

Regular Meeting of the Woodbridge Housing Committee
September 4, 2025
7:00 PM Woodbridge Town Hall, 10 Meeting House Rd., Woodbridge

Present: Mary Dean (via telephone), Chris Dickerson, Elaine Feldman, James Graham, Kathy Hunter, Warner Marshall, Lewis Shaffer. Absent: Donavon Lofters (Board of Finance liaison).

A quorum is present.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by Kathy Hunter, Chair

1. Approval of Minutes of August 6, 2025. Approved unanimously with one minor correction of a typo (Motion: Elaine Feldman; Second: Jim Graham)

2. Public Comment:

Cathy Wick spoke advocating Lascana Homes in Orange as a model, comparing it to the proposed building at 804 Fountain Street. She also thinks that the committee should comment to the TPZ on the affordability aspect of the development proposal.

Joyce Simpson asked if the Housing Plan would be incorporated into the POCD. She also requested that more information be provided to encourage ADUs and other such options for affordable housing. Also, referencing land that was donated to the town for open space purposes, she expressed the opinion that no open space in town should be used for housing.

3. Housing Chair Report

This meeting had been scheduled to make possible a joint meeting with the Conservation Commission, but the Conservation meeting had been canceled. Kathy proposed that we try to reschedule for October by extending an invitation for them to join us at our meeting. The group agreed.

The chair encourages the committee to continue watching TP&Z meetings to stay abreast of the current housing issue and be aware of public comments and concerns about it. The same applies to POCD public comment meetings.

Chris asks when the amended AHP will be available on the town web site. Kathy understands that it hasn't been brought before the BOS yet, but she believes it will be on the docket for October.

Chris advocates that the housing committee discuss 804 Fountain Street, understanding that Kathy can't participate because she is on the TP&Z Commission. Kathy suggested that we add it to the agenda and she would just recuse herself, a solution that met with general approval. Chris moved that we add 804 Fountain Street to the present agenda, Lew seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Mary asked Kathy to explain why, when communication and collaboration between commissions is generally desirable, the situation is different with respect to Planning & Zoning Commission members. She explained that P&Z members—even, as in this case, an Alternate member-- are prohibited from discussing with the public any application before them while it remains open, lest something said could create a bias or contribute to a predetermination on the application.

4. Public Comment by Housing Committee on CCW Master Plan

Next BOS meeting will have a presentation on the Master Plan. Kathy recommends that we don't make public comment before the presentation but rather listen to see what it actual entails; the framework that was on the website had no mention of affordable housing. Mary had sent the public comment draft that Kathy prepared with a couple of suggestions. Chris recommends that the second paragraph be removed because it contains data without giving the source. General discussion followed about how best to emphasize the main issues and avoid distraction. Changes are reflected in the final version as attached.

Lew suggested that all voting members present could sign the hardcopy to be submitted after the comment is read by Kathy. The amended comments were approved unanimously on a motion by Kathy seconded by Lew.

5. Public Hearing on the Housing Commission Ordinance (9/10/25)

Kathy wanted to recommend a couple of additions to the draft ordinance that were suggested to her by the Guilford Ordinance, which she thought was a good model:

- Advise and interact with other town commissions and committees
- Definition of Affordable Housing, referring to the Connecticut General Statutes Section 8-39a.

During a general discussion about the scope of the charge of the committee as drafted and its wording, the group identified some concerns about the need for this additional wording, specifically the definition, and did not vote to recommend it.

As for the recommendation that we advocate for 7 members rather than 6, there was agreement that that would improve the chance of having a quorum.

Kathy recommends that we ensure that the ordinance refers back to the AHP by charging the committee to promote the implementation of the strategies in it. The group felt that it was unnecessary as it was covered by the general statements.

Kathy also asked about the suggestion that we include as ex-officio, non-voting members of the commission the town planner and a member of the Town Planning & Zoning Commission to provide technical assistance and serve as a liaison.

Motion was made by Lew to "provide the recommendations on the housing commission extending the membership from six to seven members and to include as membership to serve as ex-officio non-members of the commission the town planner and a member of the planning and zoning commission." Seconded by Jim, the motion passed unanimously.

6. Debriefing on the Conservation/Housing Event & Conservation Meeting

Chris reported that some members of the audience were upset "because there are a lot of people who are on land trusts who support open space and support affordable housing, while the presentation said that only 14% supported affordable housing. [The 14% related to land trusts in Connecticut already engaging in ways to support affordable housing based on the report provided (Connecticut Conservation Land Trusts & Affordable Housing - Current Status and Recommendations (June 2025).]

Kathy thought it was a start towards what she hopes will be the possibility of working together to, for example, create housing with access to green space, trails, etc. Mary asked about the scope of the audience and it was reported that people from all the local land trusts and the Conservation Commission attended.

