

Regular Meeting of the Woodbridge Housing Committee
February 5, 2025
7PM, Central Meeting Room, Town Hall 11 Meetinghouse Lane

Attending: Mary Dean, Chris Dickerson, Jim Graham, Kathy Hunter, Donavon Lofters (liaison from the Board of Finance), Warner Marshall, Lew Shaffer.

Guests: Mica Cardozo, First Selectman; Justin LaFontaine, Town Planner

A quorum is present

Meeting called to order at 7:06 p.m. by Kathy Hunter, Chair

1. Public Comment The following individuals addressed the committee during public comment. The Chair and others did advise the audience that this committee was not involved in the proposed development on Fountain Street; however, several people still provided comment on that matter.
 - Amey Marella, 184 Rimmon Rd.: Requests that the committee do a “course correction”. The Housing Plan had no substantive input by the public and was flawed. Refers to residents’ priorities as reflected in summer 2024 community survey, which the consultant SLR says were robust and reliable. (full copy of comments attached)
 - Cathy Wick, 181 Rimmon Rd.: Comments that what are considered errors of fact in the ADP were quoted in the Fountain Street project’s statement of use, justifying fear that errors in the document would be perpetuated in other town policies. (comments attached)
 - Dr. Phillip Arnold, 131 Beecher Rd.: Supports previous speakers and their remarks.
 - Julie Mason-815 Fountain St. and Westgate Town Homes: Comments on the predictable increase in traffic onto Fountain Street from the proposed development.
 - Stephen Mason, 815 Fountain St.: Concurs with previous remarks. Other comments were related to the Fountain St. application.
 - Michael Broderick, 5 Old Still Rd.: Expresses the belief that the Housing Committee is putting an undue tax burden on the residents. Understood that commissions should represent the town-- what townspeople, not outside forces, want-- and believes that the number of affordable housing units recommended would be deleterious. The state’s suggestions are just suggestions.
 - Donald Celotto, 3 Knollwood Rd.: Accuses the committee of failure to address refutable facts. Blames this on poor leadership and recommends the chair step down.
 - Sally Connolly, 249 Newton: Expresses her gratitude to the housing committee for its work to provide Woodbridge with more affordable housing.
 - Jonathon Jacko-Jones, 38 Deer Run Rd.: Speaks to potential environmental impact of the project on Fountain St. and impact on the school.
 - Marissa Jacko-Jones, 38 Deer Run Rd.: Believes that the Fountain Street project is inextricably linked to the Affordable Housing Plan so offers comments on it with her concerns. (comments attached)
 - David Cantor, 86 Forest Glen Drive: Thanks the committee for its efforts. Recommends that given the wide range of opinions on the subject of affordable housing we should slow the process and work towards more consensus based on facts.
 - Robert Adams, 25 Pumpkin Patch Road: Would prefer that we not lose our rural character and become built up.
 - Nancy Silverstein, 29 Fairgrounds Rd.: With regard to the proposed project on Fountain St., does not believe that it reflects the views of the people of the town and opposes such changes.

- Ted Kosiol, 2 Shephard Rd.: Advocates that town representatives represent the residents' wishes.
- Leslie Lyons, 941 Greenway Rd.: Expresses concern with what might be the effects of dismantling DEI—will that affect any of the decisions being made about housing?

After all who wished to speak had done so, Public Comment was closed on a motion by Kathy, seconded by Lew.

Mica asked to inform the audience that a community conversation about housing has been tentatively scheduled for February 27, probably in the town gym. Its purpose will be to provide information and it will be possible then to answer questions from the public.

2. Housing Chair Report

- a) The chair acknowledges the flyer received by Woodbridge residents; its many misstatements highlight the need to refocus our charge for educating residents on housing. While acknowledging that there are different opinions, we should be engaging in a respectful, fact-based discussion. Other housing committee members also offered comments about the flyer: Lewis expressed regret that the committee chair had been targeted for criticism and he emphasized her sincerity and knowledge. Mary agreed that more opportunities are clearly needed for the public to ask questions and get information from individuals who are well informed. Jim agrees, and adds that in any event people are going to have different opinions; we should expect that, but one thing that we can agree on is that what we choose ourselves is better than what may be imposed on us if we do nothing. Chris advocates for ensuring that all the facts in the housing plan are accurate so that we aren't open to criticism on that account.

Kathy provided corrections and explanations for some of the misstatements including how the major zoning amendment was made in 2021 as a result of the Open Communities Alliance application to the TPZ; under it there were no proposals for new construction. The recent amendment only changed the bulk requirements of the regulation in order to improve economic feasibility.

