

Lyme Affordable Housing Commission Meeting April 5, 2021

This meeting was conducted via ZOOM. Electronically present: Tim Hildner (Chair), Carleen Gerber, Carol House, Steve Mattson, Jim Miller, Steve Olstein, and Tina West.

Visitors: Sue Hessel, Anne Ahern

Hildner called the meeting to order at 6:37 pm.

The minutes of the March 1 meeting were accepted as posted.

Old Business:

Public Education Initiative:

Carol House provided an overview of the results of the educational quiz sponsored by the Commission. The quiz consisted of 5 multiple-choice questions, each followed by the correct answer and a fuller context for the question and answer. The quiz had 124 responses. Here are the tabulated results.

| | Quiz Question | Correct Answer | Percent of Correct Responses | Most Common Answer | Percent Giving Most Common Answer |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Q1 | To qualify for affordable housing in CT, an individual's annual household income cannot exceed what amount? | \$51,408 | 37% | \$51,408 | 37% |
| Q2 | How many affordable accessory apartments are there in Lyme? | 0 | 27% | 10 | 33% |
| Q3 | In a 2015 survey of residents, what percentage of respondents were in favor of expanding the Town's affordable housing options using accessory apartments? | 45% | 14% | 10% | 38% |
| Q4 | How many homes in Lyme currently qualify as affordable housing under state guidelines? | 12 | 15% | 8 | 43% |
| Q5 | How many years ago was the last affordable housing unit in Lyme completed? | 12 | 42% | 12 | 42% |

The Commission continued to discuss expanding the use of the Commission's webpage as an educational tool, with the scope of information to be focused specifically on Lyme. After reviewing the guidelines for drafting a town's affordable housing plan, the Commission decided it was too detailed for use as an educational tool. Hildner drafted a clear statement of the state's criteria for classifying a housing unit as "affordable." He included a section on "Why it is important to the town of Lyme." This document will be placed on the Commission's website.

The Commission discussed the various needs for affordable housing in Lyme, and how best to communicate those needs to our community to elicit support for making it happen. The Commission's approach will be to identify the Town's needs before trying to chase the currently fluid state guidelines. Those needs include providing affordable housing, particularly rental, for individuals and their families who service our community through such things as volunteer work, teaching in our school system, and providing homecare. We also see the need for senior living, so that Lyme residents who need to move to such housing do not have to leave the community. Issues include the fact that Lyme does not have a lot of buildable land, existing zoning regulations, raising funds to build what is needed, and identifying a successful plan to manage rentals. We see a real need for a regional effort to meet demands.

Affordable Housing Rental Model: The Commission sent out a letter to homeowners identified by the Lyme Assessor as having an accessory structure. The letter briefly described the proposed program and offered these homeowners an opportunity to express interest in such a program and join with the Commission to discuss the details. There were few responses, but Hildner reached out to those that did respond. The homeowners' basic concern was not in renting to individuals with lower incomes, but 1) putting a deed restriction on part of their property, and 2) fear of government interference with their rental decisions.

Affordable Housing Plan: Lyme is required by state statute to have an official Affordable Housing Plan. This Commission will have the lead role in the drafting of this plan. We will be working with the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG) to fit our plan within a regional plan. No additional action to report at this time. The Commission members were asked to give additional thought to the ideas we would like to see in the plan, but we are on hold until there is additional action by the RiverCOG.

New Business:

Affordable Housing Bills: Several affordable housing bills are in various stages of discussion in Hartford. Bill 1024 is now out of committee. It will likely go through additional changes over the next few months and then will get a vote before the General Assembly. It will likely pass, and it is currently unclear whether the Governor will sign it.

Affordable Housing-immediate needs: There will be a discussion of this topic offline.

Other: Essex Savings Bank sent a letter to Lyme indicating their interest in working with towns on affordable housing.

Hildner adjourned the meeting at 8:15 pm.

Next meeting: Monday May 3 at 6:30 pm. This will be a Zoom meeting.

Respectively submitted,
Carol House