

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

CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was called to order at 3:10 pm by Chair Lois Bahle.

ROLL CALL:

MEMBERS PRESENT

ZOOM:

Lois Bahle - Village of Suttons Bay
Ty Wessell – Leelanau Township, Northport
Frank Clements – Empire
Rick Foster – Leelanau Township
Sharon Oriel - Glen Arbor Township
John O’Neill – Cedar, Solon Township
Melinda Lautner - Solon Township
Tony Lentych - TCHC, Grand Traverse County

Absent: K. Birney, V. Goldschmidt, C. Noonan, S. Yoder, K. Wiejaczka

Staff: T. Galla (In person)

Public: None
(ZOOM)

Election of officers:

Vice-Chair

Bahle accepted nominations for Vice-Chair.

Motion by Bahle, seconded by Wessell, to nominate Lautner for Vice-Chair. With no further nominations, Lautner was elected Vice-Chair 8-0.

Consideration of Agenda

Motion by Lautner, seconded by Foster to accept the agenda as presented.

O’Neill commented that the bylaws say the HAC can go by consensus. Bahle agreed and said they had a discussion at the last meeting to also have officers and we can do it either way – by motion or consensus.

Motion carried 8-0.

Public Comments

Bahle announced the phone number for public comment. There was no public comment.

Staff Comments – None.

Consideration of January 11, 2021 Minutes

Motion by Wessell, seconded by Clements to approve the minutes as presented.

O’Neill commented on shortening the minutes but still maintain the essence of what was being discussed. He commented on how the county can address foreclosure prevention, without money, and he sent that in prior and

wanted to add that to the minutes. Galla stated she needed to know what he was referring to if it was going to be added to the minutes. O'Neill read from the document.

Bahle asked what the procedure was as O'Neill is asking to amend the minutes and include information on foreclosures. Lentych said it doesn't have to be in the minutes, it could be attachment in the packet. Galla said she thought it was already in the packet for the January meeting. Bahle said they can be added to the minutes of the February 8 meeting so anyone who is looking for that information can find them.

Motion carried 8-0.

Old Business

Foreclosures / Evictions

Bahle said the HAC has covered this in the past, and tried to figure out what our role is, perhaps being a vector for people needing these services and she thinks that is where we are going.

Wessell asked O'Neill to run through his suggestions and they can get a sense of support or lack of it for those ideas.

O'Neill said he has been trying to promote a foreclosure prevention plan for those who may slip through the cracks of all the existing programs or whatever the government comes up with. O'Neill spoke about housing, and the preservation of existing affordable homes. When people run into problems with their mortgages because many jobs are on hold or small businesses are closing, people are going to be in trouble. He wants those people to retain their homes and the equity they have in them. If they decide to move, he wants a mechanism to allow them to get fair price but keep it in the stock of affordable homes. That's not the county's job to build new houses or apartments, but we are advocating for it. If we don't, we will see diminishing level of affordable homes.

Wessell interrupted, stating he wanted O'Neill to go through the list to see what Lentych and Oriel felt Housing North might support for some of these bullets. That was his reason for asking O'Neill to go through the list. O'Neill wanted to email the document to everyone and come back to that discussion in a few minutes.

Bahle said losing our housing stock has a lot to do with conversations on short term rentals (STRs). Until our communities and township get firm with limiting the number of STRs, she didn't know how we could control it. If someone wants to sell their house, they can do that unless you are willing to buy it and keep it as affordable.

O'Neill said just as it is not the county's job to build tax credit housing or ask Habitat to build or ask developers to put in affordable units, it's also not our role to tell townships they have to put a damper on short term rentals. We advocate for those things and need to also advocate for preservation of existing affordable homes. We didn't have all the answers when we started our checklist but we knew it was import.

Bahle doesn't see how that can happen right now, but perhaps Housing North can help with that and go forward in some way. Bahle felt we are stalled on this topic.

Discussion / Action

1. Identify 2021 Goals

Bahle stated the only goal we did not complete from 2020 was mapping areas of infrastructure. We can look at different areas and score them for high density, areas for transportation, utilities, schools, etc. A lot of the checklist is covered if we apply this to our own communities and narrow down where our focus could be. In order to reach those 600 units that the target market says is needed, we need rental units. Where can those be located?

Bahle said looking at the 2021 proposed list, it seems like we are coming to the end of what we can do as volunteers. Are there other communities that have a model we can look at and a person doing this work? When she looks at all of it and tries to put it all together, she finds it overwhelming.

