

**Notice of Agenda for the Regular Meeting of
The Housing Committee for
March 5, 2025**

7PM, Central Meeting Room, Town Hall 11 Meetinghouse Lane

Present: Elaine Feldman, Kathy Hunter, Chris Dickerson, Lew Shaffer, Mary Dean, Jim Graham. Excused : Warner Marshall.

A quorum is present

NOTE: because the committee had to take meet in the Library, which closes at 8 pm, the committee was told to plan for a short meeting. The agenda was therefore not followed as posted, and some subjects had to be postponed until April.

1. Approval of Minutes of February 5, 2025 The minutes were unanimously approved on a motion by Chris seconded by Elaine.
2. Public Comment

Cathy Wick: 181 Rimmon Road. Objected to the committee distancing itself from discussion about the Fountain St. apartment building application. Felt that discussion focused on the contents of the town flyer was not grounded in fact. (For full text, see attached.)

Amey Marella, 184 Rimmon Road, made two observations: if there were better communication, dialogue, etc. there would not be a need for a flyer. Adequate information was not available otherwise. Also, the fact that there would be extraordinary increase in the number of houses is the cause of concerns. Quoted David Fink as recommending that we go slow, not over reach, make incremental changes.

Comments were made by committee members about the need for an opportunity to provide corrections when an assertion made publicly such as on the flyer is just wrong, and more information about aspects of the subject that are complex. The informational meeting was to have been held Feb 27 has been postponed, but we need to bring the professionals in to help explain, for one thing, the complex economics behind building affordable housing.

Further discussion covered the committee's recommendation for the CCW, its background and possible alternatives.

3. Housing Chair Report

Events: quarterly SCRCOG Housing Group Meeting will take place Thursday, March 13, 2-3:30. Sean Ghio, from the Partnership for Strong Communities, will be reporting on legislative proposals in the current session. The region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy's

housing committee will also be talking about the link between housing and economic development. Attend in person or via zoom: Kathy to send link via email.

Kathy also spoke to the SCRCOG staff and they are tentatively scheduled to come discuss the Regional Housing Strategy at our April meeting or perhaps in May. Stephanie Camp, [Director of Regional Planning] for sure, talking about What to incorporate as we are updating our AHP; we have to plan not just for the town but for the region as well.

Kathy sent the video about conservation and affordable housing* to the Conservation Committee. Hasn't heard back from them, but during the recent TAC site visit she spoke to one of the co-chairs who seemed to be interested in it. [*Litchfield Center for Housing Opportunities web site has a number of things including this video:

<https://cho.thehousingcollective.org/impact/northwest-connecticut-affordable-housing-and-conservation-strategy>]

POCD will be discussed at the TPZ Special meeting next Monday, when we will see what recommendations have been incorporated.

Attended the Ordinance Committee meeting today to learn what will be happen to our committee. It appears that the proposal to make the Housing Committee a Commission will be acted on at the next BOS meeting. Kathy reviewed the language. Kathy thought it would primarily to provide some structure; individual members will need to have terms. Current members will have to indicate an interest in being appointed, and there will be other people added. Mary questioned the reason for the change: what advantages or disadvantages would accrue? Kathy believes we should instead have a Housing Authority so we would be able to actually create housing. Some discussion focused on the role of the committee to serve the citizens to understand about affordable housing and it's a mystery how we morphed into "the anti-conservation enemy". A budget would presumably be made available, but Kathy has learned that we are already eligible for some reimbursements.

4. Update on CCW Technical Assistance Committee [not covered]
5. Considerations for Updating the Affordable Housing Plan

Introduction: Kathy wants to push back on the idea that we didn't work on the plan ourselves; existing conditions section was imperfect but the other sections were solid and we were proud to submit it. With regard to ACS data, she talked to our planning consultant about using it, acknowledging that the data is less accurate for smaller towns. The purpose is for trying to show a trend, it is standard data that planners use, and the best information available. Jim and Chris continued the conversation about where to find updated information about Woodbridge population figures. The committee discussed overall requirements, the special circumstances of Woodbridge, and other factors affecting the situation.

There was some discussion including the desirability of identifying and supplying specific advantages such as tax advantages and how ADUs contribute to our housing unit census or

(even if deed restricted) to the Affordable unit census, the subject of the AHP update was tabled until the next meeting. General approval for taking out some sections entirely.

