

**Lincoln Housing Commission
Virtual Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, August 5th, 2020 7:00 p.m.**

Members Present on Zoom Teleconference: Keith Gilbert, Chair; Evan Gorman, Vice Chair; Diana Chirita, Allen Vander Meulen, Victoria Benalfew. *Elaine Carroll not present due to a meeting conflict*
Also present: Kristin Ferris, Rebecca Blanchfield, Aldis Russell,

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Keith Gilbert.

(Note: the Town supplied Zoom meeting link was unusable due to not having an appropriate login and password, so Allen Vander Meulen supplied a “free” Zoom meeting link instead, which expires after 40 minutes.

Keith welcomed Victoria and our guests to the meeting.

Minutes:

One correction was requested for the June 30th Amendments by Diana Chirita: A sentence about half way through the second (last) large paragraph on the first page should be changed to read “*Diana felt we should change it to Affirmative Action Affordable Accessory Apartment Bylaw and to rent to minorities first.*” (Inserted word shown underlined.) Allen moved we accept the minutes for June 30th as amended, Diana seconded the motion. Roll Call: Keith Gilbert-aye; Allen Vander Meulen-aye; Diana Chirita-aye; Victoria Benalfew-aye; Evan Gorman-aye.

Keith Gilbert moved we approve the July 8th minutes as written, Allen Vander Meulen seconded. Roll Call: Keith Gilbert-aye; Allen Vander Meulen-aye; Diana Chirita-aye; Victoria Benalfew-aye; Evan Gorman-aye.

Keith Gilbert moved we approve the June 30th Executive Session minutes as written, Allen Vander Meulen seconded. Roll Call: Keith Gilbert-aye; Allen Vander Meulen-aye; Diana Chirita-aye; Victoria Benalfew-aye; Evan Gorman-aye.

Continued discussion on reimbursement from State funds on lost rent from COVIC-19:

Keith reiterated that this discussion is with regard to the Federal funds being distributed to the State that are intended to assist governments, businesses organizations and individuals who are facing financial difficulty due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Allen noted that one of the permissible categories of reimbursement is to compensate Landlords due to lost rents, as is the case with some of the Affordable units owned by the Town of Lincoln and administered through the Housing Commission. He added that 1 or 2 of the Housing Commission’s tenants are struggling by virtue of income lost due to the shutdown.

A second category is for people who may lose their homes due to an inability to pay rent or mortgages. With the support of the Housing Commission, the Council on Aging (COA) instituted a “Rent Relief Program” this year for Lincoln residents facing the potential (or actual) loss of their home. The program has already been hard hit by the COVID-19 shutdown. Diana had conferred with Abigail Butt, the COA’s new Director as to foreseen needs above the original funding for the program due to the pandemic and shutdown.

On July 29th Abby replied, informing Diana that there are currently 6 approved rent assistance requests totaling \$10,411, but that some of these families are still thousands of dollars behind on their rents. Abby anticipates

many more requests for assistance once eviction protections run out. Diana added that St. Vincent DePaul has also had numerous recent requests for help but they feel they can manage for the time being using funds they already have.

Allen pointed out that this retrospective summary from the COA did not help us determine how much money might be needed going forward, and asked if we should meet with Abby (Abigail) to get some idea of the scale of the anticipated need.

Keith suggested that since it has taken a month to get this far, then perhaps we should simply make the best guess we can and request that. Allen noted that it appears we can apply for funds more than just once, the only limitation being that all unused funds must be returned; therefore, we should probably just “go for it.” Keith agreed. Diana said Abigail had mentioned that there were many more requests than those that had been approved so far. Evan pointed out that the original request for funding through the CPC had been for \$30,000 for the first year, but that had been modified due to delays in starting the program (and the request therefore falling across accounting years). He suggested that the original request therefore be doubled to \$60,000. Allen said the main restriction to these funds is that they must be directly attributable to the COVID-19 shutdown. So, losing a job because of doing “something stupid at work” would not be covered, but losing one’s job due to a state-ordered restaurant shutdown would qualify.

It was agreed we should discuss with Abby and then send a joint letter. Keith said he will send an email to Abby to get her buy-in, then send a joint email to the Town.

Allen Vander Meulen then moved that we make a joint request with the Council on Aging for \$60,000 in funds to support families at risk of losing their homes due to the COVID crisis. Keith Gilbert Seconded. Roll Call: Evan Gorman-aye; Allen Vander Meulen-aye; Diana Chirita-aye; Victoria Benalfew-aye; Keith Gilbert-aye.

Keith recapped that he would send the letter to Abby for buy-in, then (once they agreed) a joint email to Tim expressing our desire to request these funds. Allen also said he’d find the original email where he informed Tim and Keith of the Fund, and send it to Keith again.

Update on SLPAC / Appoint Representative to SLPAC:

Allen gave a summary of the history of SLPIC, SLPAC’s predecessor: that it was supposed to look at the Lincoln Station and surrounding area and find ways to make it a more vital and economically viable town center. The problem was that SLPIC’s membership was a dozen people (or more), so finding meeting times when everyone could attend was nearly impossible. Therefore, most of the work went on in sub-committees (which met separately). One of these was a zoning subcommittee, which came up with the proposed Zoning Bylaw that was presented to the town for discussion in March(?). This was very controversial and received a lot of pushback from residents in the neighborhood.

