

CAMBRIDGE AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST
MEETING MINUTES
October 25, 2018

Ackerman Room, Cambridge City Hall
795 Massachusetts Ave.

Trustees Present: Louis DePasquale, Chair; Peter Daly, Florrie Darwin, Gwen Noyes, Cheryl-Ann Pizza-Zeoli, Susan Schlesinger, James Stockard, Elaine Thorne, Bill Tibbs

Trustees Absent: None

Staff Present: Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for Community Development; Chris Cotter, Housing Director; Anna Dolmatch, Housing Planner; Linda Prosnitz, Housing Planner

Others Present: Hiroshi Yamanoh, Tanaya Srini, Shail J. Shu, Michelle Zucker, Radhika Singh

The meeting was called to order at 4:08.

Upon a motion moved and seconded, it was voted

VOTED: To approve the minutes for the meeting of Thursday, September 27 as submitted.

PROJECT UPDATE

Concord Highlands - All funding has closed. A groundbreaking ceremony was held October 5. Construction is expected to take 18 months.

Squirrelwood – The project received a funding award from DHCD. Just A Start is completing predevelopment work with a goal to secure additional funding and begin construction early next year.

Frost Terrace – Capstone/Hope received a funding award from DHCD. They are finalizing predevelopment work and will be looking to secure additional funding and begin construction early next year.

Vail Court - Demolition is underway. The foundation will be removed, and then the site will be backfilled and fenced. The legal process with the former owner is still in the discovery phase, so the redevelopment process will not begin until that case is

Jefferson Park – Certificates of Occupancy are being issued.

Inclusionary – The pipeline is active but no new projects have come under covenant since the previous meeting. Some projects are currently coming in for building permits, including the second phase of the Alexandria residential development on Binney Street that will contain both low/mod and middle-income units.

NEW BUSINESS

Staff presented recommendations from the Trust's Preference Review Working Group on potential changes to the preference policies used to select housing applicants for City housing programs.

The Preference Review Working Group was established to look at these policies as part of the update to program regulations after the passage of the updated Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance. The Housing Committee has asked for the Trust's input on the preference system.

Bill Tibbs asked for clarification on the role of the Trust and the Council in making any changes. Chris Cotter stated that any recommendations from the Trust would go to the Housing Committee. The City Manager has the authority to issue regulations under the Inclusionary Ordinance. The preference policies will be a part of those regulations, which will go through a public hearing process before being finalized.

Florrie Darwin asked if there was a difference between regulations for Inclusionary housing and other Trust-funded housing. Chris Cotter stated that it has always been the goal to have the regulations as similar as possible, but it is challenging for projects with other funders, such as the state, who may have different requirements for things like local preference. Peter Daly noted that Inclusionary units all follow a local preference, which is a fundamental difference from state-funded units.

The starting point for the working group was to keep local preference to the full extent possible, meaning that a preference is given for Cambridge residents. The current definition of residency for preference is currently living in Cambridge; the working group did discuss the possibility of reexamining that definition, and what documentation would be required. Trust members asked if residency applied to former residents who wanted to return. Chris Cotter stated that previous Cambridge residents displaced from Cambridge did not currently receive residency preference. The working group discussed this issue but could not come to consensus and wanted to discuss that aspect with the Trust.

One idea that was discussed was to give residency preference to applicants who hold a mobile rental voucher from the Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) that they use to rent outside of the City. The CHA currently uses a broader definition of resident, including anyone who works in Cambridge or has been hired to work in Cambridge. This would give preference to applicants who potentially had never lived in Cambridge versus a displaced former resident. Another issue is that this change would not assist former residents without vouchers. Including this group in the residency preference would require developing documentation requirements that would be very difficult to administer. Former residency could be very difficult to determine consistently.

Cheryl-Ann Pizza-Zeoli noted that the CHA had recently surveyed voucher holders who had moved out of Cambridge to offer them the opportunity to return to Cambridge. Only 13 out of 746 voucher holders contacted chose to come back. Others noted that a CHA analysis found that almost half of CHA non-resident voucher holders never lived in Cambridge. James Stockard noted that there are many people with a severe need for affordable housing who do not have vouchers.

Susan Schlesinger asked about the working group's proposal to make an emergency need a ranking preference above households with children without an emergency. Chris Cotter

stated that under the current system, there are applicants with housing emergencies who are never served because they now are considered after families with children. Trust members stated that an emergency should mean something. Susan Schlesinger asked if the severe need for affordable housing was driving people to have emergencies? And out of applicants given preference for emergency need, how many of those are housed?

Chris Cotter stated that most applicants with emergency need and children under six have been considered for units; however, that does not mean they are housed as they still must meet the income eligibility and building screening criteria.

