

**COMMISSION ON THE AGING
4 Brush Hill Road
New Fairfield, CT 06812**

COMMUNITY FORUM

"DIALOGUE WITH NEW FAIRFIELD HOUSING TRUST"

MINUTES

Saturday November 9, 2013

The Commission on the Aging sponsored a community forum on housing. The COA invited the New Fairfield Housing Trust (NFHT) to have a dialogue with the community to share its vision for affordable elderly housing in New Fairfield at the Senior Center from 10:00am-12:00 noon. Cindy LaCour was the Moderator. Secretary, Laurie Busse, took the minutes.

COA MEMBERS PRESENT: Maureen Salerno, Chairperson, Cindy LaCour, Vice Chairperson, Jeannette Sweeney, Kathy Hull, Katy Johannssen Stephanie Shaughnessy, and Roberta Ilardo,

NEW FAIRFIELD HOUSING TRUST MEMBERS PRESENT: Maureen Salerno, Tom Dube, Tom Dube II, Linda Decker, Al Mardis, Bob Jano, Roger Flocke, and David Berto

Introduction & Welcome:

Cindy LaCour discussed the Commission on the Aging (COA) is mandated by the State to continuously study the conditions and needs of elderly persons in the community in relation to housing, economics, employment, health, recreational, and other matters. It shall analyze the services for the aged provided by the community, both public and private agencies, and shall make recommendations to the Chief Executive and the Municipal Governing Body regarding the development and integration of public and private agencies, in cooperation with State and other services to the extent possible. Cindy LaCour talked about the COA's dedication to addressing the needs of New Fairfield senior citizens. Based on surveys conducted in 2004 and again several months ago the need for affordable elderly housing in New Fairfield is eminent. The members of the COA and NFHT were introduced.

Maureen Salerno discussed on April 14, 2012, the COA held a Community Forum entitled "Affordable Senior Housing; Together We Can Make It Happen". At this forum attendees were asked if they would like to become part of the New Fairfield Housing Trust (NFHT) and if so to please leave their name and contact information on the sign up sheet that was being passed around. The NFHT is a private non profit organization whose mission is to bring affordable senior housing into New Fairfield. The COA has invited the NFHT to have a conversation with the community to correct the misinformation and rumors that have been

circulating regarding the development of affordable elderly housing on property off of Rita Drive in the Oakwood Acres subdivision. The property abuts the Police Dept, Fire Dept, Meeting House Hill School, and the Congregational Church.

Tom Dube explained the NFHT is in the very early stages of achieving their goal of providing affordable elderly housing in New Fairfield. Currently they are looking to lease 13-15 acres of Town owned property which will be accessed at 17 Rita Drive. The subdivision Oakwood Acres is not required to supply water to this area. They are using the current zoning regulations to develop their vision. The zoning regulations require a minimum of 5 acres for the elderly housing district and residents must be 62 years of age and older. A storm water management plan is required by the zoning commission and the NFHT wants to avoid any negative impact on Oakwood Acres. An engineer will dictate how the property is developed.

David Berto, consultant for the NFHT. It is their intention that tax payers of New Fairfield will not have to bear the burden of the cost of this project. State money is available that can cover the cost of the development, but in order to apply for the State money they must first gain site control. The NFHT has split the cost of a survey with the town to have this property surveyed which is the first step in gaining site control. The Town will have a prescribed set of conditions which include but are not limited to approvals from the Town Land Use Boards & Commissions, feasibility and traffic studies which must be met or which can be met before allowing the NFHT to lease the property.

Bob Jano wanted to end the rumor that the NFHT is shovel ready. This is not true; they are in the very preliminary stages and have 3-4 years of work ahead of them. They must first gain site control, apply for the State grants, and then apply to the Town's Land Use Boards and Commissions. The project will be ADA permissible but there is no particular design in mind yet.

Cindy LaCour asked if there was any public comment—as follows:

Donald A. Salvato, 5 Cloverleaf Dr.: Stated he does not live in or around the Oakwood Acres subdivision but wanted to know if this would be voted upon and why this property and not somewhere else. The NFHT replied that there is public comment at all Town Land Use Board and Commission meetings. It will be up to the BOS to decide if there is a vote at a Town meeting vs. a referendum. Tom Dube explained he has been looking for property since 2007. Prior to the 2009 zoning regulations finding land was extremely difficult as they had to be within 1,500sqft of a commercial property. The 2012 zoning regulations are more conducive to elderly housing. When the NFHT appears in front of the Land Use Boards/Commissions neighbors will be notified as per the requirements of the specific Land Use Boards/Commissions. The best way to stay informed is to read the Citizen News.

Selectman Mike Gill stated this may be voted on at a Town meeting unless petitioned to go to a referendum.

Scott DeBellis: Wanted to know where the COA surveys were located and when were these surveys done and why didn't he receive one. He also inquired if the proposed elderly housing was open to only New Fairfield residents and if HUD funds were going to play a part in the construction of the proposed elderly housing. Lastly this property has trails that lead to the schools and to Hidden Valley. Will this proposed housing have an impact on those trails as he enjoys walking on those trails with his children?