- b) POCD Update: The consultant, SLR, was appreciative of all the recommendations provided and felt that they were good action items to be considered. Justin added that the next step will be to refer things to the TPZ for tweaks and then it will go to the public hearing process.
- c) TAC Update: note that CCW now means Community Collaboration Woodbridge. Open House meeting on January 29 was a good session that showed the process and took comments from the public. Kathy noted considerable support for affordable housing. Mica adds that there was a good sharing of ideas and opinions. The CCW site walk was cancelled again; to be rescheduled.

In addition, Kathy has noted comments branding the Housing Committee as an "advocacy" committee, but she would like to state for the record that it is, rather, a planning committee whose purpose is to educate about housing and identify ways to promote it.

Mica thanks the committee for its work and wants to ensure everyone knows that it was his decision to wait to amend the Affordable Housing Plan until the POCD comes out, to update both documents at the same time. Hence failure to make all data corrections to the AHP now should not be blamed on the committee.

- 3. Approval of Minutes of January 8, 2025 Chris moved approval of the minutes, seconded by Jim. Mary noted that Lew has brought to her attention the need to correct a typo in Kathy's name, and that amendment will be made. Passed unanimously.

4. Mid-point update of Affordable Housing Plan. The chair notes that this is a good time for an update, not only because it is at the halfway point in its life and we can add more current information from the POCD, but also because there has been some legislative activity that may be of interest. For future discussion, she has sent by email a 2023 bipartisan report on the state's Affordable Housing Plans from the Commission on CT's Future and Development.

Three things are present in a legislative proposal that reflect this report and she recommends they be adopted by our committee to be more action oriented in the way we want to create housing in Woodbridge: 1) determine what are our benchmarks (may want to identify what we want to do over the next 5 or 10 years as well as 20 years) 2) suggest where we could potentially build housing and how many units 3) identify what zoning would need to be amended in order to do that. Looks to Justin to lend his expertise in this matter.

Homework assignment was to go through the Affordable Housing Plan for suggestions about what we need to update.

Chris recommends that there are a lot of quotations without citations and that should be corrected. Mary was reminded of all the work done when it was in draft, correcting a document written by others (the consultant for the regional COG) to take out things that were of questionable accuracy or applicability to Woodbridge—we may already have asked about some of the things Chris identifies—but we made sure the things that were critical to our goals were well founded and explained. She thinks that the things to check and update as quickly as possible are the things that relate directly to Woodbridge; the goals, the map and list where it would be conceivable to build housing. Thinks the critical work for the committee actually lies outside of the Plan in providing more information on, for example, ADUs. Or perhaps those more detailed educational materials should be brought into the Plan as they are in some other towns' documents.

Discussion followed about the timing and process for updating the document itself. Mica suggested that some time be set aside at each meeting to note needed changes. Kathy suggested that some outside professional help be employed to assist with making the updates and incorporating the details. Other discussion considered removing some of the material entirely, and it was agreed that we should identify things we think can be removed.

Justin: these plans were required by the legislature just before Covid hit and they were due in 2022; each town could receive a modest amount of money for the job; these explain a lot of the weaknesses. This is a good time to look at it again. Not only is the POCD providing updated data, but on Feb 27 Don Poland will be giving the presentation on housing, and that will also provide updated data.

Chris suggests that we pick three other affordable housing plans and all review those. Justin suggests three by different consultants: Woodbury, Bloomfield, and Bozrah. Won't be perfect for Woodbridge, but will contribute ideas. The legislative report also identifies some superior plans. (And some inferior ones.)

5. Educational opportunities for the Community

First presentation will be the meeting on February 27, which is not specific to a site proposal but is intended to be general information and an opportunity for residents to ask questions. Other

possibilities include one just on planning and zoning or on the new zoning enabling act; with outside speakers.

Justin suggests that the meeting on the 27th may be an opportunity to take a poll about what people are interested to learn more about.

Mary suggests our educational sessions include a regional perspective; Kathy mentions the SCRCOG regional housing group as a resource. Mary also advocates that we begin with a presentation on the relationship between affordable housing and conservation. Kathy suggests Jocelyn Ayers, whose presentation from the Partnership for Strong Communities' 2024 Housing Conference is available on You Tube. Kathy will ask Alison to put the video up on our web site and will recommend it to the Conservation Commission.