Wessell commented on the discussion that was held at the Housing conference on "Housing in the middle". They heard from Charlevoix County and contracted with a person with grant dollars that led their housing effort. It takes more than a volunteer. We can either work with Housing North to do that, or on our own figure out a way to pursue someone to provide some staff support to developers and townships and Galla's office. Bahle agreed.

Clements commented on some of the goals that were given to the county commissioners on what the county can do and if Galla has grants for an intern for the summer, that person could work on these issues. We should try to explore that and have someone come in on a part-time basis or summer to help with those activities. Bahle felt a more permanent position was needed with someone with local knowledge so they don't have to be led by the hand. Clements suggested a student with planning background that could hit the ground running.

Lentych said that Housing North (HN) did not get involved with raising money at the county level for these positions. It was an organic effort and HN was brought in to manage the grant and manage the staff person. He felt we should not rely on HN to be able to get out and get the funding for Leelanau County but they could be a partner. He liked Clements suggestion to get some dollars for a staff or intern at the county. That makes the most sense. Oriel asked Lentych how Charlevoix was and Lentych said it was a community foundation and that was important for both of the staff funded positions in other counties. Oriel raise that as an idea when we consider sources of funding, that are not governmental funds. She agreed with Lentych that this should be one of our goals.

Bahle felt we need to know what we want, and then how much it is going to cost and how we fund it. We need a job description. Clements said a summer student, 3 months of work at \$15 hour equals \$2,000. We could find the money in the community. Bahle added they may need housing.

Foster said there is a startup time for an intern or short-term job. In this case, it might eat up 1/3 or so of their time. He wondered of the potential of finding more than 1 county in the region that might share a staff person. There are very talented people who don't want a full-time job. It could be part time for a couple years.

Oriel said HN could share job descriptions but those are unique to those counties. We should decide what we want.

Lautner cautioned about putting a lot of time looking for an employee at county level or for the county to fund this position. An intern might be a possibility but she liked putting our energy toward HN and have them help us. We have a lot of other good ideas we are working on.

Lentych suggested asking the county to host the position with staff, if we fund it somehow. Once we know that, we can find out how viable the rest of it is. Clements said he could think of a couple people that would be interested in this position.

Clements discussed Goals - #1, mapping exercise, and said we talked about putting the location of businesses on the maps. We want to get housing close to where people work. The map has a lot of possibilities and we can start to target areas that have potential and show that to developers. The map is going to be pretty important to help us narrow down areas. Bahle agreed.

Foster suggested the business information include the number of fulltime employees now and how many they wish to have. He suggested schools and municipalities be listed.

Oriel suggested adding BATA routes.

Lautner said she had discussion with fire departments and their employees and most felt it was not a big issue where they lived anymore because they are not volunteering. They have 24 hours on and 24 hours off. They already have someone at the station.

Bahle suggested the additional items could be added to the map as overlays.

Bahle asked what is needed for the goals. Galla commented that the group was getting very specific on the discussion with maps, and that is on the agenda a little later. She was hoping the goals could be finalized so you can start working on things.

Clements commented on Goal #2 with regard to obtaining more information from the Land Bank so we know what we can get to developers.

Galla said they had a session with the Land Bank Authority and the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority along with Mr. Jim Tischler from the state Land Bank, last year. Developers were encouraged to attend and some did attend. Also, she did a presentation with an environmental consultant and another consultant for the Michigan Association of Planning and some of the Land Bank and Brownfield members viewed that presentation on doing projects with the Land Bank. If a project involves the Land Bank, a developer needs to know the process or bring someone into their team that knows how to work through it as there are a lot of steps.

Bahle summarized and said this is why we need a staff person to be available to work through these projects.

Lentych commented that Land Banks are site specific and project specific. Message should be they are open for business and open to doing projects with developers.

Wessell noted we are a committee under the county planning commission and we talked at the last meeting about the possibility of having a conference or session kind of duplicating the agenda of missing middle housing for our county. We can get some of that information out to the public.

Bahle suggested trying to hire a staff person to be the bulldog on some of the projects so we step away from just volunteers trying to do this.

Oriel suggested language for a staff person as a goal. We are a committee of the county planning commission. Does the planning commission have 2021 goals we should be aware of? Lautner said the county planning commission has statutory responsibilities, and they are an advisory board.

Clements asked if there are organizations we should partner with? Galla had sent some information out regarding Habitat for Humanity resources and Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency (NMCAA). Galla said Wendy Irvine from Habitat asked to be on our mailing list and the Land Bank has worked with them in the past so that could be a possible future organization for you to work with. O'Neill added that Habitat is planning on building homes in Leelanau County this year. They work with their current homeowners to keep them in their homes. At this time, they are not doing anything beyond working with the homeowners they deal with.

