

**Bedford Housing Partnership
Meeting Minutes
May 16, 2023 at 7:00 PM
Prepared by Kim Lovy
Zoom remote participation conference call**

Attending Members: Christina Wilgren (Chair), Jacinda Barbehenn, Shawn Hanegan (non-voting member), Ellis Kriesberg, Kim Lovy, Margaret Siciliano, Alice Sun, and Elena Zorn. Jeff King (staff) is also present.

Call to order. The meeting was officially called to order at 7:06 pm. Governor's message was read aloud. Members' attendance was determined via roll call.

- 1. January 18 Meeting Minutes:** No changes needed to minutes. Ms. Siciliano moved to approve the minutes; Ms. Sun seconded.
 - a. Votes: Barbehenn (yes), Lovy (abstain), Siciliano (yes), Sun (yes), Wilgren (yes), Zorn (yes)
 - b. The motion carried 5-0-1.

- 2. April 4 Meeting Minutes:** No changes needed to minutes. Ms. Zorn moved to approve the minutes; Ms. Sun seconded.
 - a. Votes: Barbehenn (yes), Lovy (yes), Siciliano (yes), Sun (yes), Wilgren (yes), Zorn (yes)
 - b. The motion carried 6-0.

- 3. Bedford Housing Partnership Liaison to Community Preservation Committee**

We need to appoint, or reappoint, a liaison to the CPC and confirm that appointment with the Select Board by July 1. Ms. Wilgren is the current BHP liaison to the CPC. Ms. Sun stated the importance of the position, as a portion of the CPC funds need to be spent on affordable housing. Ms. Sun reminded the board that Bedford property-owners have a 3% surcharge on their property taxes. This tax revenue goes to the Community Preservation Fund; the funds are to be spent on recreation, affordable housing, historic preservation, and open spaces. Ms. Sun believes Ms. Wilgren has gone above and beyond in the position, writing grants. Ms. Sun also states that she would not be able to put in the effort of Ms. Wilgren. Ms. Barbehenn wondered about our process of selecting a liaison to the CPC, or other boards as they open up. It has been the experience of Ms. Barbehenn that boards open up the position to allow other members to consider if they would like to liaise, before simply reappointing. Ms. Barbehenn stated the importance of not having the same person in the same role for too long, as everyone needs to learn about the interconnectedness of our town government. Ms. Zorn asked if we send a liaison only to the CPC. In fact, we do not. The BHP sends two representatives to the Bedford Municipal Affordable Housing Trust. The current representatives are Ms. Sun and Ms. Wilgren. Their appointments do not end this year. Mr. Hanegan took the opportunity to explain the importance of a liaison appointment. The liaison presents the needs and concerns of the

home board and communicates information back to the home board. BHP liaisons are voting members of the boards they join. There was discussion regarding how much sway the finance committee has in determining how funds are spent, even though they do not have a say in the appropriation of CPC funds. Also discussed was the role the CPC funding cycle should be included in our operating procedures. At this point, Ms. Zorn noted that we were not attending to the agenda timeline. It was suggested by Ms. Barbehenn, and most agreed, that we take time to consider the liaison appointment, and vote at the next meeting.

4. Carlisle Road Development

Please see the recording, timestamp 30:28, for the actual conversation. Mr. Hanegan started the conversation with a request from the BHP: what is our opinion, and what questions should he ask the next time he meets with the Carlisle Road developer, Brian DeVellis. The conversation focused on what the developer has and has not done to respond to concerns of the BHP and the Select Board. There were a number of tasks that were noted as being adequately done per the Select Boards request. For example, there were two public meetings to share information with the community, a more detailed traffic impact study was prepared in response to the Select Board, and the developer met with the town department heads. Yet, not all requested tasks were completed, or were not completed to the extent expected. The tasks which were deficient or not done were: mailing all abutters within one mile, providing a detailed point-by-point explanation of how the project fits with the Comprehensive Plan and the Housing Study. Additionally, we did not receive a street-level view of the site plan, nor a proposal for providing more units at different-level AMIs.