Staff stated that one proposed change would be to refine what qualifies as an emergency. The current system gives emergency preference for no-fault eviction; overcrowding; rent burden; code violations in the current residence; and homelessness. The Trust asked if displacement was considered an emergency? Chris Cotter stated that many displacement cases would receive the emergency preference by being given a no-fault eviction notice, but a notice to quit would not meet that criteria.

The working group discussed tightening the definition of emergency to focus on the most pressing needs, therefore making the category more meaningful. Jim Stockard recommended that the language be tightened, as the current definitions allow almost any situation to be described as an emergency. He noted that the CHA goal is to serve emergency cases within two weeks.

Some ideas for changes to the emergency category would eliminate overcrowding as an emergency; require that a rent-burdened household have lived in their unit for at least a year; limit the types of code violations that qualify; and add domestic violence as an emergency category. These changes could greatly reduce the number of applicants who put themselves into an expensive apartment, or double up in a room for a short period of time, to jump to the front of the Rental Applicant Pool. One of the other proposed changes is that if an applicant has emergency preference and declines a unit, the emergency status is eliminated.

Bill Tibbs asked how many applicants applied with an emergency and were not served. Chris Cotter shared the example of the two-bedroom applicants with Cambridge residency and emergency need. There are currently ten households with children and an emergency need waiting for housing; there are 19 all-adult emergency need households. Under the current system, a household with a child under 6 but no emergency would be served before an all-adult household with emergency need. The proposed changes would allow all Cambridge resident households with an emergency to be served prior to any non-emergency households.

Trust members asked about the current ability to serve families with children under 18, but not under 6. Chris Cotter noted that one of the ideas suggested by the working group was to have every third unit have a preference for households with children under 18, so that there would be no additional preference given for a child under 6. The rental pool is not currently able to serve families without young children or an emergency need; this change would create some opportunities for those applicants. Susan Schlesinger noted that changing emergency need to a ranking preference would mean serving fewer families with children.

Chris Cotter stated that the last sample of newly-housed rental tenants showed that 34% had an emergency need preference. Trust members asked how that would change if the proposed emergency need criteria modifications were implemented. Chris Cotter stated that these changes should reduce the number of emergency need cases by eliminating the category of

overcrowding; requiring a one-year duration for cost-burdening; and narrowing the code violation definition to encompass only the most severe building conditions.

Staff noted that emergency preference allows an applicant to go ahead of households who may have been waiting for years, so it is important to set the priorities. Jim Stockard noted that with any changes, the impacts can be monitored and changes can be made in the future. Chris Cotter stated that the goal with the regulations would be to review them every year and make changes. Cheryl-Ann Pizza-Zeoli said that the public comment period would provide an opportunity for other issues to be raised that may not have been considered.

Chris Cotter recommended that the Trust members review the recently completed Inclusionary Report, which has information about how applicants and units being filled.

Susan Schlesinger asked about applicants coming out of homelessness, who qualify for emergency preference, but may need services that Inclusionary buildings do not provide. Chris Cotter discussed an ongoing pilot program where the City has partnered with property owners and service providers to deliver services to Inclusionary tenants. Without services, some tenants coming out of homelessness have struggled to stabilize their housing.

Trust members discussed what should be the top priority for emergency. No-fault evictions and severe cost-burdening were discussed. Gwen Noyes asked if there could be a priority for longer-term residents facing these issues. Chris Cotter stated that durational requirements are not advisable under Fair Housing guidance.

Trust members asked about the higher preference for families with children under 6. Chris Cotter stated that the preference exists to support moving younger children out of apartments that may put them at risk from lead paint, and to help retain families who will have children in the school system for the maximum amount of time. Susan Schlesinger noted that the “young child” preference used to be for households with children under 10 but was lowered to 6.

Trust members asked about next steps. Chris Cotter noted that there were several issues that the Trust had not had a chance to discuss, including any potential changes to bring more CHA voucher holders back into Cambridge. He stated that the staff could provide additional information or answer any other questions prior to the Trust forwarding recommendations to the Housing Committee.

Bill Tibbs requested that the data on applicants with emergency need be presented in charts. Florrie Darwin requested a projection on how adopting the working group recommendations would impact who is served. Chris Cotter stated that information can be provided on which preference groups are being served. Trust members requested to see who was housed in the past year by category. The Trust agreed to continue the conversation at a later meeting.

Other Business

Trust members requested an update on the proposed Affordable Housing Overlay. The idea has been discussed at several public Envision meetings. At those meetings, there was a lot of opposition from residents of lower density neighborhoods who have expressed concerns about possible changes. Trust members thought it important for the Trust to take a position and make a recommendation to the Council.

Trust members agreed that presenting images of affordable developments would be helpful. Staff agreed to send images of housing that would be typical of the density being discussed for the Overlay.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 5:23. The next meeting date is to be determined.

Materials:

- Preference Review Working Group Recommendation Memo
- Meeting Minutes from the Trust's September 27, 2018 meeting.
- Project Update