developer. Vice Chair Parzychowski stated conversation to be had, exploring the benefits then maybe go to Council. Secretary Wingard stated Ordinance is telling us to review and make recommendations, and even if no incentive, at least have the conversation and put idea in people's heads. Director Strange stated permitting process started with Planning Board. At that stage good time to approach developer. Member Paleologopoulos stated in past when wanted to be proactive, when have land to be developed, ask developer, as other towns have done that have non-profits that work with, like in Westfield, noting that by the time the developer comes to Planning Board has sunk money into development.

Vice Chair Parzychowski asked if developer came with proposal for 100 units, could we make an exception to give more units if included affordable. Member Ronghi stated that would be spot zoning, and Council has subcommittee looking at zoning overhaul because so much spot zoning. To get some leverage for affordable housing, better to push Council for zoning changes had discussed before, such as cluster zoning. Then would have leverage for developer to consider their options, and ultimately benefit town.

Secretary Wingard asked what are the steps when developer wants to build in town. Director Strange said depends. Developer comes to Planning Department with proposal for an idea. Gets information, and comes back when ready to submit to Planning Board. Could be six months. Not too late when gets to Planning Board, if town had an appetite for affordable housing. Would be easier if Housing Committee sent letter to Planning Board. Member Paleologopoulos said Planning Board should have something in writing to provide to prospective developers – e.g. Agawam willing to work with you to provide affordable housing. Vice Chair Parzychowski asked if could have some chart or spread sheet. Member Ronghi said could not be done, but if had that Ordinance could be. Suggested once developer comes to Planning Board, Housing Committee could develop letter asking developer to consider including affordable housing, giving links to federal site for tax credits, and state site for state tax credits, which developer may be not aware of. Invite them to do this then give them some place to get information. Then committee start talking with City Council to act on Ordinances to support or not. Either pass or come out and say not supporting affordable housing and at least people would know who on Council supported affordable housing with actions, just not words. Chair Tedeschi said not familiar with committee that had been formed to study zoning and would make inquiries about this.

Asked if anyone on Housing Committee had been in touch with Council about this. Member Paleologopoulos recalled that former Chair Mineo talked about this.

Member Ronghi asked about Ordinance re: Accessory Dwelling Units. Noted committee had talked about a series of Zoning Ordinances to ask Council to consider relating to affordable housing, including Accessory Dwelling Units, infill lots, density and cluster housing. Director Strange added had also talked about Inclusionary Zoning. Secretary Wingard noted that when former Director of Community Programs at Massachusetts Housing Partnership had come out to meet with City Council and Housing Committee had offered to provide town assistance from expert attorney specializing in Inclusionary Zoning to draft an Inclusionary Ordinance specific to Agawam's needs if Council would make a commitment to an Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance.

Member Paleologopoulos stated Planning Board had finally signed off on Accessory Dwelling Ordinance at July 16th meeting and sent it back to Council. The AD Ordinance allows relatives only. Very pared down because some City Councilors had reservations about making this open to others outside of families.

For reviewing and making recommendations on housing proposals, Secretary Wingard asked if Planning Board could inform Housing Committee when developer comes to planning Board, so Housing Committee could send letter to Planning Board to share with developer. Member Ronghi suggested having a template letter, as needs to be fluid and not wait for Housing Committee meeting for timing. Member Ronghi offered to draft letter and send to Secretary Wingard to send to committee for review. (note not reply all).

4. Active participating in M.G. L. Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permit proposals. Member Wingard stated was done for Chapter 40B with Wayfinders, and would be done again if there is another 40B.

5. Review and make recommendations on local zoning and land use regulations to further promote housing that is affordable and/or accessible. Member Ronghi asked if anyone could present an Ordinance to the City Council, more specifically could the Housing Committee. Director Strange stated to his knowledge, Ordinances done by Mayor, Council, and Planning Board, but good question. Member Ronghi suggested at next meeting focus on crafting Housing Ordinances that give tools to have open dialogue. Member Wingard stated when committee discussed this previously had talked about how to best present this to Council, noting that if Council had not even wanted to include non-relatives in Accessory Dwelling Units, not likely to be open to broader Ordinances to create more affordable housing. Agree, but want to put a lot of thought in how to present to Council in way that actually do end up with more affordable housing. Member Paleologopoulos stated can't disagree but want to see us do something. Secretary Wingard also suggested wait and see what passed in state legislature which is presently considering Governor's Housing Choice bill to change vote required for some Zoning Ordinances from 2/3 to simple majority to be passed.

