

Boxborough Housing Board
Minutes of Wednesday, August 16, 2023, meeting
In-person, Town Hall Boxborough MA 01719

Housing Board Members Present: Al Murphy, Chair; Channing Wagg, Vice Chair; Diane Friedman, Jessie Robinson, Korinne Stephens, Ron Vogel

Invited Attendees present: Les Fox, Wendy Trinks

Other Attendees: five residents

A quorum being present, Chair Murphy called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

I. Minutes

The minutes of the July 13, 2023, meeting was reviewed, an omission identified, and vice chair Wagg authorized to add the information. A motion to accept the minutes under these conditions was made, seconded and unanimously approved.

II. Old Business

A. Chair Murphy introduced the topic of 70-72 Stow Road (Stow Road) and the development of affordable housing on it with some background comments which included two potential courses of action likely to be undertaken concurrently. One is to monetize, i.e., sell the land and use the proceeds to preserve affordable housing structures currently in existence together with maintaining the Boxborough Rental Assistance Program (BRAP) to preserve housing for low-income renters within the town. The second, undertake a final review of the viability of placing affordable housing on the Stow Road property. He then opened the floor and a discussion of these points ensued.

i. The point was made that research already undertaken by and/or on behalf of the board indicates that there is a need for low-cost affordable housing within the town,

Further points encompassed concerns with water quality on the site, the economics associated with its development, increased traffic on the roadway, competing needs for the funds that could be raised by monetizing the property, the likely favorable impact on the proposed "Town Center" concept of a residential development on the property vis-à-vis some other use. There were various responses to these comments, including that some enterprising entrepreneur could make the property into a profitable development, aesthetic architecture could make the place a "showpiece," another engineering review would be a good idea and the number of units could be less than 30.

ii. It was recommended that a new appraisal of the Stow Road property's value be undertaken by a registered appraiser. A motion for this to be done was made, seconded, and approved, creating **Action Item #1. [Murphy, Stephens, and Wagg]**

iii. Comments then shifted to possible alternative uses for Stow Road, primarily the siting of a new fire station and the reasons for this.

iv. Vice chair Wagg volunteered to research additional steps needed to determine the feasibility of placing low-cost affordable housing on the Stow Road property.

This will include speaking with the Acton Housing Authority and Habitat for Humanity, creating **Action Item #2. [Wagg with Ms. Trinks, as/if necessary]**

[There then ensued numerous remarks of a general nature pertaining to board progress in “getting things done.” Comments included lack of staff support from the town, a seeming inability to supplant discussion with action, a lack of coordination/communication between the several volunteer boards whose purview encompasses land use/housing, etc., existence of the “Silo Effect” was acknowledged.]

- B. Chair Murphy then introduced the topic of the Homeowner Opportunity for Preservation & Enhancement (H.O.P.E.) Program and referred to hand-out material, a spread sheet summarizing what other towns in the Commonwealth are doing and based upon this a draft of a “straw man” program for Boxborough that also incorporates into it “Environmental Improvement” projects. He then reopened the floor and a discussion ensued.
- C. Of primary concern was the matter of billing and/or reimbursement and this aspect of the program was not resolved.
 - i. It was decided to look more closely at and clarify how certain specific actions are to be handled, draft a firm proposal and review this with the Town Administrator for a formal program to be designed.
 - ii. Since it is not unreasonable to request Community Preservation Act funding for a community housing project such as H.O.P.E. this creates Action Item #3. [Murphy, Stephens, and Wagg]
- D. Ms. Trinks introduced a BRAP policy question regarding whether former plan participants are eligible for subsequent participation. She then opened the floor for discussion. After some deliberation it was moved that the following wording be added to the BRAP program guidelines, to wit: “Households that have participated in the Boxborough Rental Assistance Program are eligible to apply again after a suitable waiting period.” The addition was approved unanimously.

III. Adjournment

After setting the next meeting date as Wednesday, September 6 at 7:00 p.m. at the town hall, a motion was made, seconded, and approved to adjourn at 9:01 p.m.

IV. Material Reviewed

Agenda

Minutes 7/13/23 meeting

Comparison of Stow Road Appraisals

“Straw” H.O.P.E. program guidelines

Spreadsheet detailing similar programs offered by other communities.

Respectfully submitted by meeting secretary, vice-chair Channing Wagg