Mary pointed out the requirement in other plans, buried and not assigned in ours, that all the town's zoning requirements be reviewed for conformity with state statutes. Some changes have been made to ours. The recommendation that we expand sewer and water access may also be able to be updated because of the situation at the CCW, where the existing infrastructure is expected to need rebuilding so the town will have to become familiar with the process of applying for money to expand service. New technological advances could also be noted.

Kathy suggests that Chris make a plan of action for the review of the current document. She recommends that we all be asked to read and make comments on the document up to a certain page that he advocates.

A folder in Sharepoint was discussed as a way to centralize our file of reference and other informational materials needed for the AHP update. A document on which we can all put our comments was also proposed.

6. CUPOP Recommendation for 52 Brookwood Drive

Kathy recommends that this town-owned site, deed restricted to be single family, be proposed for an affordable housing opportunity, perhaps approaching nonprofit housing developers or Habitat for Humanity. If no one is interested in such a small development and if the town does sell it, she suggests the money be put into a Housing Trust Fund. Chris suggests that we should all look at the property before making a judgement. Mary says that we should definitely weigh in on the situation as part of the committee's job: she suggested that we tell CUPOP that the site is suitable for affordable housing and is suitable for a duplex, that they should consider the use of this property for an affordable housing project and this committee would help them identify a suitable developer. Kathy will draft a message and circulate it for review. Committee members can also review the materials sent by email.

7. Planning for Earth Day, Saturday-April 26 from 10am to 5pm

Come to the next meeting with ideas of what we'd like to see on our table this year: the things we had last year emphasized sustainability.

The meeting ended at about 8:25 p.m. on a motion by Chris seconded by Jim.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Dean

To: Housing Committee

From: Cathy Wick

Date: March 5, 2025

The First Selectman's most recent email newsletter includes a call for engaging in fact-based discussions. I applaud that sentiment and am here tonight to contribute to that worthy effort. We all understand the damage that misinformation, especially when promoted by public officials, can do to our society. We are seeing it every day in Washington DC.

At last month's Housing Committee meeting, many townspeople objected to this committee's zealous and expansive push for denser housing and to a proposal to construct a large apartment building.

The meeting began with committee members furiously backpedaling, trying to distance themselves from any responsibility for the unpopular Fountain Street proposal. Perhaps you were unaware that both the developer's application for the zone changes and the application to construct the building quoted extensively from your committee's own Affordable Housing Plan.

After lengthy public comments, the Chair launched an attack on the flyer that informed people about the zoning change, the apartment building application, and upcoming opportunities for public comment. How ironic – if your committee had nothing to do with the proposal, why spend so much time critiquing the flyer about it? This irony was not lost on members of the public, including one person who sent me the following text later that night: "Did I mention how hilarious it was that the Chair of the Housing Committee spent the first hour after public comment responding to the flyer?"

The Committee's discussion of the flyer was, sadly, not grounded in facts. The Chair claimed that the flyer was inaccurate in stating that the zoning change "increases the developer's profit while decreasing the town's overall percentage of affordable housing." This statement is supported by the developer's own remark that he was requesting the zone changes because the existing regulations were a "heavy lift." All of the approved changes result in allowing more units and thus more profits. Moreover, one of the changes lowers the percentage of legally affordable units from 20% to 12%. That is a significant reduction in the number of affordable units he would have to build, resulting in more units rented at the more profitable market rate.

The second critique the chair offered was even more puzzling and obviously untrue. The flyer quotes the committee's recommendation that the Town add "1,000 new market rate homes and 500 new affordable homes." This is an objectively accurate statement taken directly from the Housing Committee recommendations to the Town Plan and Zoning Commission. The chair tried to contort this clear statement and claim it was somehow misleading because it did not include a timeframe. By definition, an attempt to mislead is an attempt to create a misimpression. The flyer is silent on a timeframe; there is no attempt to create any impression at all of a timeframe let alone a misimpression. The statement in the flyer is factually accurate and speaks for itself. Whether the timeframe is 10, 20 or even 30 years, the recommendation seeks to increase the number of Woodbridge homes by some 50%, a dramatic and unprecedented increase.

I reject the chair's accusation that informing the public about this committee's recommendations is fear mongering: If people respond negatively, it is because they believe, as I do, that this committee's recommendations would be damaging to the town. It is not fear mongering to tell the truth.