Mr. King took a step back from this topic to note that our experience with this project could help find ways to improve the 40B process. He stated that the 40B process really involves three parts: coming before the Select Board, meeting with the BHP, and meeting with town department heads. Timestamp: 35:10. Regarding our process: We need to consider a project with respect to the Housing Study and Comprehensive Plan, knowing that one project will not fill every need. Given that, we need a way to rate the project. For example, how many needs does the project fill, is it one crucial need, how do we measure this? Also, as we guide projects through this process, how much does the timing matter? Should there be consideration given for how long it takes to get a proposal through DHCD, or ZBA? We need to decide which steps to do before the LIP application.

Proceeding, at 39:40, Mr. King wondered about the box on the LIP application asking if the project is seeking funding from the town. What does it mean to claim that? Is it not presumptive to claim that? Ms. Wilgren wonders what benefit that provides on the application? Mr. Hanegan suggested that it was not appropriate to check the box on the Carlisle Road Development application. Ms. Barbehenn believes the developer checked the box because he had heard that Bedford has money to supplement, and that we want to work with Brian DeVellis to increase the number of affordable homeownership units and lower the AMI needed for certain affordable units. In this case, it was a lack of communication between the town and the developer stated by Ms. Barbehenn. She continued by adding that the “check mark” indicates to DHCD that the town and the

developer have a good working relationship. Ms. Barbehenn lamented that over the past 18 months there has been a lack of communication, resulting in the town, perhaps, asking too much of the developer at a given time. Ms. Barbehenn continued that, whilst the town was frustrated, Brian DeVellis did not receive enough information from the town, or was not apprised of the town's expectations. Ms. Wilgren reported that expectation was, clearly, that we wanted more affordability and specifically more affordable ownership units or ones affordable to persons with lower AMI as well as rentals with deeper subsidies so they would be affordable at a low AMI. Ms. Barbehenn wishes for a reset of this relationship. Ms. Wilgren was surprised by the approach the developer had taken, commenting that we have never given a developer \$X, and given them free reign to spend.

5. Carlisle Road development, again

Mr. King noted, at timestamp 50:34, that we were off agenda, and we needed to focus on either the Carlisle Road development, our Operating Procedures, or improving the 40B process. Given that Mr. Hanegan would meet with Brian DeVellis soon, the board decided to focus on the Carlisle Road project. Mr. Hanegan stated that he values and appreciates the feedback from this board. Mr. Hanegan would like our input regarding wanting rentals, or ownership for this project. Ms. Wilgren restated her choice for ownership. Ms. Barbehenn stated that more rentals are needed, which would keep in trend with the state and the nation. Additionally, Ms. Barbehenn stated that adding more rental stock helps deflate the housing market's over-valuation by decreasing demand. Ms. Barbehenn added that money would help make more homes more affordable, while the units for sale would still be incredibly out of reach. Ms. Siciliano agreed, though likes the idea that homeowners are more invested in the community, and renters are more likely to move on. Ms. Wilgren stated that the residents in her rental community have been there a long time, over decades. Ms. Wilgren warned that hedge funds are buying up properties, turning them into rentals, continuing the cycle of not being able to afford homes. Ms. Siciliano stated that that was a generalization about renters, and apologized.

Regarding the communication between the town and Brian DeVellis, Ms. Siciliano was frustrated that the town reached out to Brian DeVellis and asked them to come to us, only to be ignored. Ms. Siciliano informed us that, in Newton, the developer came to the town and applied for funding, to fill the gap created by making some units affordable. It was never the situation where the town had to tell the developer what it wanted. Although, at this point, Ms. Siciliano stated that maybe we now need to be clear and up front (with the developer) about what we want. Mr. King noted that there had been a plan submitted with 25% affordability, with no gap in funding. However, if we wanted to supplement, we could increase that number of affordable units. In comparison to what Ms. Siciliano mentioned, there was no original gap mentioned or requested. However, he said, they know their finances and might have given us a skeleton-plan regarding how funding would affect the units and their affordability levels. Ms. Barbehenn countered that the developer did not have enough information from us to do so.

