

Small Town Housing Working Group, December 18, 2019 Meeting

In Attendance: Peggy Sloan (FRCOG), Mike Shaffer (Erving), Gina Govoni (HRA / RDI), Mary McClintock (Conway/Community Action), John Gould (Buckland), Jon Gould (Sen. Hinds), Alyssa Larose (FRCOG)

Housing News, Announcements, and Community Updates:

A. Larose reported that the North Quabbin Community Coalition (NQCC) is forming a Housing Task Force and is looking for participants. The first meeting is scheduled for January 29, 2020 from 10:00 am – 12:00 pm at the NQCC offices, 251 Exchange Street, Athol. Please rsvp to sarah@nqcc.org.

The Pioneer Valley Regional Housing Committee is holding its next meeting on February 19, 2020 from 9:00 – 10:30 am at the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) offices, 60 Congress St., Springfield. Contact Lori Tanner at ltanner@PVPC.ORG for more information.

The Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP) is holding a planning meeting in early January to discuss the rural housing conference, which is now scheduled to be held during the first week of April, 2020. FRCOG has reiterated to MHP the need for the conference to focus on economically distressed rural areas in the State. It was also noted that Greenfield Community College is being considered as a possible location for the event.

FRCOG received a grant from the MA Department of Energy Resources to build capacity in the region to assist low-income homeowners, renters, and landlords with accessing incentives and programs to adopt renewable energy technologies and complete energy efficiency improvements in their homes. FRCOG will be setting up a meeting in January with project partners, who include the Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Community Action, Lifepath, senior centers, and municipal staff in Greenfield, Montague, and Orange, to review the scope of work and determine how the grant can best benefit the partner organizations.

M. Shaffer reported that he attended the recent age-friendly community planning workshop, which highlighted the major need for senior housing in the region. The idea of inter-generational housing was discussed as well, which could be a good idea (as opposed to age-restricted housing).

G. Govoni updated the group on the progress of Rural Development Inc.'s (RDI) senior housing project at 120 North Main Street, Sunderland. The one-stop pre-application for construction funding was approved by the State, which is very promising. RDI will now submit a full application in February. A waitlist is not open for the project yet.

G. Govoni reported on RAFT (Residential Assistance for Families in Transition) program legislation for an upstream homelessness prevention program that helps a slightly different population than traditional RAFT, including families without children. The recently approved State supplemental budget provides up to four months of back rent or mortgage payments to help eligible households from losing their housing. Under the current Upstream RAFT pilot administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), eligible households can access up to \$4,000 to assist with back rent and back

mortgage payments. However, \$4000 has not been enough for most people. These changes could be very good thing.

J. Gould reported that long term versus short term rentals can come up when talking about housing. The news recently reported that Airbnb bought “urban doors” which is a one or two month rental model. It will be interesting to see how this impacts rental housing markets.

Review and Discussion of DRAFT Regional Housing Coordinator Services:

A. Larose handed out a printout of the draft scope of work for regional housing coordinator services. The idea for a regional housing coordinator has been discussed for several years. Recently a number of towns have completed housing plans or needs assessments, but have struggled to move forward with implementing affordable housing initiatives. A survey of towns completed a few years ago showed interest in a housing coordinator position, but towns were not ready to commit funding for the position. The focus now is to refine the scope of services and then seek grant funding to create a position at the Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA), hopefully for a period of 2 or 3 years. After that, the position could potentially transition to one that is partly or wholly funded by municipalities.

The group reviewed the draft scope of services and made edits (see attached revised draft). Two items were removed that were determined to be needs, but that are outside of the scope of what a housing coordinator would do:

- Directly assisting residents with accessing housing and filling out applications; and
- Serving as a marketing and lottery agent for locally-funded affordable housing projects

Schedule Next Meeting:

A. Larose will send a doodle poll out to the full contact list in January to schedule the next meeting for a date in February.