

Housing @ Hildreth House Committee (H@HHC)
Meeting Minutes – January 11, 2018
Small Meeting Room, Town Hall

Members Present: Carl Sciple, Hank Fitek, Rick Maiore, Fran Nickerson, Victor Normand, Lucy Wallace

Guests: Bill Scanlan, Town Planner; Fire Chief Rick Sicard; Bill Barton, President of Harvard Firefighters' Association

The meeting was convened at 8 AM.

Administrative:

The minutes of the November 9, 2017 meeting were approved as presented.

Considering Next Steps:

General Discussion: Rick Maiore reported that he, Carl Sciple, Chief Sicard and Bill Barton had met on November 17th to consider how best to move forward on developing housing on Hildreth House and, possibly, Fire Station parcels. Carl noted that the Fire Department will be seeking funding at the May Annual Town Meeting (ATM) for a study of station/facility need, parking, traffic flow and possible alternative sites. He added that Bill B. had offered to draft the study request. Lucy Wallace reported that the original amount requested by the Fire Chief (\$20,000) had been increased to \$40,000 by the Board of Selectmen (BOS) and approved by CPIC. Funds will be available July 1, but the RFP for consultants can be ready to go and released immediately after ATM, assuming funds are approved. She said that Marie would help Bill B. with the RFP, providing the technical language and overseeing the bidding process. The time line is such (notice of RFP in the Central Register, bidders' conference and interview of candidates) that work would not begin on the study before July 1. Bill Barton wondered if it would be feasible to target a fall 2018 Special Town Meeting to seek approval of a recommended course of action for the Fire Station. Rick thought that would be a reasonable target, and that we could perhaps seek approval to surplus land for senior housing.

Rick suggested that while the Fire Station study is being done we could focus our efforts on getting better data from seniors on needs, perhaps with another study. He then asked the Committee members for their input and thoughts on whether we should continue pursuing housing on this site.

Fran Nickerson noted surveys had been done in 2005 and 2016/17 and in both cases seniors consistently noted a desire to stay in Harvard, a need for smaller housing, and a need for tax relief (which could be realized with smaller housing). She felt that while taxes are a concern, we should focus on housing needs. She definitely supported continuing our work with the goal of building housing on this site.

Victor Normand asked if the study recommended keeping the station in its present location could the Fire Department coexist with housing on the adjoining property and a shared single access, as shown on the current plan. He further wondered if the traffic portion of the study could be done first, as a way to confirm the feasibility of pursuing housing on this site. In his opinion, we could not do more planning for that site without first solving the traffic/circulation problem.

Bill Scanlan suggested a phased approach, focusing first on housing on the Hildreth property and later, if the Fire Station is relocated, on that property.

Hank Fitek reported that feedback he had gotten on the previous plan was a concern that not all of the units would be purchased by Harvard residents; that seniors from other towns might purchase them before they were bought by Harvard seniors. Fran noted that we cannot limit the sale or purchase of the property to Harvard residents only, but felt with the local publicity they would be more apt to respond more quickly than non-residents.

Rick noted that the Planning Board is considering zoning changes to allow smaller housing, which could address senior downsizing needs on other parcels. Lucy asked if the amendments would be going before the May ATM for approval; Bill S. felt they would not be ready then.

Lucy wondered how economically feasible development would be on just the Hildreth property, given fewer units. She also noted that there might be a way for the Town to offer the land at discount as a way to keep housing costs down, noting we were seeking the highest possible return in order to underwrite a portion of the Hildreth House Phase 2 project.

Actions: The Committee agreed there are several actions we can take now. First, we can apply for a water and sewer permits. Rick reported we should be seeking a single hook-up for 3,000 gal/day and that the justification for this request of a new use would be the public benefit of the housing. As a sewer commissioner he cannot make the application; we will need to select another Committee member to do that. He also noted that they are just completing another analysis of the excess capacity of the present system and believes our request for 3,000 gal/day will not use all of that excess. Victor suggested we meet informally with the commissioners before filing our permit application so that we can learn their concerns and better address them in our application.

Victor reiterated the importance of the traffic study and suggested that be the first deliverable of the study.

The senior housing survey needs to be updated, perhaps focusing more on the market and how much seniors are willing to pay and for what size housing. Fran volunteered to review the most recent survey to determine what information needs updating and what additional information we should seek.

Lucy suggested doing more site visits to other senior housing projects, perhaps inviting seniors interested in downsizing to join us.

Lucy will amend the Committee charge to add two more members and have the charge approved and the new members appointed at the next BOS meeting. Both Chief Sicard and Bill B. agreed to serve.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 AM. No future meeting date was set.