The COA replied the surveys were first done about 10 years ago and were mailed to residents and more recently several months ago the survey appeared in the Citizen News as well as local businesses and churches. Mr. DeBellis stated he does not have time to read the Citizen News. The survey results are available on the COA's homepage of the Town website. The NFHT is not yet sure if they will apply for HUD funding, they first would like to apply for the State grants. HUD is very complex and people have tended to stereo-type HUD funded projects, noting HUD has several different types of funding available. The NFHT asked Mr. DeBellis to close his eyes and vision a building for senior citizen singles or couples that are 62 years and older. Depending on the type of funding it is possible that a specific percentage can be dedicated to New Fairfield residents. For example Wilton has received funding that allowed 1/3 of the elderly housing units to be dedicated to current Wilton residents. Most of the trails run west of the property and they will do their best not to disturb any existing trails.

Kathy Hull, COA Commissioner: It is her hopes that the elderly housing is not limited to New Fairfield residents. In her job as the Senior Center Director she has seen several residents forced to move out of New Fairfield to Danbury and other surrounding towns because they were no longer able to keep up their homes and New Fairfield does not offer any affordable elderly housing options. These same residents have expressed a desire to move back into New Fairfield. Additionally she has lots of friends who want their parents to move to New Fairfield so that they will be better able to help them in their golden years.

Pat Antal, 15 Rita Dr.: She used to live at 15 Rita Dr. and has since sold the property to her son. She has concerns about the run off from underground springs. The water run off had caused her to do significant repairs to her home costing over \$30,000. Many of the homes on Rita Dr. have sump pumps that run 24/7 because of the high water table. In the last 40 years there have been many proposed projects for this property; however they all were shot down when they appeared in front of the Inland/Wetlands Commission.

Ms. Richie: Is a 32 year resident of Ball Pond. Due to a grandfather clause many homes were built in her area which has caused a lot of flooding. Please check with the Wetlands Commission before proceeding any further.

The NFHT stated they are required by law to deal with water issues before construction can take place, however, they have to get an engineer in their first to determine the most cost effective water management system. Further discussion focused on leasing the land from the Town for a nominal fee is cost effective and will reduce the amount of rent a tenant would pay than if they had to purchase the property for a couple of million dollars. When the time comes, they will apply to the Wetlands Commission.

Kathy Sharkis, 4 Spring Dr.: She has been a resident since 1985 and has more issues with drinking water than she cares to mention. Additionally why hasn't another property been viewed? Aquarion owns the property next to hers and this past summer they had to truck in water for the reserve tank so that she does not run out of drinking water. There have been many times in the past when she did not have running water. Aquarion knows her on a 1st name basis.

The residents of Oakwood Acres need to band together and put pressure on Aquarion to drill more wells. There are State agencies available that can help them do this. Tom Dube stated that over the years he has looked at many properties in Town. Many of the properties did not have the required 5 acres, some neighbors threatened to take him to court, while other properties were either too expensive or the seller wanted more than the assessed value. This is the only property that has enough acreage and is cost effective since the Town is considering a lease option for a nominal fee. They will be the management company for this property. Further discussion focused on it is a state law that any developer can propose affordable housing in any town and they can construct it just about any where they want to. The court system is designed to be in favor of affordable housing and the majority of the appeals are shot down. The NFHT is reaching out to the community to get their feedback and construct affordable elderly housing that is agreeable to everyone. The NFHT is not obligated to reach out to the community but wanted to put an end to all of the rumors and misinformation that is floating around town. Additionally a feasibility study will be done and the NFHT will be knocking on doors for feedback. They will put a tremendous effort into engineering so as to have a minimal impact on Oakwood Acres.

Roberta Ilardo, COA Commissioner: Has been a resident on Rita Dr. for over 40 years and volunteers her time on several Town Boards and Commissions. She knows people who have moved away because they could no longer afford to live here and would love to move back to New Fairfield. She understands that water is an issue but the COA and the NFHT are honorable people and have viewed many properties. This is a 35 acre property and they are only asking for 13-15 acres. They do not want a significant impact on Rita Dr. They will have engineers put in new pipes and design a 21st century drainage system. There are lots of folks in New Fairfield who want to bring in their aging family members and this would be the perfect opportunity to do so. If the property turns out not to be viable, then they will move on, however both the COA and NFHT are charged with looking for affordable elderly housing and she prays that this project will improve the water issues for this area. Additionally she has a friend that lives next door to a group home for the disabled. When this group home 1st came in, many residents who did not live next door to them were opposed to the project. However, her friend lives right next door to the group home and they are quiet, good neighbors.

Tom Riley, 40 Rita Dr.: He is an architect who works for developers on large scale commercial projects. He will help the NFHT find another property. He has lots of concerns over drainage issues and drinking water. Additionally he is concerned about the additional traffic coming into a quiet neighborhood and if the zoning regulations say they can have 6 bedrooms per acre that would be over 70 units. There will be loss of natural buffers and all

of these factors will change the character of the neighborhood, noting homes that about the property will see the biggest change and their property values will decline.