There was some discussion regarding the housing stock in Bedford, rentals versus ownership, and affordable versus non-affordable. Ms. Sun spoke up to inform us of the

housing stock in Bedford. She said that, as of that time, there were 11 homes for sale, ranging from \$600k to \$2.6 million. There are no rental units available. In fact, Ms. Sun has been working with a woman who would love to rent in Bedford, but there has been nothing available. Ms. Sun noted that it was easier to create affordable rentals, because the market-rate rentals keep the affordables afloat. This is not the case with sales. Of the 1,800 units in Bedford's affordable housing stock, 11% of those units are owned, while 89% are rentals. Ms. Sun argues these rates are based on what a developer can sell or rent to carry the cost of the affordability. There was discussion about how much the developer will profit from this project, and that it will be a lot. Mr. King noted that DHCD restricts the profitability, while Ms. Wilgren replied that they are all bloated. Others retorted by stating that this is our society, and people expect to turn a profit. Ms. Sun confirmed that most contractors will not take on a job if it will not be profitable enough for them. Ms. Siciliano agreed about the long-term financial prospects of rentals versus home sales. Ms. Siciliano would prefer to leave the rent/buy mixture as it is, and work on buying down from 80% on the rental side. Ms. Siciliano suggested the notion of project-based vouchers. Ms. Lovy seconded that notion. Several board members discounted the feasibility of that plan. Ms. Siciliano proposed requesting HOME funds from RHSO. Mr. King replied that those are hardly ever useful, unless the timing is just right. Several board members discussed the national economy, the state and local economies. There is a waitlist for Section 8 housing, and how much time it can take house people. Ms. Sun brought it home by reminding us that rentals are a quick way of housing people.

Ms. Zorn expressed, at 1:11, how we need to be able to speak to Brian DeVellis again, ask generic questions, tell him what we want, and restart the conversation. Mr. Hanegan stated that if there is a continuation of this matter at the next Select Board meeting, that would allow time for another meeting with the developer, and we should invite him back. Mr. Hanegan echoed Mr. King in that Brian DeVellis had been invited to attend multiple times, but acknowledged that the town also lacked a good process for this. Ms. Barbehenn stated that it would be behoove the town to give the go ahead, as many more hurdles lay ahead. Mr. Hanegan stated it was nice to have this board reaffirm the project, and say that, as an advisory board, this is a good idea. Additionally, Mr. Hanegan stated that he wanted to be able to alert this board to the updates, and perhaps to find negotiating points for the next meeting with the developer. Ms. Wilgren stated that the BHP has already written a letter of support. Ms. Barbehenn said that it would behoove us to be present at the Select Board meeting and be ready and willing to speak up. Many in attendance at Select Board meetings are opponents to projects, and that having proponents present would be noticed. Mr. King agreed that BHP folk could show up. Ms. Zorn spoke up to remind us that while we are airing dirty laundry, we have an advocacy role. We need to be able to communicate our support back to the public. The Select Board meeting will be 5/22/23 at 6pm.

6. Adjournment

Ms. Wilgren noted that the time was 8:17, and asked if we could call for adjournment. Mr. King suggested we vote on our agreement of the standing meeting the third Tuesday of the month. It was determined that we did not need to vote. Mr. Hanegan mentioned a subcommittee of himself, Margot [Fleischman], and volunteers from this board. Ms.

Wilgren volunteered. Ms. Barbehenn suggested we wait until the next meeting to choose subcommittee members. Ms. Wilgren stated that it is not a process, just volunteer. Ms. Lovy indicated that she would be interested in the subcommittee, but agreed that we should wait until the next meeting. Ms. Barbehenn moved to adjourn, and Ms. Sun seconded. Votes: Barbehenn (yes), Lovy (yes), Siciliano (yes), Sun (yes), Wilgren (yes), Zorn (yes). Meeting adjourned at 8:20 pm.