



BRISTOL PLANNING BOARD MAY 9, 2024 MINUTES

TOWN HALL
10 COURT ST.
BRISTOL, RI 02809
401-253-7000

Held: May 9, 2024 in person

Present:

Charles Millard, Chairman; Anthony Murgo, Vice Chairman; Steve Katz, Secretary; Member Brian Clark (arrived at 8:22pm); Member Richard Ruggiero; Alternate Member Michael Sousa; Alternate Member Jessalyn Jarest

Also Present:

Diane Williamson, Administrative Officer/Director of Community Development; Edward Tanner, Zoning Enforcement and Principal Planner; Andrew M Teitz Esq., Assistant Town Solicitor

Not Present:

Chairman Millard called the meeting to order at 7:02pm and led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

A motion was made (Murgo/Katz) to accept the April meeting minutes.

In favor: Katz, Millard, Murgo, Ruggiero, Sousa

Opposed: None

Director Williamson mentioned that there will be a public meeting on May 22nd at 7pm at Town Hall.

Director Williamson also mentioned a meeting with Secretary Prior. The State is undertaking a Housing Plan update, and inquired about Town issues. The issues that were mentioned at the meeting were off campus housing and short term rentals. Member Sousa expressed concerns with the approach proposed for RWU. There was a lot of discussion about having different tax rates on second homes. Assistant Town Solicitor Teitz mentioned that the State is using Newport as a pilot program, but then brought the discussion back to the topics at hand. Director Williamson will keep the Board updated on what the Town Council is proposing.

C1. Update to Housing Chapter of Bristol's Comprehensive Plan - Presentation, Review, and Discussion to continue the update with Jeff Davis from Horsley Witten Group & Robert O'Brien from Camoin consulting firm. Update will include strategies to achieve the goal of 10% Low-Moderate Income Housing. Also for discussion is program for affordable housing trust fund.

Jeff Davis from Horsley Witten Group presented. Jeff explained that the recommendation is to make a universal edit to the distributed Memorandum to replace "affordable housing" with "LMI housing". He explained that LMI housing units count towards the Town's goals; affordable housing units are homes that are affordable to the occupant.

Jeff then gave a high level overview of the Analysis of Existing Actions and Other Potential Actions. Actions that had comments from the Board noted below:

Analysis of Existing Actions:

- H-2: Adopt a public advertising campaign to educate residents on the need for the creation of affordable housing units.
 - Chairman Millard asked how this would be done. Jeff Davis responded that the recommendation would be to provide a standard set of talking points for developments.
 - Member Sousa asked if these bullets would be included in the Comprehensive Plan. Jeff responded that the principles can be built in, but the talking points would be graphic punchlines for marketing purposes.
 - There was a discussion about the price of rental units in Bristol. Member Sousa suggested charging RWU a fee for every student they can't house, and to use that in a LMI fund. Chairman Millard disagreed with this suggestion. A debate followed.
- H-4: Work with RWU to encourage more on-campus student housing. As off-campus housing becomes surplus, the Town should consider creating opportunities for affordable housing. The Town and RWU should create an agreement offering the Town the right of first refusal for these units (Almeida Apartments).
 - Chairman Millard mentioned that in almost all universities, it's assumed that students live on campus the first 2 years, and off campus the second 2 years. Jeff Davis responded that it depends if the university is in a city where there are other housing options or not.
- H-5: Re-institute the Affordable Housing Committee to help identify affordable housing opportunities, advocate for / educate about affordable housing needs, and explore more creative ways to achieve affordable housing goals. Include representatives from the local housing organizations on the Committee.
 - Vice Chairman Murgo asked if this would go through the Town Council. Director Williamson confirmed that the Town Council would make the appointments.
 - Member Sousa agreed that the committee should be reinstated to help take action and get more funding.
 - There was a discussion about the history of the 'fee in lieu' calculation.
- H-7: Develop a program with the Bristol Housing Authority to recruit more landlords to participate in the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program. There are currently more recipients than apartments available.
 - Chairman Millard asked if the commitment is still 30 years. Jeff Davis responded that there is no time limit.
 - Chairman Millard asked why we would want to invite more Section 8 housing. Jeff responded that it's a voucher program, and that the landlords can actually make more money than on the open market. Director Williamson added that it's a subsidy, and the government is paying the difference.
 - Member Ruggiero asked if there is a cap on what you can charge. Jeff responded that yes, there is a cap based on the region. Director Williamson stated she would find out what the cap is for Bristol.
 - Member Ruggiero added that there is a negative opinion about Section 8, and wondered how to get rid of that opinion. Jeff Davis suggested having landlords who have had good experiences talk to try to change the negative opinion.
- H-12: Consider the best use or reuse of town-owned property to include housing and/or a portion from the sale to be applied to a housing trust or first-time homebuyer program.

The exception to this would be the former school buildings on the Town Common which cannot be used for housing and cannot be sold.

