

Hanscom Area Towns Committee
DRAFT meeting minutes
January 23, 2020

Attending: HATS Selectmen/Select Board members Jonathan Dwyer, Lincoln, chair; Suzie Barry, Lexington; Linda Escobedo, Concord; Mike Rosenberg, Bedford. Other HATS members: Margaret Coppe, Lexington, Mark Siegenthaler, Bedford Planning Board. Also attending: Jane Blumberg, Concord Housing Foundation; BJ Dunn, superintendent, Minute Man National Historical Park; Anthony Gallagher, Massachusetts Port Authority community relations; Lincoln Selectman Jennifer Glass; Nancy Nelson, Concord; Charles Phillips, Concord Housing Foundation; Elizabeth Rust, Regional Housing Service Office.

Mr. Gallagher said the Massport Community Advisory Council recently held its general meeting. The council is expected to soon begin concentrating on issues concerning drones. Mr. Gallagher noted that Concord, Lexington and Lincoln have open seats on the council.

Ms. Rust noted that the Regional Housing Services Office (RHSO) actually originated at a meeting of HATS town managers, who conceived of the regional collaborative in 2011. It wouldn't have been practical for all of the towns to hire their own affordable housing coordinators. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council helped draft an intermunicipal agreement. There were no other models, she said. Currently there are eight towns in the RHSO; the agreement allows for nine. (It was noted that Maynard is thinking of joining.) Members pay an annual fee. The office is located in Concord.

RHSO responsibilities, Ms. Rust reported, include inventory management, monitoring, program development and administration, assessment valuation, and support of local efforts, including project studies, analyses and reviews. The RHSO also runs some small government programs on behalf of the towns. Each member community has individual affordable housing projects and priorities, Ms. Rust said, and her agency serves as technical advisor.

She also discussed various municipal housing strategies in the area of private development. Accessory dwelling units can be built by right or through special permit. Bedford town meeting will address detached units for the second time. Concord also will consider a similar proposal this year. Lexington will consider amending its 2016 bylaw. In support of Concord's proposal, the RHSO mailed some 200 surveys to current residents of accessory units. About 50 were returned, showing 64 percent occupied by residents unrelated to persons in the main dwelling on the site; 65 percent are not charged rent. Ms. Rust said she hopes to obtain data from other towns.

RHSO is also working with Lincoln and Concord on long-range plans to try to ensure continuing compliance with the state threshold of 10 percent affordable housing a decade from now, Ms. Rust said. The office also works on preserving affordability, focusing on funding buybacks when deed restrictions expire. She noted that Bedford and Lexington have committed local funds to preserve affordable rental developments. The RHSO also helps promote rental development through local funding and zoning, Ms. Rust said, citing successful efforts in Lexington, Concord and Lincoln.

RHSO support for home ownership includes Riverhill Crossing, which Ms. Rust called a significant effort to move government-owned land in _____. She also cited the charrette visioning effort that led ultimately to private development of former military housing in Bedford into 29 units, four of them affordable. She said the Concord Housing Development Association and others are working with Habitat for Humanity on a duplex. Lexington and Lincoln are considering including moderate-income housing in zoning; the RHSO is developing guidelines.

Ms. Rust said Lincoln has launched a voucher program with Community Preservation funds, modeled after Buxboro's, to help achieve a deeper level of affordability in housing inventory. Selectman Dwyer said research

shows that more residents would be eligible than first thought. Ms. Rust noted that Bedford uses federal HOME funds to provide first-month rent and security deposit to eligible applicants.

Ms. Rust also reported that Concord is trying to establish an affordable housing trust and other funding sources at its upcoming town meeting. Select Board member Barry said one possible model is payment into a stabilization fund from expansion of a senior housing development that didn't include affordable units. Select Board member Escobedo said Concord Town Meeting in 2019 allocated \$500,000 for affordable housing; approved a home-rule petition to the Legislature for a building permit surcharge in support of affordable housing efforts; and accepted the state enabling law to establish a municipal housing trust. Concord will ask for an additional allocation of \$500,000 for affordable housing at its April town meeting. This year's town meeting will vote on a home-rule petition to establish a property transfer fee surcharge. Cities and towns need more tools to spark affordable housing, she said.

Asked by Selectman Dwyer about interfacing with residents of affordable units, Ms. Rust said the RHSO writes to owners every year with information. The RHSO fields calls from renters but is not able to mediate particular situations. The RHSO maintains connection with property managers. The website provides links for housing opportunities and lottery schedule for available units.

In answer to a question from Selectman Dwyer about evictions, Ms. Rust noted that, driven by the strong economy, eligible income levels and rents continue to rise. This year's overall rent increase was 12 percent. This is a problem especially for the 25 percent of affordable unit tenants who are on Section 8 vouchers, as they aren't aligned with changes in affordable rent criteria. This discrepancy can generate evictions, which are becoming more prevalent, she said.

In answer to Select Board member Escobedo's question, Ms. Rust said the state Department of Housing and Community Development looks more favorably on proposals with significant local contributions. She added that the state's priority is housing for homeless families, not for elderly persons. Mr. Phillips asked how Bedford was able to achieve more than 18 percent in affordable units. Selectman Rosenberg acknowledged that the percentage was augmented by dozens of apartments for veterans at the VA Medical Center.

Municipal highlights

Selectman Rosenberg reported that one theme of the upcoming annual town meeting will be the Fire Department. Town meeting will vote on a budget increase for an additional four firefighters. Another article proposes a bonded appropriation for acquisition of a site for a new fire station. Select Board member Barry noted that a 2019 town meeting vote to adopt the name Lexington Select Board has been approved by the state Legislature. The new Hastings School is scheduled to be occupied in February and construction of both the visitors center and fire station are on schedule. All races on the March local ballot are uncontested. Town meeting will address 50 articles, including 15 citizens' petitions. Lexington has formed a committee to prepare for the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution; the Battle Road towns also have launched a coordinating committee. Also, the center streetscape project has been approved. Ms. Coppe said its execution is expected to take two years.

Select Board member Escobedo said there are more than 50 articles on the Concord town meeting warrant, including nine citizens' petitions. Concord recently completed its first assessment of municipal facilities. It concluded that there is little to no room for expansion in existing buildings. Selectman Dwyer said Lincoln town meeting will consider purchasing a new fire engine. The town is developing a cyclist and pedestrian plan, with support from the MAPC, including links to surrounding networks. Temporary classrooms have been connected in preparation for the school project. There will be no local fireworks this summer. Henry Hayes, former command chief for the 66th Air Base Group at Hanscom Air Force Base, has been named Sudbury town manager.

Minutes of the meeting of Nov. 21, 2019 were approved, 3-0-1. The meeting was adjourned at 8:23 p.m.