



Affordable Housing Advisory Commission Meeting
October 16, 2019
7:00 PM
Town Hall



Present: Chairman Quinton Harper, Betty Curry, Tyran Hill, Terri Buckner

Absent: Gabe Viñas, Amy Singleton, Cain Twyman

Also present: Board Liaison, Barbara Foushee; Town Staff, Anne-Marie Vanaman

Guest: Leah Whitehead, Community Empowerment Fund

I. Welcome

Chairman Quinton Harper welcomed everyone and opened the meeting.

II. Consider Approval of September Meeting Minutes

Betty Curry made a motion to approve. Harper seconded the motion. Voted all in favor of approving the September 18, 2019 meeting minutes.

III. CEF Presentation, discussion & recommendation

Before guest Leah Whitehead arrived, Terri Buckner asked if the OWASA Care to Share program, administered by IFC, was utilized to support water utility costs. She also inquired if the Affordable Housing Special Revenue Fund could make contributions to the Care for Share program. Harper said he would be willing to consider but that more information would be needed first: we have no idea if this is a real need, nor do we know what other resources exist.

Anne-Marie Vanaman explained that CEF administers the Town's Rental and Utility Deposit Assistance Program. For each applicant, CEF assesses the applicant's needs and lines up community resources to meet those needs. The Town is one resource for funding, as is IFC, the County, etc. Vanaman stated she has only seen utility deposit requests for Duke Energy on our recent applications. It could be assumed if water bills are an issue for the applicant, the Care to Share program, through IFC, is being utilized. She will look into the issue and report back.

Guest Leah Whitehead arrived and provided background about Community Empowerment Fund and the clients they serve. A nonprofit funded primarily through private donations, CEF functions as a low-barrier access hub for healthcare, housing, benefits, and employment services for households earning 80% or below the AMI. However, 90% of their clients earn 30% or below AMI. CEF works with client members on long-term planning for future, but also conducts "triage," especially for those in a housing crisis.

Whitehead noted that since CEF began conducting the Coordinated Entry process for people facing homelessness, they have seen a high volume of traffic in their office, resulting in more applications to the Town for rental deposit and utility assistance.

a) Amount of funding per rental deposit assistance

Whitehead shared that the Town's current maximum grant of \$1,000 often does not cover the financial burden facing applicants. They often see higher rents and/or double deposits based on credit scores, plus market rents are quite high in our area. In addition, the Town's \$1,000 cap negatively impacts larger households whose basic rent alone is well-over \$1,000.

She gave a snapshot of the last 15 Carrboro applicants: 53% had children; 40% were voucher holders; 60% came through coordinated entry; 53% engaged with CEF afterward to work on other goals; only one household needed CEF's financial help again. (Note: The Town's grants are one-time only.)

Whitehead reported that for 60% of these applicants, CEF had to reach out to the County for additional displacement funds. This caused a drain on County resources for those households who do not live in a Town jurisdiction. She recommended the Town consider increasing its maximum grant limit and employ a tiered structure, revised annually, based on HUD fair market rents, plus deposit expenses:

FY 2019

Maximum grant for 1-bedroom, \$1,498; (note, a double deposit would be \$2,400)

Maximum grant for 2-bedroom, \$1,652; (note, a double deposit would be \$2,707)

Maximum grant for 3-bedroom, \$2,033; (note, a double deposit would be \$3,468)

Another option would be to raise the maximum grant to \$3,468, but still revise annually.

b) Administrative costs

Whitehead said that CEF administers the assistance programs for Carrboro and other jurisdictions. The work is time consuming and costly. She suggested that the Town consider supporting a 10% administration fee per application to help defray the costs.

The AHAC thanked Whitehead for her time and Whitehead left the meeting. The AHAC discussed CEF's suggestions and administration fees versus a flat rate, perhaps included as a recurring expense. The AHAC asked staff to research the administration fee versus flat rate structure further before making a recommendation to the Board.

IV. October Application Review

An application from Rebuilding Together of the Triangle (RTT) to the Affordable Housing Special Revenue Fund for \$28,625 was discussed. The application was to support critical repairs, weatherization, and disability accommodations for 4 homes in Carrboro. Buckner made a motion to recommend funding the application in full to the Board of Aldermen. Tyran Hill seconded the motion. Voted all in favor to recommend the RTT application at the full amount, \$28,625, to the Board of Aldermen.

Buckner also requested RTT engage the homeowner of one of the homes noted in the application, and possibly connect the homeowner to Self-Help Credit Union if the situation is appropriate. Vanaman said she would convey the request.

V. Review and discuss the feedback/priorities from the Oct. 1 CBOA meeting

a) Special Projects Information

Harper appreciated the feedback from the Board of Aldermen during the October 1 staff presentation on affordable housing and asked the AHAC to discuss strategies to prioritize. It was noted that Town staff is

working on a mobile home displacement strategy and will review the Affordable Housing Plan and the Community Climate Action Plan for any additional synergies.

Discussion ensued about how proactive the AHAC should be in ensuring Carrboro residents who could benefit from the Affordable Housing Special Revenue Fund are aware of its existence, or aware of other community resources. Harper suggested the AHAC communicate directly with residents while Buckner countered with a concern that, in doing so, an unrealistic expectation could be created given limited annual funding. Hill agreed and worried about the volume that would be created. He also noted that in terms of community marketing, engagement (such as canvassing) and making informational flyers available are very different things. Canvassing creates higher expectation. Finally, he worried the Town could become an unnecessary “middle man” between the residents and nonprofits. Curry felt that once someone has information, it is up to them to follow through if they are interested. Vanaman stated that the Orange County Home Preservation Coalition sees a high number of critical repair requests and that the nonprofit partners at the table are engaged in the communities they serve.

Discussion shifted to hosting community conversations about affordable housing. Harper stated that the AHAC should host these conversations and that it should not fall on Staff. Buckner said any event should be well thought out with goals and desired outcomes. Hill agreed. Echoing the previous conversation, Buckner also did not want to create false hope through these events. Curry felt strongly that affordable housing conversations should always be approached through the lens of racial equity and briefly shared the negative experiences of others who have tried to rent an apartment at Shelton Station as an example. Curry supported these events serving as a platform for residents to share their experiences with those in power – elected officials. Hill agreed that we do not want to tell other people’s stories and become a buffer. After more discussion, it was decided that Buckner and Curry would develop a workshop on fair housing and engage their networks for marketing. Hill also suggested engaging the Orange County Affordable Housing Coalition in this effort. Buckner added that she would reach out to the NC Justice Center per Hill’s suggestion. Buckner and Curry will report in November. Harper said he would like to revisit affordable housing strategies at the next AHAC meeting.

VI. Additional comments/updates/questions

Due to time, an update about Shelton Station was postponed until November.

Tyran Hill announced that he is moving away from the Triangle region and must step down from the Affordable Housing Advisory Commission. This was his last meeting. The AHAC expressed gratitude for his service and affordable housing expertise.

VII. Next Regular meeting on November 20th

Chairman Harper closed the meeting.