6. Serve as community resource on affordable and/or accessible housing issues.
7. Increase public awareness through forums, workshops and other community events.
8. Identify available local, state, and federal resources to support their recommendations.
9. Identify suitable parcels for affordable and/or accessible housing development.

Secretary Wingard stated have made some progress on Duties and Responsibilities in Ordinance, but lot more to be made.

5. Review of Recommendations of Housing Production Plan to be Prioritized at Future Meeting:

Member Wingard noted committee had discussed this before and had some ideas, but agreed to wait until had full committee to move forward. Vice Chair Parzychowski noted that all assume/require zoning. Secretary Wingard suggested given that, to start with crafting letter to Council to open dialogue on zoning as discussed. Include that Council approved Housing Production Plan, with these recommendations. When ready to do this, send copy letter to Planning Board and to Zoning Board of Appeals. Member Ronghi stated ZBA has to follow zoning. Member Wingard suggested copy to ZBA as a courtesy. Vice Chair Parzychowski offered to draft letter and ask Member Ronghi for assistance.

Chair Tedeschi asked if committee felt all goals still appropriate or if others should be considered. Secretary Wingard stated Housing Production Plan had been approved by City Council and submitted to State Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) which had approved Plan, and that approved Plan gives one year of what is called Safe Harbor which gives town more control over 40B developments for every 60 units permitted, so cannot be changed. Chair Tedeschi stated always good to remember why here. Need to be proactive, and here's an opportunity

6. National, State, and Local Housing Crisis:

Member Ronghi asked if could just all agree there is a housing crisis and move on. Member Wingard agreed all know there is a housing crisis but said taking a course with Dr. Tiffany Manuel who wrote "Strategic CaseMaking: The Field Guide for Building Public and Political Will". Book and course include use of data and how when presented with data about huge need for issues such as housing, audience overwhelmed and have adverse reaction, so have to carefully consider how present information about housing crisis to public. Also noted Dr. Manuel recommends finding common ground to build on.

Member Paleologopoulos stated had put link in chat re: repeal of fair housing by Federal administration. Member Ronghi stated Housing Committee not political, and focus on city council where could have some effect. Member Paleologopoulos noted this will be local, and Member Wingard agreed fair housing impact.

7. Use of CPA funds for Temporary Emergency Rental Assistance:

Member Jenney asked this be put on Agenda. Stated this is being done and we can do it. We should use CPA funds for temporary rental assistance. Does not anticipate having huge eviction problem in Agawam, as not that many apartments but has been working with Landlord Association, and 25,000 evictions expected in the State. Chair Tedeschi asked Member Jenney if could do some research with links to show this, what can be done and what other towns are doing, and Member Jenney agreed. Secretary Wingard agreed can be done, but someone, probably the town administration has to submit a proposal to the CPA and asked if possible for Member Jenney to find out how many landlords in Agawam are not being paid to have specific information about the need to give to the administration. Chair Tedeschi noted this would give some teeth to request. Member Jenney stated lot of people not paying rent to Mom and Pop landlords.

Member Ronghi stated Member Jenney could get this information, but be aware about potential conflict of interest as some members of committee are landlords. Stated CPA allowable use of funds, and administration was actually looking into this, but ultimate decision to allow larger funds (from federal and state governments) to be administered first. Make sure to hit people who need it. Also be aware that when some folks in town were getting wind of possible rental assistance to tenants, there was a huge wave of what consideration would be given to homeowners who are taxpayers in town who are in the same position. So at some point, when homeowners saying we should get assistance too, may be political sensitivity of some Councilors and administration. Vice Chair Parzychowzki pointed out homeowners have options, such as selling their house, modifying their mortgages, or inviting family members to move in to share expenses, while renters do not. Member Ronghi said doing this would not be an automatic slam dunk – would need to find agency to administer. Chair Mario stated when Paul gets information may not be that difficult to do that. Member Ronghi said had wanted to give information he had to members.