Therefore, the Planning Board (of which SLPIC was a subcommittee), reconsidered the whole approach and came up with SLPAC with a much reduced membership and more narrowly defined mission. The new body has 5 members. In the last Planning Board meeting, at which Allen was present, the Planning Board unanimously agreed that the Housing Commission should retain a seat on the revised committee. There were a fair number of present and past Housing Commission members at the meeting to advocate for Housing to retain that seat, including former chairs Pam Gallup and BJ Scheff (as well as Allen); current member Evan Gorman, and former HC member Sharon Antia. The point all the HC representatives made is that Housing is a necessary piece of any development in the Lincoln Station area, and therefore the expertise and voice of the Housing Community (which embraces not just the Housing Commission but also the Housing Trust and Lincoln Foundation, among others) must be an integral part of the discussion and effort – not just for housing that qualifies under the technical term of “Affordable Housing” (meaning it is included on the town’s

“Subsidized Housing Inventory” but the broader issues of Housing that is affordable for more moderate-income individuals and families, and also diversity.

Keith Gilbert then nominated Allen Vander Meulen to continue as the Housing Commission’s Representative to SLPAC. Evan Gorman seconded the nomination. Roll Call: Keith Gilbert-aye.; Allen Vander Meulen-abstain; Diana Chirita-aye; Evan Gorman-aye; Victoria Benalfew-aye.

Elect New Chair:

Keith stated he no longer wished to continue as the chair, and noted that whoever replaced him would take on the task of contacting Abby and the town about the COVID funding. Evan asked Keith to confirm that he really wanted to step down, which Keith affirmed.

When asked if she wanted to be chair, Diana said that she was firm in her plans to step down. Diana Chirita then nominated Allen Vander Meulen to be the new chair and Evan Gorman seconded.

Allen then pointed out that having been Vice-Chair for some time, Evan was the next in line to be Chair. Evan stated he was not interested in being chair at this time, but agreed when Diana suggested that that it would be his turn in another year. When asked by Keith, Allen said he would accept the position if elected, but that he would remain as chair for just one year, not beyond that. Roll Call: Keith Gilbert-aye; Diana Chirita-aye; Allen Vander Meulen-abstain; Evan Gorman-aye; Victoria Benalfew-aye.

Keith then turned over chairmanship of the meeting to Allen.

Discussion with and input from Meeting Guests

At this point, Allen asked the guests (Kristin, Rebecca and Aldis) to talk a bit about what their interest was in the Housing Commission, and what they hope to see happen in the Housing Commission.

Kristin, who has attended the last two or three HC meetings, started out by saying she would continue to attend HC meetings as time permitted, but with her new position as chair of METCO and other time commitments she did not feel was able to be a regular member of the Commission at this time.

Aldis said she is very interested in finding out more about how the HC functions and what it does. She is not interested in joining in the near term, but is interested in getting involved at some point in the future.

Rebecca said that like Aldis and Kristen, she is busy with other commitments, including her position as Treasurer at Lincoln Nursery School (LNS) during her family’s last year there. However, she would like to be involved as long as the workload for her is light, and she would consider doing more once her commitment with LNS ends.

At this point, Allen noted that, because they were using a free Zoom meeting link they had limited time, just ten minutes were left before the meeting would be terminated by Zoom.

Update: AAA Meeting with Tom Stanley

Allen gave a summary of the History of the Affordable Accessory Apartment (AAA) Program’s history, noting that the Zoning changes needed to implement for the law, and a property tax rebate for homeowners who joined the program, had been passed at the 2017 Town Meeting. The property tax rebate was to make it so Homeowners did not have to pay taxes on whatever portion of their home was being used for an AAA tenant.

The Property Tax rebate required legislative approval, and was hung up in the legislature due to a lot of confusion over how the law was to work, with demands to rewrite the rebate's language – which the Housing Commission refused to do, because the proposed changes were made without considering the extensive negotiations and agreements about this program that Lincoln had made with DHCD, and because accepting the proposed changes would have required going before the town again to get the new language approved.

It now appears that the bill, in its original form, is in the legislative queue - although there has been no movement on it since the COVID-19 crisis began. Keith Gilbert, by virtue of his relationship with Tom Stanley (our State Rep), requested a meeting with Mr. Stanley. Mr. Stanley was open to a meeting, and so Allen followed up with an email back to him about a week ago asking to set a date and time for the proposed meeting. We have not heard back from him yet, likely because of all that is going on with the end of the Legislative Session right now. Allen will try to contact him again in another week or so.

Keith reiterated what he said in past meetings, which is that he does not feel this effort to get the Property Tax rebate passed is time well spent. He feels it will be of benefit to very few people, and that the chances of it passing in the legislature and getting signed into law at this time are very slim.

Diana felt that this effort is time well spent, even if only 5 affordable apartments are created as a result.

Other Business:

Given that the Zoom meeting was about to run out of time, Allen suggested we pass on the proposed “Review of Tasks and Responsibilities” agenda item for now. He then asked if there was any other business to be discussed before we ran out of time.

Diana said that she wants to increase the HC's attention to diversity, including adding language to a revised Housing Plan and making a prominent statement about a commitment to diversity on the Housing Commission's website. Both Allen and Keith agreed that Diana's proposal was a worthwhile and important change to make. When asked if she would take on this task, Diana responded that she would not since she is leaving the Housing Commission soon, but feels it should be done.

At this point (with less than a minute of time remaining on Zoom) Keith proposed we adjourn and start a new Zoom meeting for the Executive Session. Allen said to Aldis, Rebecca and Kristen that since the next session would be an Executive Session, they would not be able to participate. He thanked them for participating and said he hoped they would show up at our next meeting to talk more about working with the commission in some form, as well as the possibility of formally joining on the commission.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40pm.

Post-Meeting Task List:

1. Allen to discuss COVID Relief Program Funding with Abby and prepare a joint email to be sent to Tim Higgins and the Chair of the BoS.
2. Allen to send a web link to information on the official COVID Relief Program to members of the Commission.
3. Allen to again contact Tom Stanley to set up a Zoom meeting with him (and Pam Gallup) regarding the AAA Property Tax Rebate.