

WHITEFISH STRATEGIC HOUSING PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE MINUTES

January 26, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

1. Call to order:

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m.

Present: Addie Brown-Testa, Wendy Compton-Ring, Ben Davis, Rhonda Fitzgerald, Kevin Gartland, Bob Horne, John Muhlfeld, Rebecca Norton, Dana Smith

Absent:

Others: Jerry Dunker, Heidi Desch, Mayre Flowers

2. Approval of Minutes from the November 12, 2020 meetings:

Horne/Muhlfeld moved to approve the November 12, 2020 meeting minutes. Passed unanimously.

3. Public Comments: none

4. Review Responsibilities for Strategies and Core Components in Strategic Housing Plan:

Dana provided a summary and brief review of the strategies and core components in the Strategic Housing Plan and reviewed the important relationships with all the partners to bring affordable housing to our community. Each of the major tasks were reviewed to see where we are at and each gave the group an update.

Kevin – agreed it was a good time to be looking at all this again, the landscape has changed in the past 5 years

5. Update from Whitefish Housing Authority:

New webpage is www.whitefishhousing.org and it is working well; the WHA worked with Alpenglow Apartments and the Section 8 housing program to fill some rental units

Alpenglow Apartments (LIHTC) – emailed an update from Homeward to the Committee before the meeting: Building 1 (24 units) people are moving in this weekend; setbacks due to Covid; Building 2 (11 units) – late February; and Building 3 (3 units) – mid to late March

Lori – we have more applicants than units. It is a bit of a process to go through to get people into these units; Noted that it took a while to fill the Riverview Meadows apartment and the WF Crossing units; there are more applicants for 60% AMI or less than 70-80% AMI range

Rhonda – concerned that we're not able to find people to fill the apartment units and units are staying empty for the higher AMI units, something isn't right

Addie – rents have skyrocketed and income hasn't; people have lost jobs and can't afford the rents

Lori – 60% AMI income is about \$15/hour or less; a 70% AMI is approximately \$20/hour

Ben – if the rental rates are low; why do we have vacancies

Kevin – wondered about the number of applicants

Lori – we need more projects to rent to people earning less than 60% AMI; Covid has really affected people; some people don't meet the qualifications so the WHA won't move them in, so they go and rent a market rate and are willing to take on the greater % of their income to housing

Ben – how many vacant rentals?

Lori – two of five at Riverview Meadows are vacant (a two-bedroom and a one-bedroom)

NEXT STEPS:

Can the Housing Steering Committee get a tour of Alpenglow Apartments before it all gets leased up? Will there be any ribbon cutting ceremony or press release on its opening? This project is a big deal.

Snow Lot – the RFP/Q deadline was last week; they received 4 proposals; interviews coming up

NEXT STEPS:

The WHA will invite Craig to the interview process because he has good experience in this type of process; Lori will reach out to Craig to find out his availability.

6. Update from Whitefish Chamber of Commerce:

Talked about the previous funding & PR group – good to get those going again; workforce housing is always on their agendas; is willing to outreach to employers, but wants to make sure there is housing then he can include it in his email updates

NEXT STEPS:

Lori and Kevin need to talk off-line to figure out who the open rentals are for so he can get the word out with a 'targeted message' and needs to be part of an overall message to the public about what the range of income they are serving

Ben – does this need to be a future agenda item?

7. Update from City of Whitefish:

Montana State Legislature 2021 Session (LC 0304 now known as HB 259) – Dana provided an update to the Committee LC 0304; she reached out to Bozeman – their lobbyist met with the sponsoring representative; she was not interesting in making amendments ahead of time; was not very optimistic

Rebecca – the City has considerable investment (time & money) in the development of the regulations; this came from the community; what else are we supposed to do if we can't use all of our tools

Rhonda – is it even constitutional for the state to limit the City's actions like this; if this goes away is there another way to address this?

Dana - didn't draft a bill to exempt impact fees for affordable housing projects; there may be another way deal with this

John – the City will be required to revert back to the PUD with the voluntary inclusionary zoning; this group needs to reconvene to provide targeted public testimony at the Legislative Committee once the hearings are scheduled

Bob – once it gets to Committee it's too late for amendments

Rebecca – it would be good to see how much money we have spent (time/money); WF is one of the most innovative cities in the state

Rhonda – local control is important

NEXT STEPS:

Committee members be prepared to testified and several members indicated they would make contacts

Needs Assessment/Plan Update of 2021 – The City Council extended the Committee until the end of 2021; reached out to Rees Consulting to get an estimate to update the Housing Needs Assessment - \$20,000; has some budget authority for professional services; could proceed with concurrence from the Council

Kevin – need to do the Needs Assessment completed first, then look at the Strategic Housing Plan to see how we are doing

NEXT STEPS:

Dana can start the process with Council

House Prices sold in 2020 – Wendy received an update on the houses sold in 2020 in the 59937-zip code and shared with the group. There were 687 sales with the following information:

Whitefish Sold 2020		
	Sold Price	Total Sq. Ft.
Low	\$25,000	390
Avg	\$775,589	2324
Med	\$533,900	2000
High	\$5,000,000	12704

The group was surprised by the uptick and the number of units sold was considerably more than previous years.

NEXT STEPS:

No action needed. This data will be used as part of the information needed to update the Fee in Lieu of Affordable Housing.

Accessory Dwelling Units Draft Language Revisions – Staff overview of the draft and questions.

Rhonda – ADUs only wants to support if it supports the ADUs if they maintain the neighborhood; thinks the draft does nothing to support neighborhoods

The Committee was not in support of both units (single family home and ADU being rented) and there was concern with ADUs being used as Short-Term Rentals

The group generally agreed the ACUP process would be acceptable since project with significant concern can be upgraded to the full CUP with public hearings; generally, staff receives very little neighborhood comments on ADUs

Dana – as time was running out, the Committee was directed to read the draft and forward comments to Wendy by Friday

Rhonda – requested photos of good design and bad design to help the group visually understand the design standards

NEXT STEPS:

This will be an agenda item on the next meeting. Wendy will update the draft based on comments tonight and provide a list of suggestions from Committee comments

8. Next Committee Meeting: February 11, 2021

9. Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.