

**TOWN OF MANCHESTER
HOUSING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2009
7:00 P.M. – LINCOLN CENTER HEARING ROOM**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Geoff King, Susan Holmes, Julian Stoppelman, Marlene Walsh, Patricia Cottle, Gerald Guay, Lynn Gough, Peter Mason

ALSO PRESENT: Mark Pellegrini, Mary Roche-Cronin, Gary Anderson,
Heather Donoghue

Chairman King welcomed Commission members and staff. Each Commission member and staff person introduced him or herself. The Commission welcomed three new members: Susan Holmes, Marlene Walsh and Lynn Gough. Heather Donoghue also introduced herself as the new CDBG Program Manager. She will be attending Housing Commission meetings as a staff person.

Acceptance of minutes of November 19, 2008 and December 10, 2008 meetings

Mr. Stoppelman moved to accept the minutes as written. Mr. Mason seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The motion passed 5 to 0. New members abstained from voting because they were not yet members for either of the meetings.

Election of Officers

Mr. King handed the meeting over to Mr. Stoppelman for the election of Commission officers. Although the Town Ordinance establishing the Housing Commission only mentions an elected chairperson, the Commission decided by consensus to elect both a chair and vice-chair.

Election of Chair: Mr. Guay nominated Susan Holmes for Chairperson. Ms. Gough seconded the motion.

Mr. Stoppelman asked for other nominations. Mr. Mason nominated Mr. King for Chairman. Mr. Stoppelman seconded the motion.

The Commission agreed by consensus to vote via secret ballot. Ms. Donoghue counted the votes and the results were: five votes for Mr. King and three votes for Ms. Holmes. Mr. King was elected chair by majority vote.

Election of Vice-Chair: Mr. Stoppelman nominated Ms. Holmes for vice-chair of the Commission. Mr. Guay seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

Review of Draft Annual Report to the Board of Directors

Mr. Anderson drew the Commission's attention to a draft annual report to be submitted to the Board of Directors as according to Town Ordinance. He asked for comments or suggestions on the document.

Mr. King asked why the most recent foreclosure prevention workshop was not included. Mr. Anderson said the report only covers Commission activities from October 2007 through September 2008 and that the December foreclosure workshop would be included in next year's report.

Mr. Mason asked if it would be possible to include some housing demographics in the document. Mr. Anderson said that was possible and he will include any demographic data staff provided to the Commission during the reporting period.

Mr. Stoppelman moved to adopt the report with the addition of demographic information which would be included as an appendix. Ms. Holmes seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

Discussion of Goals, Objectives and Housing Priorities

Commission Charge

At the request of Chairman King, Mr. Anderson distributed Article 6 of the Manchester Town Ordinance. Included in that document is the purpose of the Housing Commission which is to: "promote and encourage the development and continued availability of affordable housing for the people of Manchester, by bringing together public and private resources, developing recommendations for comprehensive housing policies and goals, and facilitating the accomplishment of these goals."

Mr. King called the Commission's attention to an e-mail sent by Ms. Holmes to all Commission members on December 30, 2008. The e-mail contained suggestions for Housing Commission goals including creating and maintaining a sustainable community, creating and maintaining sustainable neighborhoods, and holding informational public workshops. Ms. Holmes commented that people often attribute different meanings to words used in housing discussions, such as "sustainable" and "affordable". She said her e-mail was an attempt at bringing forth a discussion on these terms and on the Housing Commission's future priorities.

Mr. Stoppelman said affordable housing is defined as housing that is affordable to a household earning 80% of the area median income without that household paying more than 30% of their income in housing costs.

Mr. Pellegrini said the State Housing Appeals Law, applies to communities in which less than 10% of the housing stock is affordable. "Affordable" in this law includes public housing, housing occupied by occupants with Section 8 vouchers, CHFA mortgages, deed-restricted, or otherwise assisted units. Because Manchester has historically had more than 10% of its housing listed as affordable under this statute, Manchester is not subject to this law.

Ms. Walsh asked if the Town had demographic information on the percentage of residents in Manchester who were at 80% or 50% of the area median income. Mr. Anderson said the Town has access to that information and he would get it to the Commission for their next meeting. He also mentioned there is demographic data on the planning department website which includes housing demographics. Ms. Walsh felt this data was especially relevant in that it illustrates housing demand.

Mr. Mason said the Commission's goal is to encourage the development and continued affordability of housing in Manchester. It was up to the Board of Directors and the Planning and Zoning Commission to decide whether they agree with the Housing Commission's suggested policies.

Mr. King said it was likely the Planning and Zoning Commission will pass a six-month moratorium on multi-family housing and suggested the Housing Commission could be helpful in discussions regarding housing in Manchester during that period. He asked the Commission what role they wanted to play.

Ms. Holmes said the Commission could play a role in how much affordable housing is available and necessary, adding that more and more people will likely be needing affordable housing in these difficult economic times.

Beyond the moratorium Mr. Pellegrini said there were a few developments that could dovetail with the themes brought up in Ms. Holmes' e-mail. One was addressed by the Commission in a letter to the Planning and Zoning Commission requesting affordability be addressed as part of the housing workshops held during the moratorium. He said the Planning and Zoning Commission will be updating the Plan of Conservation and Development over the coming year and there will be an opportunity for the Housing Commission to be actively engaged in this process. The stimulus package currently being discussed at the federal level may also include funds to address the foreclosure problem at the local level.

