

A regular meeting of the Leelanau County Housing Action Committee was held on Monday, March 8, 2021 at the Government Center, in person and by ZOOM.

CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was called to order at 3:00 pm by Chair Lois Bahle.

ROLL CALL:

MEMBERS PRESENT

ZOOM:

Lois Bahle - Village of Suttons Bay
Frank Clements – Empire
Rick Foster – Leelanau Township
Sharon Oriel - Glen Arbor Township
Melinda Lautner - Solon Township
Tony Lentych - TCHC, Grand Traverse County
Kathy Birney- Leland Township

Absent: J. O’Neill, T. Wessell, C. Noonan, S. Yoder, K. Wiejaczka

Staff: T. Galla (In person)

Public: None

Consideration of Agenda

By consensus, the agenda was accepted as presented.

Staff Comments – None

Public Comments

Bahle announced the phone number for public comment.

Nate Griswold called in to give a public comment. He was recently appointed to the county planning commission and has a background in landscape architecture, and has worked all over the world. He is very interested in what this committee is doing and happy to collaborate. He has policy ideas to look at this problem. Griswold said he had some questions for the committee and hoped to get some answers. Are members pro-growth? That seems to be the underlying question that he saw in minutes and lots of discussion on finding more housing and what to do with current stock. He felt very progressive and incentivized zoning for developers is a good thing to look at. Challenge developers to be greener and establish more sustainable technology. If this is the appropriate place, or the planning commission is, he would be happy to share other incentives and ideas. In the minutes and the questions, he saw some opportunity and he is happy to participate in a larger scale with this committee. The demonizing of Short Term Rentals (STRs) is not a solution, neither is trying to push homeowners to make sure they stay in a certain spot. There are ways to create new spots and create zoning and he is here to share ideas. He thanked the members for their time.

Clements said we have been on this train for a long time and Griswold may not understand all the things we have done or have not been able to do. He suggested Galla send a packet of meeting minutes and things we have done so he has more context on our work. Clements was particularly interested in incentives to developers that Griswold mentioned.

Bahle asked if there were any rules on new members for the HAC and Galla said it should be brought before the county planning commission as HAC is a subcommittee of the planning commission. Bahle welcomed new ideas and fresh concepts. She will follow-up with Griswold.

Foster suggested Griswold go through our past minutes and explore what ideas and items have been done already, otherwise we may be hearing about things we have already talked about. On the other hand, fresh ideas would be good to add.

Consideration of February 8, 2021 Minutes

Motion by Lautner, seconded by Clements to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried 7-0.

Old Business

2021 Goals

Bahle said she liked the expansion of #2 in the Goals, the staff position. She felt it needed to be someone who is more permanent to get us moving.

Lautner said she had no problem with goals. We are just a committee. She was opposed to a staff person, always has been and hasn't changed her mind on that even if it is a shared position. She felt we should work with Housing North, our partners, townships/villages, etc.

Motion by Foster, seconded by Clements to accept the goals as presented.

Lautner stated she would vote no, based on the staff person position being one of the goals.

Motion carried 6-1, Lautner opposed.

DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

Leelanau Housing Ready Program Overview

Galla stated Yarrow Brown from Housing North sent this draft for reference/information. If you have questions or want more information, that will be shared with her. She can attend next month's meeting to talk about this and answer your questions. Galla commented on positions set up in other counties and Housing North helped set it up but the funding came from other agencies or private funds. Lentych confirmed.

Bahle felt Brown's report shows we need some help and 3 year period because you can't do it just in the summer to get in the spread of issues across the communities. Need concentrated time and attention.

Oriel asked what the county's policy was on accepting funds from other organizations to pay for this person. We have some ideas from other counties and from Brown. I need to know what the governmental guidelines are for having a person provide resource to this committee but not be paid for by the county. Galla said there is a policy on how donations are accepted. She gave Senior Services as an example and how they come before the county board to approve accepting a donation. She assumed the HAC would have to follow a similar process. In addition, we would have to check if there are benefits and who pays for that. It will take a little more work to figure out the funding for the position. She understood from previous conversations that HAC was looking for the county to house this person in an office, not pay for them. She suggested more input from Brown on how other counties did this and then look at what Leelanau might do. She stated the county has been pretty consistent over the years that they didn't want to do a grant funded position or intern position and have it turn into a full time position. The county has been clear they are not going to do that.