Member Wingard stated that both RAFT and ERMA state assistance funds are for homeowners as well as renters. RAFT funds are for households earning up to 50% of the Area Median Income and ERMA funds are for households up to 80% of the AMI, and this important info for people to know. Member Ronghi suggested Housing Committee craft and send out an informational letter to publicize this because so important and something committee can do, just which conduit to do. Member Wingard noted at last City Council meeting for Citizen speak asked Council and Administration to take on that role and do a publicity campaign, including putting flyers from Wayfinders, which administers both programs for Agawam, into school lunch distribution, giving to food banks, a lot of ways to do. Member Ronghi suggested draft letter. Secretary Wingard agreed and can draft a letter. Has written two letters to the Editor of Agawam Advertiser, but in terms of committee taking on that huge publicity job effort, don't know. Member Ronghi stated get info to town to maybe put in with tax and water bill, as with COVID those are resource to the town. Member Paleologopoulos asked if put on town website. Vice Chair Parzychowski asked about putting information

on town forums, and Member Wingard stated had been put on forum by resident. Also as point of information as of June 29th only 13 Agawam households had applied for RAFT. Member Ronghi suggested contacting Les Tingley for Housing committee to do a presentation about this on the towns cable tv, and suggested Secretary Wingard do this. Secretary Wingard agreed and asked others to join her. Vice Chair Parzychowski volunteered and Member Ronghi offered to be there as well.

Secretary Wingard said one more question for Member Jenney if more comfortable having housing committee send letter to landlords. Member Jenney said he can contact couple landlords. Has more access to bigger landlords. Secretary Wingard asked Director Strange if have list of landlords in Agawam and if a thought to have housing committee draft a letter to landlords and ask how many tenants not paying and give information about applying for rental assistance if want it to give their tenants. Then would also give us info to give to CPA about Agawam landlords not getting paid. Chair Tedeschi suggested could do two pronged approach with letter and he and Member Jenney follow up with landlords know.

Director Strange informed committee that \$2.2 million of CDBG funds through CARES Act has been allocated to Western and Central Massachusetts for ERMA by DHCD. Town of Agawam (Marc) will be administering this money for Western Mass, basically as a pass through, working with DHCD and five agencies, one of which is Wayfinders, to help them distribute to their constituents. Member Ronghi asked if included Agawam residents and if getting administrative fees, and answer yes to both. Member Wingard asked how much money for Agawam. Director Strange stated not specific to towns, but for agencies to distribute. Each agency will reach out to their areas. Agawam residents can apply to Wayfinders and if call town will let know to apply to Wayfinders. The benefit to the town of administering this is good will with DHCD, also noting Agawam just got \$200,000. more for micro-business funding.

Director Strange also stated the town administration has been talking about the use of CPA money for emergency rental assistance. Well aware of eviction moratorium ending, and speculate probably going to be lots of Agawam tenants unable to pay rent, and lots of landlords who will be stuck taking tenants to housing court. So trying to find way to justify the effort, and really need to track down some information about what % of landlords not getting all rent as way to justify need for CPA funding. Chair Tedeschi asked if will send letter. Director Strange has reached out to Realtors Association of Pioneer Valley, but no information yet, but pretty sure town has list of landlords and will make phone calls to landlords in town from list. Chair Tedeschi suggested if ran into any roadblocks he and Member Jenney could help as know many landlords in town. Secretary Wingard asked if should send letter to landlords if want information about how tenants can get rental assistance. Chair Tedeschi said that could be one of the questions Director Strange ask landlords. Chair Tedeschi said lot of good things out there today and great first meeting.

8. Agenda for Next Meeting:

Chair Tedeschi asked Secretary Wingard if have enough information for next agenda of what should be striving to accomplish or put on next Agenda. Send to him, then even send to members if anyone wants to add something. Secretary Wingard suggested follow up on drafting letter to Council on beginning dialogue about zoning and Vice Chair Parzychowski offered to start working on that, saying would ask Member Ronghi for assistance if needed. Chair Tedeschi not reply all. If we can team up makes a lot easier than if all on one person. Great today, that bunch volunteers to write these letters and move these things forward. Going to be key. If someone feeling pressure, send email individually and see if can get some volunteers to help out and move committee forward. Secretary Wingard also suggested next time update on progress with landlords and need for rental assistance. Chair Tedeschi asked Director Strange if going to get the information of needs of landlords. Director Strange said has been on list and has gotten to it. Want to get to now in anticipation of end of eviction moratorium so ready to roll. Chair Tedeschi stated if that helps us with any letter writing to administration in support of what asking to do, everything is going to help.

9. Any Other Business that May Legally Come Before the Committee:

Vice Chair Parzychowski asked that person in charge of Agawam Housing Authority be invited to meetings for her to fill us in on what she's doing and any ways we can support her in her efforts, or she can support us in ours. Secretary Wingard noted is on list sent for meetings, and Member Ronghi acknowledged this, and said would speak with and encourage to attend. Member Ronghi also shared that during this COVID pandemic, there has only been one positive case for all of the Agawam Housing Authority.

Motion to adjourn at 7:17 p.m. by Vice Chair Parzychowski, second by Member Paleologopoulos. All in favor.