

Town of Great Barrington Community Preservation Committee (CPC)
Minutes of October 15, 2015
Great Barrington Fire Station

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 PM by Chair Karen W. Smith.

Members present: Ed Abrahams, Thomas Blauvelt, Jessica Dezieck, Martha Fick, Suzanne Fowle, Kathleen Jackson, William Nappo, Deborah Salem, and Karen W. Smith. Also present: Town Planner/CPA Administrator Chris Rembold

Members absent: none

Administrative Business

Blauvelt moved to approve the minutes of October 6, 2015, Salem seconded. All were in favor.

Review and Evaluation of FY17 Step 2 Applications for Housing

1. Construct, housing at 316 State Road

Cara Davis and Tim Geller were present for Construct. Jackson recused herself from the discussion since she is working for Construct at this time.

Smith said the Committee has received a document from the applicant via email to clarify some of the questions from last meeting. With regards to net zero design, Geller said they have energy consultants on contract, usually with the architect's contract. The consultant will model energy usage as they design the units. Procedures include a tight building envelope, double walls, triple glazed windows, heat pumps, and solar panels, for example. Geller said the efforts will reduce utility costs for the residents.

Geller said this application is for housing, not open space. He said the open space is already conserved. It would not have been conserved however unless this housing project were happening. He said 11 acres is conserved and 1 acre is being developed. He said that is indicated in the restriction in the deed. Geller said there are no existing trails, but Construct will consult with local trail organizations to ensure trails are responsibly developed.

Smith said we are asking everybody what would happen if the project was only partly funded. Geller said partial funding is not an option for this project. The timeline is tight, and the project is ready. It has its permit and we are in the design development stage. He said the reason this cost is more per unit as other housing projects is because smaller projects depend on different funding sources than larger sites like 100 Bridge Street. Smaller scale projects rely on public sources, not private sources like the tax credit money in the 100 Bridge Street site. He said this project needs as much public help as it can get.

Salem asked if this was more expensive than other projects. Geller said no, it's about right. The per square foot costs here are a little higher here, but the total costs are in line. He said they have lower soft costs on this smaller project. Davis said this site is also easier to develop than the Hillside Avenue project or Pinewoods in Stockbridge was.

Smith asked about the costs and expenses versus the revenues, to understand if there was enough income to offset ongoing or long term costs. Geller referred to the 10-year operating pro-forma, line 1666 net operating income, as well as lines 1708 replacement reserve and 1709 operating reserve. Blauvelt asked if those were sufficient. Geller said yes, since we are actually starting with money in that reserve, and then adding to it every year. Davis said they have not had to tap the reserves yet on East Street, Hillside, or Pinewoods.

Smith referred to the financing commitments provided in the packet. They are from Berkshire Bank, Construct, and CEDAC. Geller said these are committed. He added the state financing will add a funding round this winter for small projects like this. He referred to the timeline included in the Step 2 application which he believes is accurate. Geller said it is critical to have funding commitments when going for state funds. It shows readiness. Even if Town Meeting has not voted yet, a Committee vote would show strong local commitment to the project.

Nappo asked about asbestos and lead in the existing building. Davis said that building is not part of this project. That is on the adjacent site.

Fick asked about the garden. Davis said it is for the residents. There will also be a play area.

Nappo asked about transportation. Davis said BRTA wrote to them and said they will provide bus service. The residents just need to call and ask for the bus to come by, and the next scheduled bus would come by the site. Smith asked for a copy of the BRTA letter. Geller said this is how they serve Simon's Rock campus now so it's not unprecedented.

2. CDC housing at 100 Bridge Street

Smith said this is for the additional contribution of CPA funds that was only a soft commitment last year. Smith asked for an update on the project. Geller provided an update for the Committee, dated 10/14/15 sent via email and copies distributed at the meeting. He said the housing can be built separately from the commercial anchor tenant. The commercial building would only be built when there is a commercial tenant on board. He said the affordable housing will be built regardless.