Kathy reported that people from the Conservation Commission felt that the program was an infomercial for affordable housing rather than understanding that we were having the conversation because we have an affordable housing crisis and need to work together to best address it. A goal may be to have cross-representation on the commissions. We do have a common ground in advocating for public needs and addressing land uses that the private market neglects.

7. Community Conversations - Elaine/Lew

No report this month

Woodbridge Like Me Day is October 4 from 11-2 and we need people to support the table. Group asked to think about any additional things to display. Additional information on ADUs was suggested and the poster with images of attractive developments should be shown again.

8. Next Steps for Informational Sessions

We will invite the Conservation Commission to our next meeting. We'll ask them what they would like to talk about.

9. Other Business - Housing Related

Mary asked if others had seen anything in the POCD related to housing that needed correction or if we are expected to do provide observations. Kathy asked the committee wants to make recommendations as a committee or as individuals? Chris suggests we put it on the next agenda for discussion.

<Kathy recused herself at this point and Mary took the chair for the duration of the meeting.>

Discussion on 804 Fountain Street: Chris expressed his dismay at the tone of the public meeting he attended on this subject, regretting the divisiveness that he saw there. Lew concurred that the situation is a bad example to go through for the first project associated with Affordable Housing. "We spent a lot of time at these meetings showing how affordable housing doesn't have to ...look like something that belongs in New York City." Much of the subsequent discussion reiterated these points: dismay that our recommendations that the town plan housing that fits into the community have not yet resulted in action, and fear that the community's experience with this project may set back our work by inspiring so much criticism.

Discussion was wide-ranging, from ADUs to the Zoning changes, which we assume to have been inspired by the fact that in three years no one had come forward to offer the town any other proposal or any other place to site housing. Elaine pointed out the irony of the project in Orange, which we have ourselves have advocated as a model, now being recommended to us in contrast to Fountain Street. Mary noted that the TPZ public comment includes people saying that they otherwise support Affordable Housing,

so perhaps the ramifications of the application for the future of the committee's work will not be all bad.

As for the suggestion that the committee provide the TPZ with comment on the affordability aspect of the proposal, Jim asked why we as a committee can't criticize it to the extent of saying that this isn't what we envisioned. Mary said that with reference to the Housing Plan that would be simply a statement of fact.

Concluding, Chris advocated that we just focus on what we can control and stay away from the Fountain Street matter entirely. Jim favored "mak[ing] it clear that this is not the kind of project we envisioned or endorsed or had in mind". Doesn't want people to think that this committee is intent on building whatever we can.

Lew wondered if as a commission we could do more, such as make recommendations.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:26 p.m. on a motion by Chris seconded by Jim.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Dean

Public Comment – Woodbridge Affordable Housing Committee

Good evening. I am speaking on behalf of the Woodbridge Affordable Housing Committee. The Committee has reviewed the proposed plan document prepared by Cooper Robertson for the reuse of the Country Club of Woodbridge (CCW) and we are concerned that there is no mention of affordable housing.

This omission is troubling for several reasons. First, the CCW site is one of the very few parcels in town where higher-density housing is even possible. To exclude affordable housing from the framework risks missing one of our best opportunities to address Woodbridge's housing needs in a thoughtful, sustainable way.

Second, the need in our community is real. Last year, over 300 people from Woodbridge sought assistance through Team Inc. for energy, food, or housing according to the CEO, David Morgan. Nearly 8% of our population—254 residents—are ALICE households: working families who are one paycheck away from housing instability according to the United Way of Greater New Haven, ALICE report 2024 Update. These residents do not appear at public hearings, but they are part of our community. Also not at public hearings are the many people who work in Woodbridge but can't afford to live in Woodbridge as highlighted in our current POCD update. The Board of Selectmen have a responsibility to be a voice for those who are not in the room, not just those who repeatedly show up.

Third, our town is currently facing litigation for exclusionary zoning. Failing to demonstrate a good-faith effort to include affordable housing at this site does not strengthen our defense. On the contrary, it leaves us more exposed legally, financially, and reputationally.

Finally, planning for affordable housing here is consistent with Connecticut's Plan of Conservation and Development, which encourages higher-density housing on previously developed land. It would also make the town eligible for brownfield cleanup funds to address environmental concerns on the site.

We understand this framework is preliminary. But if the Board is preparing a Request for Expressions of Interest, it is critical that affordable housing be explicitly included as a priority. Supporting only age-restricted or market-rate housing will not move the needle toward meeting the state and regional need, nor our own obligations.

We urge the Board to ensure that affordable housing is not left out of the conversation. The Country Club of Woodbridge represents a rare and essential opportunity—one we cannot afford to waste.