New business: Donavon thanks Kathy, acknowledging the value of her efforts and of her experience with housing. The committee needs to support her and work together with full understanding of what we're trying to accomplish as a committee.

Meeting adjourned at 9:08 p.m. on a motion by Lew, seconded by Kathy.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Dean
Secretary pro tem

Housing Committee

Amey Marrella

February 5, 2025

I come before you once again to urge a course correction.

The 2022 Housing Plan lacked substantive input from residents when it was released in the Spring of that year, and contains substantive misstatements of fact and law as critiqued in detail by me and others in previous appearances before your committee and the Board of Selectmen.

Stuck so far with a flawed Housing Plan (which the minimal edits proposed last month would not correct) many of us hoped that our town would do a better job looking at housing in the process of crafting the new POCD .

Last summer, as part of the POCD ^{review} process, the town invested in a robust town-wide survey revealing – in general terms – residents' priorities for our town's future. As summarized by POCD consultant SLR, the summer 2024 Community Survey Results show:

Respondents generally feel that there is an appropriate mix of housing types in the community, but would like to see more small single-family homes, condominiums, and mixed-use options. Participants also note a need for more affordable housing: nearly 60 percent stated that Woodbridge's housing stock is not accessible and affordable to people of different ages and lifestyles and would like to see more affordable single-family structure options in the community.

Another portion of the survey report makes clear that our schools and economic development are the residents' top priorities for the next 10 years – in contrast, out of 11 possibilities "affordable housing" ranks 8th and "housing stock" ranks 10th.

Notably, SLR has stated that its Community Survey Results for the POCD update are robust and reliable.

So what does this survey tell us? It tells us that residents support more affordable housing and have specific ideas about what type of housing they favor – notably NOT large apartment buildings. It shows that in general more housing stock is NOT a priority, but that residents are amenable specifically to more affordable housing with a focus on single-family structures,

Sadly, the Housing Committee's advocacy is completely out of touch with what residents want, and has failed to make any effort to achieve the type of affordable housing that residents do want. Instead, this committee continues to rely on an outdated, deeply flawed plan and personal preferences. Please start listening to your fellow residents.

To: Housing Committee

From: Cathy Wick

Date: February 5, 2025

Facts matter. Getting basic verifiable facts right lends credibility to any argument. The reverse, of course, is also true: if basic verifiable facts in an argument are wrong the argument lacks credibility. If the factual assumptions that underlie any argument are proven to be false, the argument collapses.

Amey Marrella and I presented a 5-page critique of the Affordable Housing Plan in September 2023 outlining myriad factual errors in the plan that still, nearly 18 months later, have not been corrected, even though the Selectmen directly requested corrections last June and again a month ago.

I'm going to mention the simplest most obvious error in the Plan and then talk about why this committee's stubborn refusal to correct its errors is so dangerous and has contributed to the 4 story, 96-unit horror proposed for 804 Fountain Street.

Let's start with a quiz.

True or False: The population of Woodbridge has been *increasing* over the past decade. Answer: TRUE

True or False: The Affordable Housing Plan says, incorrectly, that the population of Woodbridge has been *decreasing* over the past decade. Answer: TRUE

There is no excuse for getting such a simple fact wrong. You can get the correct information in about 30 seconds on the US Census Bureau website. Unfortunately, the Affordable Housing Plan, instead of using reliable sources, repeatedly mis-uses something called the American Community Survey, which is not meant to provide data on individual communities, and therefore is frequently inaccurate, such as in its incorrect assertion that Woodbridge is declining in population.

Let's get back to our quiz.

True or False: Accuracy in basic facts is important in official town documents. Answer: TRUE

True or False: The chair of the Housing Committee believes that accuracy in basic facts is important in official town documents. Answer: FALSE

At the January 8th meeting of this committee Ms. Hunter complained bitterly that the Selectmen had asked her to correct her errors and said that getting basic facts about the town wrong in the Affordable Housing Plan is "immaterial."

I'm going to explain why this sloppy approach to facts has been so damaging.

The application to build a 96 unit, 4 story apartment building on Fountain Street includes what is called a "Statement of Use." This statement is the justification for the project, the reasons why the applicant believes that the application should be approved.

The Fountain Street developer's statement of use quotes directly from the Affordable Housing Plan, stating that the Plan "makes key findings related to the need for affordable housing in Woodbridge."

These so-called "key findings" include:

- "Over the past decade, Woodbridge has seen slight population decreases and is projected to continue to experience population decreases over the next two decades." (p. 12)

As we just established, this statement is FALSE.