Tom Keough, 21 Rita Dr.: Envision 13 sloping acres of mature vegetation cut down. This will have a devastating impact. He had to cut down a tree that was damaged in a storm and that changed the character of his yard, when a neighbor had to cut down trees in their yard it further changed the character of his property. He has a sump pump that runs 24/7 and cutting down mature vegetation will only increase his water problems. He knows of a town where affordable elderly housing went in, and it was rented to people under age 62 and there is quite a bit of police action there now. He would be OK with the project if it was strictly age 62 and over and there was water control. If the NFHT leases the property who is responsible for making sure that water control is addressed and age requirements are enforced?

The NFHT stated that they will put a stop to any foul play. Applicants must be age 62 or over and they will abide by the New Fairfield zoning regulations. Every member of the NFHT loves New Fairfield. Their combined years of residency totals well over 200 years and they will not do anything to harm the image of this town. It is their goal to keep property values from going down and protect the Town from what is going to come; meaning any developer from any state can come into town and build whatever type of affordable housing they want. It would be best if affordable housing was for the elderly and built by people who love the town and are willing to address any concerns the residents may have. Additionally they have reviewed the property values of the homes surrounding the fire and police departments as well as the cell tower and property values do not appear to be affected by these changes.

Vincent Casasanta, 24 Rita Dr.: What about properties that are easily more accessible and do not have water issues. He has a sump pump that runs constantly.

Tom Dube stated before he joined the NFHT he was actively seeking property for affordable elderly housing for another group. The Zerrener Gas Station wanted \$1 million and they only had 1 acre of land. The old creamery has 5 acres but is in a flood zone and there is not enough land on the Gillotti Rd. property. Additionally he has viewed properties on Colonial Rd., Sawmill Rd., El Rd., and Shortwoods Rd. . All of these properties were either too much money, not enough land, did not meet zoning regulations, or all of the above. The reason they want 13 acres instead of the minimum 5 acres is so they can keep the building away from the road, avoid construction on the slope and minimize water run off.

Elizabeth Thompson: In 1972 the Town appropriated a path for the children of the Oakwood Acres subdivision to walk to and from school. She has concerns that this path will be at risk. Recently she had walked the property at 17 Rita Dr with her husband and they came upon MHHS. They received some looks from the teachers and on their way home they were apprehended by the police and questioned as to why they were on that property. The BOE should notify the school that there will be different people there in the coming months. The paths in question are to the west of the property and should not be affected by any construction.

Mike Gill went to the Assessors office after the "Housing Forum in 2012 and asked to pull up available town owned properties. This property was available and the Town is willing to lease it to the NFHT if certain prescribed conditions can be met.

Lucille Norton, 33 Rita Dr.: Her mom lived with her for 1 year and is thankful for the Senior Center however, who voted for this property and how can she stay in touch with or get involved with the NFHT? The NFHT stated the property was not voted on. The NFHT spoke with the BOS and this property is available. It is not committed to any particular project. Many studies have to be done and several conditions have to be met before the Town will give them the option to lease the property. Legal Notices are published in the Citizen News and residents should read this paper to stay informed.

Ms. Pilkington, 63 Rita Dr.: Stated her parents live in affordable elderly housing and inquired how far away will this be from Meeting House Hill School. Will they be able to see the school?

Jeannette Sweeney, COA Commissioner: Stated she lived on Rita Dr. with 6 children for 8 years. The NFHT is not a group to be afraid of; it is not their intention to demoralize the character of any subdivision. She is here because her children are here and can help her. If her children weren't here and there isn't affordable elderly housing she wouldn't be here. This proposed affordable elderly housing is available for them, the residents of Rita Dr too. This is for people who are in their later years that don't have money to purchase a condo. The citizens of New Fairfield should be embracing the NFHT, not afraid of them.

Mark Ptakowski, 57 Rita Dr.: He understands that their intentions are good but there may be indirect consequences to their actions. For example when the Town paved his road he thought that was great, but they paved up to the grass line and now the water just flows into his property and he had to do drainage work that was quite costly. He hopes that this will come to a Town vote.

Susan Ptakowski, 57 Rita Dr.: Inquired if there would be income limits and if so what they would be. So far today many questions have been asked but none have been answered, how can they can keep in touch with them and get answers to their questions. She knows of issues where tenants were renting to those under the age of 62 and trying to get someone evicted is almost impossible. The NFHT replied there will be income limits, but it is too early to tell what those limits will be. There is a formula that determines what the term "affordable" is, but it is too early in the process to make that determination just yet. Maureen Salerno discussed her own mother was able to get an affordable elderly housing apartment in Brooks Quarry in Brookfield CT. She explained how that process worked and her mother paid no more than 30% of her income, noting medical expenses could be deducted from her qualifying income. Maureen Salerno will be happy to give out her contact information privately to anyone who asks her for it.

Cindy LaCour closed the community forum at 12:10 by thanking everyone who attended and noting that this will be on Channel 17, Uverse channel 99, and the Town website.