Galla reported that REACH is merging with Homestretch. O'Neill felt Homestretch should be on the list. Foster felt Homestretch had not been quite as successful working in this county, as we had hoped for. Foster wondered if we could interest the township & village planning commissions about having a webinar that focused on housing in the middle. They could include those ideas in their plans.

Wessell was pleased that Northport Village Planning Commission did look at the webinar Galla helped to present, and they have considered the ideas and it is a regular part of their conversation as they renew their plan.

Lautner asked to move the Goals forward to the next meeting.

Galla will revise the goals and bring them back to the HAC next month.

O'Neill felt the STRS concern could be combined with existing stock of affordable homes. Combine preserving existing rentals, concern of STRS, and preserve affordable housing. Gentrification is the #1 problem we have in this area.

2. Draft Maps – public utilities

Clements volunteered to help with maps.

3. Forum piece / quarterly submissions

Clements said the piece was broken into 3 areas and he was looking for ideas from the HAC:

1. What is the issue?
2. What is current reality?
3. What is action we should take?

We talked about pandemic causing wide-spread unemployment and we can give numbers on that. The current reality is we can talk about things nationally, and that gives idea of what could be happening in the county. Clements talked about data for low-income rentals, average incomes, assistance programs, etc. and the information broken out by census tract. It appears there are about 300 rental homes in the county at risk. They call this a low index assessment and it is done by census tracts. We have the data that tells us what might potentially happen. We are looking for local resources to help people that may have eviction problems so they know where they can go for help. He would like to talk with NMCAA and there is another group called Greenpath in Traverse City. In the forum piece, we could point out the issue, the reality, and make some recommendations for local resources that could offer assistance.

Clements said there is potentially a \$1.9 trillion relief package coming. Oriel and Clements were on a webinar about housing foreclosure and they could not find out who the fiduciary is that will disburse this money locally. Lentych said it will probably end up at NMCAA. NMCAA got the first round of money out pretty quickly because there was a high demand. Clements said the webinar had a list of all agencies in Michigan and they were located in Detroit or Upper Peninsula - nothing in the middle. Oriel added that a draft forum piece is not being presented yet because they need more information. Lentych reminded them of the 500-word limit and there is a lot to cover. Perhaps a goal would be to submit quarterly forums and break this up a bit. O'Neill added the Leelanau Ticker is good and there are a lot of other sources that will distribute this information.

Discussion returned to foreclosure prevention.

O'Neill reviewed his suggestions and discussed being an advocate for prevention which could include notifications to nonprofits of pending Sheriff's sales on properties and tax foreclosures. We could serve as a clearinghouse.

Wessell said if we serve as a clearinghouse, that means information needs to be kept up to date all the time. Perhaps we need to find an agency to do that and just have a link on our website. Every single week it needs to be updated.

Clements suggested working with the Sheriff to help get information out to people when they have to send notices for eviction. Share some of the resources and agency assistance. O'Neill added that we need to reach

homeowners before they can't get caught up. That's way before the Sheriffs sale. Refer people to agencies on top of that.

Lautner commented on having rentals. One thing she found is that they know where the resources are, they know how to get the help and they are getting all of that. Our issues with eviction were different than just them needing assistance.

Galla commented on the information that her office sends out to any homeowners listed in the newspaper for foreclosure. We already get resource information out to people, post it on Facebook, send it to the townships and villages. For the last 3 years or so, whenever a bank notice is in the paper, we send out a packet of resources to the homeowner and it is up to them to follow up and seek help if they need it.

Bahle commented on counseling resources that are available. Banks are not interested in foreclosing.

4. Outreach Opportunities – 2nd visit to townships/villages?

Communication Items

Bahle commented on upcoming events and reminded members to sign up for sessions.

Public Comments

Bahle announced the phone number for public comments.

No comments.

O'Neill asked for suggestions to help him realize his plan for foreclosure prevention. Bahle felt an existing non-profit would be the way to go and work with them to help solicit funds and develop the plan under their umbrella. Lentych did not feel this body was the forum to make this happen. He suggested O'Neill try to find or forge that partnership somehow.

Staff Comments

Galla announced the planning secretary is moving to another position.

Member Comments/Chair Comments

Clements complimented Bahle on running the meeting.

O'Neill thanked Galla and her staff for doing a great job.

Adjournment

Motion by Wessell, seconded by Foster to adjourn meeting. Meeting adjourned at 4:35 pm.