

Morrisville/Morristown Housing Committee

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Meeting Minutes of Thursday 12 December 2024

Committee Members present: Judy Bickford, Bob Bortree, Josh Goldstein

Committee Members absent: Yvette Mason, Donna Sherlaw

Guests present: Town Manager Brent Raymond, Grace & Seth Costa

Staff: Planning/Zoning Director Todd Thomas, A/V Operator Ally Olsen

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order in the Community Meeting Room of the Town Offices, 43 Portland Street in Morrisville, at approximately 5:05 P.M.

Vote: Approve prior meeting minutes – Member Bickford moved to approve the November 14th meeting minutes. A vote of 3-0 affirmed the motion.

Discuss: Audio / Visual for meetings – After a brief discussion, the Housing Committee decided to try having full hybrid meetings. Member Bortree said that if the online interaction becomes problematic, the Board could always revert to the current livestream format.

Discuss: Meet with local builders of smaller and more affordable homes – Grace & Seth Costa appeared before the Housing Committee as requested to speak about the biggest challenges they face as developers of smaller and more affordable housing within our community. They said while they enjoy working with the Zoning Administrator, the zoning in Morrisville is their biggest obstacle to creating small, affordable, owned housing. They said that they would like the Zoning Administrator to be given more discretion/authority as the carrying cost of waiting for DRB hearings and appeal periods to expire only further exacerbates the cost of the housing they can build. They added that Morrisville's 2 acre minimum lot size in rural areas seems large and unnecessary, as they are used to 1 house per acre in the surrounding rural communities without zoning that they sometimes work in (Johnson, Waterville, etc.). Speaking of their recent Home Acre Street subdivision, they said that the infrastructure cost of the subdivision process was very expensive (\$200,000 invested in just underground improvements for the 4 lots). Ms. Costa clarified that the \$200,000 spent on infrastructure did not include the sewer hook-up cost of \$4,000 per house. Mr. Costa added that their cost of materials for the single-family homes they build approaches \$175 per square foot before they even pay themselves. They said that their most avoidable expense with their subdivision was the current zoning prohibition on architectural repetition, which creates tens of thousands of dollars in extra cost for both architectural services and construction. Member Goldstein successfully clarified with Planning/Zoning Director Thomas that changes could still be made to the architectural repetition requirements at the Planning Council's zoning change public hearing on January 14th because Section 206 was warned. Mr. Thomas said that this was correct,

but any contemplated changes to reduce the engineering and construction costs driven by subdivision road design rules (such as increasing the trigger for “road” construction requirements from 3 to 5 houses) would have to wait until a future warned change of the Zoning Bylaws.

Discuss: Result of affordable housing letters sent to each Legislative Body – Mr. Thomas shared that the Village Trustees voted to take no action regarding the Housing Committee’s letter asking to share infrastructure costs for developments that were 20% or more affordable. Member Bortree expressed disappointment in this result but expressed some optimism that the Selectboard seemed inclined to grant some tax stabilization to encourage affordable housing, even if that Board asked for more information before doing so.

Discuss: Draft affordable housing letter for Planning Council – The Council decided that due to the Costa Family’s testimony, that additional edits must be made to the draft letter to the Planning Council, especially to advocate for changes to the existing architectural repetition rule. It was decided to hold an additional Housing Committee meeting on December 19th to review the agreed upon revisions before the letter was signed and sent to the Planning Council.

Discuss: Mutual Assistance discussion with Stowe Housing Committee – The Committee decided to discuss what topics should be broached with the Stowe Housing Committee at the next scheduled Housing Committee meeting on December 19th.

*The Housing Committee will meet next at 5pm on Thursday December 19th.

The meeting adjourned at 6:15 PM, submitted by Todd Thomas, Planning/Zoning Director