Geller updated the Committee on the remediation plan. The bioremediation was halted. They will cap the site instead, which was their original plan. It is the conventional way to remediate a brownfield site. The change in strategies has no impact on the project schedule.

He said the financing for each project component—commercial, market rate housing, and affordable housing—are completely independent.

Abrahams asked about the tax revenue projections. Geller said the only thing that will not be taxed is the open space, which will be owned by a nonprofit. The housing components and commercial components will be taxed. The affordable housing will not generate a lot of tax revenue, since it has little income. The commercial component will have the greatest tax revenue.

Blauvelt asked about proximity to the treatment plant. Geller said it is not really an issue. Odor is rare. There is a little background noise.

With regards to municipal permitting, Geller said he expects to be applying for a 40B Comprehensive Permit by Thanksgiving, and it should be in hand by early winter. He said they had a good neighborhood meeting a few weeks ago. They've presented the concepts to Planning Board already. Therefore he hopes the permitting process will go smoothly. But they will review the plan again with all boards before the ZBA makes their decision.

Geller said they have been getting the environmental permits in stages through the Conservation Commission. He said the final step will be to have the permitted site plan approved by the Commission. He said one Notice of Intent will permit the entire site and describe the phased build-out process.

Geller said the Town submitted a Mass Works grant for the area. It includes infrastructure and streetscape work on Bridge Street and Bentley Avenue. He said he mentioned this because there has been some concern the 100 Bridge project is not proceeding. But in this grant application by the Town we said the project is actually ready and moving forward.

Geller said the last year's \$200,000 CPA grant is under contract. They have not used it yet. It is predevelopment money. But they expect to use it as they get into the permitting process.

Geller reminded the Committee that this CPA request is for an affordable housing project that hits every mark we can hit. It's of a higher density, in town, walk to downtown, net zero, on a previous developed site, an integrated neighborhood. It meets the criteria you want.

3. St James Housing / Berkshire Housing Development for Land Acquisition

Lynn Wood and Elton Ogden were present for the applicant. Smith asked them to summarize the project and answer the questions we raised last time. Ogden said they have a big waiting list at Bostwick Gardens, and there is a need for more housing. They have been looking at building new housing for a dozen years. The problem has been that there have not been the funding programs to build it. Lately however the state has come up with a senior housing funding program.

Ogden said the parcel behind Bostwick Gardens has been on the market for several years, but they have not been able to do anything about it. Now that there are funds to build, they want to take this chance to buy the land.

He said they have a very experienced team put together. Their architect has a lot of experience in affordable housing. SK Design knows the site details. Craig Okerstrom Lang is local and familiar with the site and has already done some conceptual design.

Ogden said this is project would be 31 units, a relatively small project that is difficult to fund from the usual sources. Having a local CPA source would meet a serious budget need.

Wood said her mother lived at Bostwick Gardens, and she knows it meets a tremendous need for Great Barrington and the area. She said this piece of property would offer a new experience for the seniors – they can go outside to the river and the future river walk trail. She said nowadays people take exercise much more seriously than in her mother's time.

Smith asked about the applicable CPA boxes. Ogden said the primary box was land acquisition for housing.

Ogden said the appraisal is not yet completed. He thinks it will be available in a couple of weeks. The current ask of \$400,000 is the seller's asking price. He said there is \$65,000 committed by the applicant for predevelopment work, but they may need to use some of the \$400,000 for predevelopment activities.

Ogden said trails are a specifically allowed use in the conservation restriction. There was confusion about the restriction and whether it was a formal restriction held by the state. Rembold said it is a deed restriction required by the Natural Heritage Endangered Species program. Ogden will send a copy of the restriction to the Committee.

Ogden said preliminary budget total development cost is estimated at about \$340 per square foot. Ogden said this is very early. These estimates are based on a 40-unit project they are doing in Williamstown right

now, scaled down for 31 units. He said it is generally in line with other projects in the county and the state.