- Chairman Millard asked what town owned land is available other than Guiteras school. Director Williamson listed some others, including 10 Court Street. Jeff Davis added that there may not be imminent opportunities but it is a best practice to include.
- H-26: Work with service providers to create affordable child care, based on income, to help people return to the workforce.
 - The Board discussed how expensive child care has become, and that the Town is about to lose St. Michael's child care center.

Other Potential Actions:

- Expanding Opportunities for Senior and Accessible Housing
 - Chairman Millard asked Director Williamson if she had any ideas for where more senior housing could go. She responded that Unity Park was on the map, but Britto has tried to work with another industrial firm. She will reach out to him to confirm.
 - Jeff Davis also brought up wheelchair accessibility.
 - Director Williamson also mentioned Colombian Fathers as a potential future opportunity. Chairman Millard disagreed that this is a possibility for senior housing.
- Expand Resources to Rehabilitate and Deed Restrict Existing Housing
 - Chairman Millard mentioned that taxes are what the Town runs on, and disagreed with tax abatements in exchange for deed restrictions. This is also why he disagreed with the Colombian Fathers becoming senior housing.
 - Director Williamson mentioned that the population needs to remain diverse in order to keep things like the volunteer fire department. Seniors need somewhere to move to in order to free up their homes for families.
 - Chairman Millard stated that couples without children do not put a drain on the Town like couples with children. The Town cannot support all these houses with children in the school system that are a negative drain on the taxpayers. Member Jarest disagreed with this, and mentioned that she has children in the school system, and spends a lot of money in town.
 - Member Kats asked about the land across from Rockwell school - Old Orchard Farm. Director Williamson responded that the Town bought the development rights for this land and it's now preserved and will never be developed.
 - Chairman Millard mentioned that there is a dichotomy where the Town doesn't want to develop land, but also wants to find land to develop senior housing.

Member Clark arrived at 8:22pm.

- Member Sousa suggested approaching the Town Council when any current tax exempt property is sold, and taking a percentage of the new tax as income to fund the LMI fund. Chairman Millard disagreed with this as if the income goes into the general fund, it keeps taxes low for taxpayers. A debate followed. Member Sousa acknowledged that this is not an easy problem to solve, but it will never be solved if we keep doing the same thing.
- Chairman Millard stated that Bristol has become such a desirable community, that some people who work in Bristol will not be able to afford to live in Bristol.
- Jeff Davis paused the conversation since this problem will not be solved today.

Member Clark inquired about updated homeless stats. Director Williamson and Jeff Davis responded that they tried, but were not successful. Member Clark still disagrees with the statistics that were provided.

Vice Chairman Murgo asked if there's any way to have a set number of LMI units in Town instead of the 10% target. The way the Town is getting developed, he doesn't feel like the 10% will ever be hit. Assistant Town Solicitor Teitz and Jeff Davis explained that because new developments have a target higher than 10%, the Town will eventually get to 10%, but slowly.

Chairman Millard asked if Bristol doesn't get to 10%, what happens. Director Williamson responded that if a community reaches 10%, it does not have to get the comprehensive permit applications. Assistant Town Solicitor Teitz added that making progress toward the 10% also counts, and that the State could also reduce funds going to Bristol if the 10% is not met. Chairman Millard and Member Clark disagreed with this approach and stated that the 10% will never be met.

Director Williamson stated that we need to show the State that Bristol is trying. Assistant Town Solicitor Teitz suggested focusing on the need for housing instead of the 10% target. He added that the Board should focus on what can be done, while also keeping the State requirements in mind. There is funding coming in, so the focus should be to determine what it can be used for.

Member Clark stated that the target is not realistic and it is being forced on us. He suggested pushing back on the State.

Member Sousa brought up the benefits of an LMI non-profit committee and LMI fund. Chairman Millard asked where the LMI housing would go.

The Board got up and looked at the map of Potential Affordable Housing Locations. They reviewed the list of potential options and discussed feasibility. There was a lot of debate and discussion. Member Clark mentioned that market volatility is not being considered. The LMI Committee was discussed again.

Director Williamson asked how important the list is. Jeff Davis responded that it is as important as the Board decides it is, and that a list can be created / kept but not published.

Member Sousa reiterated that the Board should approach Britto, RWU, etc to understand their plans. Even if they say no, the Board can get in line.

Jeff Davis will review the memo, and send notes and ideas to Director Williamson.

D1. Correspondence from Director Williamson inviting the Board to the June 4, 2024 workshop on the Route 114 Resilience Plan

Director Williamson mentioned that the June 4th workshop is with Barringtona and Warren, and is to discuss coastal flooding.

D2. Correspondence from Nick Toth inviting the Board to the presentation on the Bristol Waterfront Historic District Re-survey report on July 10, 2024

A motion was made (Murgo) to adjourn the meeting.

In favor: Katz, Millard, Murgo, Ruggiero, Sousa

Opposed: None

Meeting adjourned at 9:04pm

Respectfully submitted by Doran Smith, Recording Secretary

Date Approved: 13 June 2024 Planning Board: 