Bahle referenced the 4th paragraph in Brown's document which states that Housing North can recruit, hire, manage, etc.

Clements commented on NIMBYism (Not In My Back yard). We go through the work and get to the community and the community drives the project out. You need public relation activities prior to that and work on 'yes' in my backyard instead of 'no' in my backyard. He would like to see some kind of public relations campaign going on to use in various communities when a developer comes in that we can stand behind, and we like the project.

Lentych replied that local communities that have these staff positions are largely responsible for the activities of those staff persons. Funds were sought for those staff people largely based on action plans and what they wanted accomplished. That's the most successful approach. He didn't think many people would give money if you don't articulate what you want to accomplish. It goes a long way to attract the partners you need. If we can get clarification from county if they are willing to house this position. We should get that established before we ask for help or ask for dollars. If not, we should find an alternative. In communities that have done this, community foundations have been very active funding those positions. It would be good to have a good solid answer from the county if they are willing to have the position. Is there room? Find that out first, then do a job description, then talk to founders. If you raise dollars and county decides not to house the position, you can put it somewhere else.

Galla said office space in her office suite is not being used right now and doesn't expect that to change because MSHDA is no longer doing grants. She didn't know how the county board might feel about that; they have not been asked.

Bahle was hoping for a model of what other communities are using.

Lentych said the question we should pose is 'is it worth our time to go out and fundraise for a positions' when we don't have the answer from the county board. We want to be sensitive to county policies on grant positions, etc. before we start. EDC and some others may be natural partners on this. You might get one person for a 3 year project but don't know how you get away from some turnover with this position. Before we entertain funders, have the question answered and work with Housing North for a package similar to what they did. The Frey foundation in Charlevoix really pushed the issue and they found another partner to help fund the staff position. We might have to go out and do some of the work ourselves to get funders.

Opportunity Analysis for Affordable Housing

Clements stated we have been talking about mapping the opportunities for affordable housing for quite a while. We have the criteria for what determines a good site: zoning, utilities, etc. Galla previously gave out a map for Elmwood Township showing sewer service and that was a beginning for the mapping. Galla and Clements talked with Rob Herman from the Equalization Department on this mapping project. Clements had emailed a document to all members over the weekend and the first part of it is background information on the Housing Ready Communities Checklist and for communities to work on their plans and policies to pave the way for housing developers, investors, and housing non-profits to build housing. Clements spoke on the Cornerstone development in M-22 in the Village of Empire. They ended up buying the development and we have 12 new homes and about 20 more can be built. We were proactive to go out and attract developers to Empire. We need to make it easier for developers to come to our communities. Clements reviewed the action steps outlined for the HAC as well as the new map of Elmwood Township. Clements and Galla met again with Rob Herman on the mapping. Most developers are looking for higher density which is about 6 units per acre. Sewers allow that to happen. You can find that on the map and the R3 zoning which allow for higher density and the R2 which allows for 2 family dwellings. Some districts require a 10-acre minimum but some do allow smaller lots. We also looked at identifying employment areas. Clements spoke about the proposed Brewery Creek development. The township has changed the calculations to take out wetlands and road right of ways so that gets you down to more like 450 units allowed on that site. It is already a targeted area for housing.

Bahle said a large number of units on a site will bring up NIMBYism. She has looked around Suttons Bay for areas for multiple units and the only way to make a dent in the number of housing unites needed is to build a lot of

rentals. The New Neighborhood in Empire Village is attractive and has a maximum buildout of around 40 units. She asked members where we should focus our energy?

Clements said Suttons Bay Village has very few opportunities with the village limits for multi-family. There are more opportunities in the township but no sewer. If you go to Northport, they have the sewers and more properties zoned for multi-family housing but sewer hookup is about \$17,000 a unit. It's important that we also take this information back to our communities to tell them – this is why you are not attracting developers. Frankfort identified land specifically to help developers. Clements added that sites in Elmwood need to be ground truthed as some may have development on them. If we are serious about looking at each township and village to see what they can or cannot do, this is the way to do it. He felt we have to find someone to be able to do this on a consistent basis. It has a beginning and end to it so we could hire someone to get this accomplished. He noted some of the other things on his list will require more work and there may be other things to add.