Smith asked what if the housing does not get built? Ogden said they will have invested a great deal of money in the project design, and they will stick with it to build it. He said it is just a question of when it will get built. He said they would not be spending money on design and acquisition if they didn't believe this is a feasible design that will get funded. The need for the housing is documented. The numbers work.

Blauvelt asked why there were no units in the 50% AMI. Ogden said having some units at 30% AMI and others at 60% meet state requirements. He said this is a conservative estimate. If they have a good financing, it will allow them to have more units at lower income levels.

Ogden confirmed the Berkshire Fund source is committed. He said that fund is a 42 year old sister corporation to BHDC that regularly partners with them to develop affordable housing or operate housing programs. The two agencies were founded together and they have the same purposes and mission. It is an arm's length organization and is tax exempt. Berkshire Fund owns Christian Hill Commons, for example, and BHDC manages the property.

Fick asked if anyone else is interested in the land. Ogden said eventually they think it will sell.

Fowle asked if the owner will subdivide this land. Ogden said yes. Rembold showed the parcel map on the screen.

Fick asked what the implications would be if the money was not granted this year, and what would happen if you received less than you are asking for. Ogden said they will have a 12 month option and hope to buy it at the end of the option. If they do not have the grant they will have to get other financing to do it. Ogden said if they do not get the full CPA grant request, they would have to replace it with some other source. He said CPA is an important non-loan source and it shows a major town commitment to the project.

Rembold asked about a housing restriction. Ogden said in Williamstown they drafted a restriction that required the land to be used as affordable housing. Rembold asked what if the housing did not happen? Ogden said there could be a recapture provision after some reasonable period of time.

4. Town, for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund

Rembold said the proposed \$20,000 amount was decided upon as a reasonable amount to start with. It would be for something small. He said for example Lenox has a first-time homebuyer program that gives up to \$10,000 grants. This proposed amount could do two similar grants in the first year.

Rembold described how the fund is different from the CPA housing fund. He said the Trust Fund might accept applications outside of the normal town meeting cycle. He said once town meeting appropriates money to the Trust Fund, the Trustees can spend it. Blauvelt asked what the CPA application meant in saying only executive approval would be required to spend the money. Would it be the Town Manager? Rembold said no, it would be voted by the Board of Trustees, as opposed to Town Meeting.

Rembold read some examples, from the CPA application, of what other Towns do with their trust funds.

Rembold said Town Meeting accepted the state provision in 2007 to set up a trust fund. We just have not funded it yet, nor have we set up the Board of Trustees. Smith said it's been almost 10 years which is too

long. Tim Geller said funding this would be an important step for the Town to address affordable housing needs.

Committee Member Reports

Abrahams said the Selectboard is reviewing Town bylaws. It is considering the makeup of the CPC and whether it should include an Agricultural Commission representative.

Salem said that with regards to community feedback, it is not necessary to defend ourselves. That might not even be helpful. We just need to think about it and consider how we respond.

Next Meeting:

There will be site visits on Tuesday 10/20 beginning at 1:00 at Bostwick Gardens and Wednesday 10/21 beginning at 4:00 at Bostwick Gardens.

The next meetings will be in-depth reviews and presentations, as follows:

October 20 – open space and recreation. October 27 historic resources. October 29.

Citizen’s Speak Time: None

Adjourn: Dezieck moved to adjourn, Blauvelt seconded, all in favor. Meeting adjourned at 7:55 PM.

Materials presented or distributed for this meeting:

- Draft minutes of October 6 meeting
- Step 2 applications from Construct, CDCSB, Town of GB for housing, and St James Housing/BHDC
- Answers to questions re 100 Bridge St, dated 10/14/15
- Answers to questions re 316 State Road, dated 10/14/15

Respectfully submitted:



