

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING STEERING COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2021**

The Glastonbury Affordable Housing Steering Committee held a Meeting at 6:00 p.m. on Monday, November 29, 2021 in the Council Chambers of Town Hall at 2155 Main Street. The meeting was also broadcast in real time and via a live video stream.

Committee Members:

Deborah Carroll - Town Council
Lillian Tanski - Town Council {excused}
Sharon Purtill - Town Plan & Zoning Commission {excused}
Christopher Griffin - Town Plan & Zoning Commission {excused}
Neil Griffin - Executive Director, Housing Authority
Carl Stenman - Housing Authority
Nick Paindiris - Community Member
Patty Parent - Community Member
Richard Johnson - Town Manager
Rebecca Augur - Director of Planning & Land Use Services
Jonathan E. Mullen, AICP - Planner

1. Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Ms. Augur at 6:03 p.m.

a. Minutes of October 27, 2021 Meeting

There were no comments on the minutes.

2. Public Communication and Petitions. None

3. Special Business

a. Metro Realty Group Discussion - Developers' Perspective

Ms. Augur noted that, at the last meeting, there was a request from committee members to hear the perspectives of developers on expanding affordable housing in Glastonbury. She introduced one such developer, Geoffrey Sager from Metro Realty Group, which is based in Farmington. Mr. Sager explained that their group has conducted about 25 affordable housing developments, mainly in suburban locations, including Farmington, Avon, Canton, Berlin, and South Windsor. Their developments, which include both family and senior units, have all been rentals, and all have been financed through the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA).

Ms. Augur asked what factors they look for in a community. Mr. Sager replied that while his group does not have a sophisticated site search methodology, sewer and water are imperative, and they typically look for land. Ideally, future developments will be near a grocery store, a drug store, schools, places of employment, and public transportation. Ms. Augur asked if there is a certain size they target for development. Mr. Sager responded, typically 60 to 90 units. Most of what they do is financed through the CHFA, which acts as a conduit for the federal government. Assuming there were no wetlands on site, the density would consist of 8 to 20 units per acre. Thus, affordable housing would likely be in the 5 to 10-acre range.

Mr. Paindiris assumes that the cost of land in Hartford and East Hartford would be cheaper than in Glastonbury. Mr. Sager stated no, not necessarily. Land prices are all within a range and it is not as obvious which municipalities have cheaper land. Mr. Paindiris asked if it is the land that is difficult to find or is it the nature of processes with respect to zoning, affordable housing, and open-mindedness in a community. Mr. Sager replied that the latter used to be a factor 20 years ago, but it is not so much anymore. They are open to working and developing in any community.

Mr. Paindiris asked what types of incentives they look for in a town. Mr. Sager responded that finding suitable land is the key factor, which is difficult. Mr. Sager has never experienced a town with reservations about incorporating up to 20% affordable housing in any development. If a project becomes too dense, it is typically not the town but the people in the community who take issue with the affordable housing development(s).

Neil Griffin asked what the impacts are of inclusionary zoning on residential developments. Mr. Sager explained that inclusionary zoning is really a function of the market. For example, in areas where people pay far higher than the market rate, such as Silicon Valley, affordable housing is much more easily achieved. Ultra-low interest rate environments led to the way apartments were built here. However, both interest rates and construction costs have gone up, so this market struggles to put even the market rate inventory online. He noted that West Hartford recently gave a developer an incentive by cutting taxes. Neil Griffin asked if a percentage of units could become viable under a market rate development that could be made affordable. Mr. Sager does not think that there is such a percentage, and he questioned at what AMI that would apply.

Mr. Stenman noted that many homes in Glastonbury are on septic, which has experienced advances in recent years. He asked if Mr. Sager's group, or other developers he knows, have considered pursuing a multi-family development in Hartford County where water and sewer was not an option. Mr. Sager replied no to both. Mr. Stenman asked if some municipalities are friendlier, from a developer's perspective, and if so, what those aspects are. Mr. Sager responded that various commissions treat them with respect. The pushback is rarely from Town staff or the commissions, but usually from the neighbors.

Mr. Stenman asked how they keep landowners satisfied over the long period it takes to receive the tax credits. Mr. Sager explained that they need to be able to tie the land up in contract for long enough to run the gauntlet. Doing that and buying the land wholesale usually does not happen, so they need to offer a premium. Mr. Paindiris asked, in the absence of a governmental subsidy, is it doable to create an affordable housing development? Mr. Sager does not believe

that it is possible, in this environment, to create a major development without government assistance, though one- or two-unit projects could be doable.

Ms. Carroll asked if the municipalities have ever approached Mr. Sager, as the developer, with the land. Mr. Sager replied that, in all his cases, their group has found the land, but nothing precludes them from working with a town which has the land in possession. Ms. Carroll asked what Mr. Sager means by higher density being preferable. Mr. Sager explained that it is a more efficient use of land, with less sprawl.

Neil Griffin asked if all of Metro Realty Group's housing projects are 100% affordable or mixed income, with some affordable units and some at market rate. Mr. Sager noted that, in the past 10 or 15 years, a minimum of 20% at market rate is their usual. Mr. Griffin asked if the density demands vary among the two types of developments. Mr. Sager responded not really. Mr. Griffin then asked what towns could do to encourage the construction of affordable housing developments at market rate. Mr. Sager listed three things: if the Town has land inventory; if the Town were receptive to a zoning density bonus; and if the Town offered a tax incentive to developers, which is complicated both politically and legally.

b. Draft Plan Discussion

Ms. Augur noted that Mr. Chalder is absent, but she will pass along notes on any comments or questions made tonight.

Mr. Paindiris stated that greater density can lead to more affordable units. On page 17 of the draft plan, there is discussion about expanding other housing options and choices, but it does not address the topic of building heights. He believes that, theoretically, one could increase the number of building floors while keeping costs constant, thereby lowering the cost of affordable housing. Neil Griffin agreed, adding that, architecturally, there are ways to make the development more aesthetically appealing for the community. Mr. Stenman said that one of Metro Realty Group's models is to develop affordable communities in areas where there is sloped terrain. In this way, what appears to be a one-story building is actually two stories on the back side. He thinks that this could be achieved without creating a mini skyscraper effect that would not fit downtown Glastonbury.

In the implementation plan, Mr. Stenman noted that multiple agencies are identified as taking the lead in this process. He believes that a lead agency should be singular, and the others can be supporting. Thus, he encourages the selection of a specific lead entity for each of the items listed. Mr. Paindiris agreed, adding that they need someone within the Town who would serve as an advocate for affordable housing. For the purposes of increasing assisted housing, Mr. Stenman pointed out that the Town should emphasize families as a priority. Ms. Augur remarked that the existing stock in Town is heavily skewed towards seniors. Neil Griffin added that non-age-restricted housing does not limit seniors, but rather, opens it up to all ages.

Mr. Paindiris asked if the occupant of an accessory apartment/dwelling unit must be a family member of the property owner. Mr. Mullen replied no, there is no requirement as to who lives there. The property owner must live on the premises, but they can choose which unit they want

to live in: either the main unit or the accessory dwelling unit. Mr. Stenman pointed out that the definition of family listed on the document has expanded, so it may not necessarily be limited to what has been identified there. Ms. Augur added that it is also different from how the Town's zoning regulations define family.

Mr. Stenman believes that this is a very nice first draft, and he looks forward to the next one. Ms. Augur explained that the plan is to revise this draft, then post it on the Town website. The committee's January 26 meeting will be promoted as a public workshop, where the public will provide their input on the plan. Revisions will be made following that meeting, after which, the document will be reviewed by the Town Plan and Zoning Commission, then forwarded to the Town Council for final approval.

c. Public Input *None*

4. Adjournment

With no further business to come before the Steering Committee, the meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lilly Torosyan
Recording Clerk