Bahle felt sewer was the key. Northport almost eliminates themselves for housing development because of the cost.

Lautner noted that while it would be great to have some of these housing projects on sewer, it might not work and some areas may not be on sewer. She cited the development off Grey Rd in Grand Traverse County as an example. While it may not be considered to be affordable, at the rate things are going they may be. There could be separate drain fields. All of this boils down to the density. Clements agreed and said that Cornerstone did that development. It is a green site – platted, with roads and utilities put in. Cornerstone was looking for a shovel ready project to do when he came to Empire. A green site takes a longer period of time.

Scoring Project Sites

Bahle introduced it the scoring sheet and asked what else could be added. She suggested brownfield, land bank or blighted sites. Properties that are abandoned, idled, vacant, etc. may qualify for funds through the brownfield or the land bank. Foster commented that if a property is in the land bank, it automatically qualifies for brownfield funds. Clements thought some of the scoring criteria fell in line with what they looked at for the Empire site and felt the list was helpful.

Public Comments

Bahle announced the phone number for public comments. No comments.

Staff Comments

Galla said that O'Neill had sent an email with a 3 page document that he put together and he asked for it to be in the minutes. She did reply that it is part of the meeting materials. You can get documents from anyone on any topic and they don't need to be made part of the minutes. Galla mentioned she had talked to MSHDA years ago on having a clearinghouse for housing issues and MSHDA didn't seem interested. It's difficult if you are looking for housing help and can't get through all the agencies. She asked Brown if Housing North would be willing to be the cleaning house for this region. You could go in and enter your county and then have drop down menus. This has been an issue for all counties for residents to try and maneuver through all the agencies and resources. Instead, have it in one place. It would take some work to set it up and it has to be kept up to date but it would be very useful. Also, we had Esther Greenhouse here several years ago to talk about housing for all ages and building homes so it works for ages 0 to 99. If someone needs to use a walker or be on crutches for a while, there are things that should be built into the homes to handle this. Leelanau County has growing number of seniors and our percentage is higher than the states. It doesn't have to be a senior having issues, it can be anyone. She mentioned working with Building Codes and designs to try and make sure that people can live in their home and maneuver around their home and the neighborhood. She is talking with Brown about this to see if HN is interested in putting more resources out there on this topic.

Bahle said it sounds just like something she recently did in a home to alter the bathroom, shower, hallways, etc.

Galla mentioned she and Greenhouse did a presentation in New York and she added that some of these things address people with arthritis and difficulties opening doors, or for kids. The design works for anyone of any age.

Member Comments/Chair Comments

Bahle mentioned tomorrow's meeting and Commissioner Bunek has proposed a resolution dealing with stresses, etc. There was an article in the newspaper that county was able to refinance and save \$90,000. If you save some money, maybe you could use some of those funds to focus on some of these issues. Childcare is a real stressor as well as rent and mortgage foreclosure threats. Using some of that to apply on a needs basis through Leelanau Christian Neighbors, Northwest MI Community Action Agency, and some of the organizations O'Neill was talking about seems to make sense.

Bahle asked Lautner if it made sense. Lautner replied, no. The money saved is not money in the pocket it is savings over the years and we have the bonds to be paid. We haven't even budgeted for 2022 yet. She thought Bunek was talking about support for all the emotional things people are going through with COVID such as opioid abuse. It is an emotional dilemma that our children are going through not being in school and so forth. Housing and mortgage relief is too big and she didn't know how the county would deal with this.

Oriel commented on two things for our next meeting. First, ask the county to have a space to house a person for housing activities. Secondly, she wanted to thank Clements, Galla and Herman on the work on the opportunity for affordable housing. This is something that is really useful because we can show townships or municipalities either their reason for opportunity or reason for lack of opportunity and specifically highlight for them the changes that they can make. Whether it is dropping the price in sewer hook-up or zoning changes or an opportunity for green sites, it is useful.

Foster said it is high on the agenda for their township planning commission to look into workforce housing and try to work together with the Northport village planning committee on housing. We have some new ideas since the presentations were made to the villages. We also have a new township board and supervisor.

Bahle noted that Suttons Bay Village hired Sara Kopriva from Elmwood Township as a planner. She was not aware of how many hours she would be working.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 4:03 pm.