- "In Woodbridge approximately 66% of renters and 27% of homeowners are considered cost burdened." [meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing] (p.10)

This assertion is based on the American Community Survey, which refers to large national trends; there is no way to know whether it is in fact true or false without a very different kind of study.

- "Keeping current residents in town while attracting new residents would seem a priority in terms of maintaining the vitality of the community as well as ameliorating the potential increased proportional tax burden associated with a declining population." (p.6)

This statement is N/A, not applicable to Woodbridge, since we do not in fact have a declining population.

- "Appropriate development of higher density housing with affordable set asides has been proven to provide economic development. While concerns have been expressed that the need for more and diverse housing in Woodbridge will result in higher education costs, many studies and empirical evidence show that the ratio of school children to units in higher density housing is much lower than in 4- or 5-bedroom single-family structures, and that the net taxes more than pay for the services needed." (p. 6)

This statement is unsupported by any data citation, and besides, is irrelevant to Woodbridge because on this measure Woodbridge is not average, Woodbridge is a unicorn. Woodbridge has a unique location (commutable to NYC with post-covid work patterns), school quality as good or better than Fairfield County, and relatively low home prices that makes the demographic of people moving into town quite different from other towns. In migration here in Woodbridge is almost exclusively made up of young families with school children.

Statewide, school enrollment is at a 10-year low, falling by 8% in the past decade. In Woodbridge, enrollment is up 15%. You can read more about enrollment projections in a report commissioned by the Beecher Board of Education.

When Amey and I presented our listing of the many errors in the Housing Plan, we did so because we were concerned that those errors, if not corrected promptly, would be perpetuated in other town policies. Unfortunately, we were right.

2/5/2025

Dear Woodbridge Housing Committee:

I am writing in response to the proposed development of 804 Fountain Street. I am expressing my vehement opposition to this proposal, and I am citing the following concerns as they pertain to quality of life, environmental impact, and the education system. My husband and I moved to this bucolic town for the open space, esteemed educational system, and for the health and welfare of our growing family. Open space is an essential component of a healthy ecosystem, and supports biodiversity. As avid birders and nature lovers, we are gravely concerned about preserving the sanctity of the natural environment, especially given the rapidly worsening climate change we are all experiencing. Along with the aforementioned environmental problems, there is concern about air quality due to increased traffic, unsightly visualization of a flat roof with equipment atop it, noise and light pollution, as well as intrusion and pollution of the adjacent bodies of water. I implore you to consider how you would feel if such a proposal was brought for approval in your neighborhood.

As far as the impact on the education system, I would like you to consider where up to 96 children will be placed in an education system already beyond its capacity. The repairs of the leaking roof of Beecher Road School were delayed until Summer of 2024. I will also impart my personal experience at the beginning of the 2024-2025 academic year, which can only be described as shock and dismay when I entered our daughter's first-grade classroom open house. The room was overcrowded, with an unacceptable pupil:faculty ratio of 23:1. We petitioned the Woodbridge Board of Education to hire a new instructor, which was granted, thereby reducing the ratio to 18:1. However, is this the new precedent? Am I to believe one of the very reasons we were compelled to relocate here is now no longer salient?

This proposal is a slippery slope, which will only set a precedent fraught with deleterious consequences such as more clearing of land, destruction, overpopulation, and environmental upset. In fact, I will reference the first longitudinal clinical trial to assess the correlation between well-being and nature, using serum inflammatory markers, namely, C-reactive protein, a blood marker associated with cardiovascular disease, Diabetes, and some cancers, conducted by Dr. Aruni Bhatnagar. The results suggested adding trees to a neighborhood may reduce the risk of fatal disease, as evidenced by lower CRP levels with increased tree planting. As Dr. Bill Frist states: "Nature is essential infrastructure, too often taken for granted. But now we know it can make us healthier. Our local, state, and federal budgets need to reflect the reality that our environment and the nature around us affect our health in tangible, economically beneficial ways. We now have a proven reason to advocate for increasing trees and green spaces as a key strategy to improve individual and community health – while also making our cities cooler, more beautiful, and more welcoming places to live in and raise our families."

In conclusion, I am voicing my strong opposition to this proposal, on behalf of myself, my family, and those who are unable to advocate. Thank you for your consideration,

Marissa Jacko-Jones 38 Deer Run Road

Groundbreaking Study Demonstrates Clinical Benefits Of Planting Trees: The Green Heart Louisville Project Reveals How (September 30, 2024, Forbes)