Mr. Pellegrini said that in the recent past, the Housing Commission has addressed the fact that no affordable housing is being built by the private market. The Commission has made attempts to ensure that some of that housing will be affordable. Mr. Mason added that the Commission would like affordable housing to be integrated throughout the Town more than it is currently.

Mr. King asked if there was still technical assistance available through the HOMEConnecticut program. Mr. Pellegrini responded that he thought so and that approximately 35 towns have completed applications for technical assistance. Mr. King said the Board of Directors has recently reestablished the Redevelopment Agency in an effort to kick start the development of the Broad Street and downtown Manchester areas. He suggested this could be a new audience for the Housing Commission and said the Commission could emphasize the redevelopment opportunities of residential projects, and perhaps HOMEConnecticut or other housing assistance programs.

Discussion of CDBG Program and Funding

Ms. Holmes said she saw an opportunity for the redevelopment of many older, vacant lots in Town. Mr. King agreed but said the federal block grant money the Town receives has been

decreasing in recent years and that a good portion of that funding source is now assigned to non-housing related projects. Ms. Holmes said perhaps Manchester is a victim of its own success when it comes to housing and that with the help of CDBG the Town has seen a lot of its housing rehabilitated.

Mr. Pellegrini noted if the Commission had a suggestion for a housing-related program, it could submit a CDBG application for this or another year. In response to a question from Mr. Guay asking what qualifies a neighborhood for CDBG funding, Mr. Pellegrini said the area must meet a national objective, the majority of the people benefiting from an activity must be of low or moderate income and the activity must meet a national objective.

Mr. King asked what role the Commission could play in the next six months during the upcoming moratorium. Ms. Holmes said she would like to look at the issue of sustainability and noted the Town has to have a balance of many types of housing and a mix of households which require services and those that don't. She said the Commission could be informed as to these issues and could spread what they learned. Mr. King said the Commission has an obligation to supply basic demographic information and that many voices such as those from the Housing Authority, households using Section 8 vouchers, and those from lower income neighborhoods will likely not be heard in any housing discussion unless they are encouraged. Additionally, redevelopment of older areas could displace affordable housing units. He said it was critical to replace those as scattered-site affordable housing.

Mr. Mason said he saw limited opportunities to have an influence on policy in the near term and instead suggested the Commission establish long-term housing priorities and recommendations. He asked the Commission to think about what they want to do over the long term. Mr. King suggested holding a workshop on this topic including the basic questions of 1: What housing currently exists in Manchester?; and 2: How do we want to move forward knowing this information?.

Ms. Holmes suggested looking for examples from other towns and showing what works in a demographically diverse community.

Mr. Pellegrini said with the moratorium facing the Commission it might be expedient for the Commission to begin this work in the near term. The staff will start researching demographic information. He said a joint workshop with the PZC could provide both commissions with a snapshot of the current housing situation.

Mr. Mason said he isn't against having a joint workshop but is wary of doing so if those in attendance will have already made up their mind about housing issues before hearing the facts. The Commission agreed by consensus that staff should start researching these issues for a Housing Commission Workshop on February 10th. The research will include but is not limited to where subsidized housing in Manchester is located, information about affordable housing and ownership vs. rental, as well as unit type and revenue gained from each type of housing.

Other Business

Foreclosure Prevention Workshop

Ms. Roche-Cronin told the Commission the Housing Education Resource Center (HERC) held a foreclosure prevention workshop in Manchester on December 15, 2008. The workshop included an overview of the current foreclosure situation and was taped by Channel 16. It continues to run on Channel 16 and is available on demand via the Town's website. HERC is now keeping track of those from Manchester who call to request more information. The organization will hold a clinic for such households in Manchester in which HERC staff will work one-on-one with residents to process paperwork for anti-foreclosure programs.

Mr. King suggested the Commission continue to take a role in the educating residents on housing issues. He mentioned the owners of three and four-family residential properties which have seen assessments (and taxes) rise drastically over the past few years, while values of the properties have fallen during the current housing downturn. He suggested many of those mortgages might be currently upside-down and perhaps the landlord information sessions would be helpful.

Ms. Walsh emphasized the need for continued rehabilitation of housing, noting that when properties are improved, people tend to care for them better and asked about the availability of housing rehabilitation funds.

Mr. Pellegrini responded that the Board of Directors decides on the allocation of CDBG funds but there could be opportunities for other funding sources from the State in the future.

Mr. Anderson distributed a revised chart entitled, AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGE FOR MANCHESTER'S LARGEST INDUSTRIES – GOVERNMENT INCLUDED. He said he has updated the chart at the request of Mr. Guay who asked that government wages be added to Manchester's largest industries. The chart shows where wages for each industry fall and the size of that industry compared to a wage necessary to afford a two-bedroom home in Manchester and the full-time minimum wage.

Mr. Stoppelman moved to adjourn at 9:00 p.m. Mr. Mason seconded the motion and all members voted in favor. The next meeting of the Manchester Housing Commission will be a workshop on ***February 10, 2009 at 7:00 p.m. in the Law Library, Town Hall.***