

City of Torrington
Housing Plan Steering Committee
Meeting Minutes AMENDED
April 26, 2022

Present: Jocelyn Ayer, Planning Consultant
Sharon Waagner, former Torrington City Councilor
Claudia Sweeney, Director, Torrington Housing Authority
Starley Arias, Torrington Planning and Zoning Commissioner
Jeremy Leifert, Torrington City Planner

Jocelyn Ayer called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. via Zoom on line.

- 1. Approve Meeting Minutes**
- 2. Review DRAFT goals and strategies to meet identified housing needs**

Ms. Ayer reviewed and screen shared the draft, and will put staff person name next to each strategy, and what organization will take lead to make it happen next. A big goal is for the Steering Committee to feel confident with goals and strategies to acquire feedback. The Committee can decide later how to present the final plan documents. A column indicates a lead for each contact, and a sidebar/appendix can be added to give more context and information.

A Housing Plan Implementation Committee is next, and could be a subcommittee of the Planning and Zoning Commission and could meet several times a year. Committee members agreed on a subcommittee going forward.

Details of how the plan will proceed were discussed by Committee members. Ms. Ayer noted the Statute is bare bones, saying a plan shall be adopted every five years and it shall include the creation of affordable housing units. Committee members agreed quarterly meetings would be optimum, with an annual summary meeting.

Ms. Ayer reviewed goals, page 2. Examples will be shown, i.e. Hotchkiss Lumber Building, Libbys Building on 104 Main Street. The Stone Container building was discussed and will be included in the plan. Rista Malanca, Torrington Economic Development Director will be tasked with some of these strategies.

Two and three unit properties were discussed, and can existing vacant units be put back into inventory. Ms. Waagner shared her experience serving on other committees.

Mold and asbestos abatement programs were discussed and Mr. Leifert will look into that matter further. Ms. Sweeney noted the HUD inspection list has very minimal standards. Fire Marshal inspections were discussed, and information and brochures could be provided to the Fire Marshal for distribution during inspections. There will be a link to landlord training services, similar to what the City of Waterbury does. CHFA mortgages were discussed.

A sidebar of Healthy Homes Programs could be included.

Ms. Waagner reviewed the City's recycling program and the success the program is having. This is an increasing awareness issue. Linda Orr is the City's recycling coordinator.

Ms. Sweeney will research a program (available in other states) allowing back rent to be paid directly to the court, in an effort to resolve housing condition issues. She provided details about issues surrounding grievances where the tenant feels the landlord is not living up to their end of the lease. Ms. Sweeney reviewed her experience with lead abatement.

Ms. Ayer has met with Mayor Carbone regarding the Torrington Affordable Housing. There are several vacant units that need significant rehabilitation. Another meeting is planned with TAH. Ms. Sweeney noted difficulties on obtaining a mortgage on their properties, as most banks do not want to issue a mortgage on the house/building only, with the land leased from TAH to the homeowner. She receives a least ten phone calls a week regarding this issue. (amended paragraph)

Ms. Sweeney reviewed how in other areas, properties foreclosed on for non payment of property taxes are used as a method of then being sold to first time home buyers, with a loan to improve the property. This has worked in the past in New York State.

Ms. Waagner noted a blighted property near her home that was in terrible condition, and how work was done with the bank and blight enforcement to sell the property to a new owner, and the property is now fixed up beautifully.

Ms. Ayer noted a side bar regarding energy assistance. Mixed income housing was discussed.

The initial presentation by developers of Waters Way, 199 Water Street was discussed. No applications to the City have been received yet.

Ms. Sweeney suggested discussing transportation issues, in conjunction with parking needs for housing.

Ms. Sweeney touched on the Slaiby Village plans, progress, and approvals, which will create 92 additional senior apartments. Accessory apartments were also discussed.

Preserving and supporting Torrington's existing stock of affordable housing was discussed, as well as the Woodland Hills apartment sale and on-going improvements were discussed.

3. Discuss timeline and set meeting date for next meeting date for next community feedback forum

Ms. Ayer inquired about the possibility of a fair rent commission. Mr. Leifert will discuss this possibility with Mayor Carbone. It was the consensus of the Committee that a better name for such a commission would be Safe Housing Commission.

Discussion followed on directing residents who are in danger of becoming homeless to existing resources for help. Ms. Waagner noted an organization called The Villages in Canaan, CT that provides various services to area seniors.

Committee members requested feedback from local realtors, Chamber of Commerce, Joel at the Senior Center, Planning and Zoning Commission Members, Economic Development Commission, Blight Enforcement Commission, and the Fire Marshal.

4. Next meeting date (May 24th at 4:00 p.m.)

The next Housing Plan Steering Committee meeting will be on May 24, 2022. Ms. Ayer said she hopes to review the procedure for the next community meeting, or have a draft plan with a community forum after the plan is prepared.

Ms. Waagner and Mr. Leifert thought it is easier to evaluate a draft plan that has been prepared in advance of a community forum. Noted that better participation is needed at the next forum. Various options for such a community meeting were discussed. Ms. Ayer noted Senior Center luncheons are a good option, as participants are already gathered, and perhaps a June or July meeting can be arranged.

Ms. Waagner suggested a meeting half hour before the City Council and Planning and Zoning Commission meeting. Mr. Leifert will discuss with Mayor Carbone.

Ms. Ayer reviewed the possibility of starting a hotline for people to share their stories of housing insecurities, or the benefits of affordable housing. Ms. Sweeney emphasized that it be made very clear that such a hotline is not a call line for assistance/help.

Meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.