

CAMBRIDGE AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST
MEETING MINUTES
May 23, 2024 at 4:00 p.m.

Conducted via Zoom and in person (City Hall, Ackermann Room)

Trustees Present in Person: Yi-An Huang, Chair; Teresa Cardosi, Florrie Darwin, Elaine DeRosa, Alyson Stein, Bill Tibbs

Trustees Present via Zoom: Elaine Thorne, Susan Schlesinger

Trustees Absent: Jim Stockard

Staff Present: Chris Cotter, Housing Director; Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for Community Development; Cassie Arnaud, Senior Manager for Housing Development; Janet Haines, Housing Planner; Christine Yu, Associate Housing Development Planner; Anna Dolmatch, Senior Manager for Homeownership

Others Present: Lauren Greene, James Williamson, Aderonke Ogunrakinyo, LaToya Weaver, Sue Reinert, City Councilor Sumbul Siddiqui

The meeting was called to order at 4:02 p.m. Mr. Cotter explained that this meeting of the Affordable Housing Trust would be held in a hybrid fashion pursuant to applicable requirements, that all votes would be taken by roll call, and that there would be no public comment. He then confirmed via roll call that each remote participant could hear the meeting and was audible to others.

Prior to discussing the items on the meeting's agenda, Mr. Cotter acknowledged that this meeting is the last for Mr. Tibbs and Ms. Darwin. Mr. Cotter and other Trustees commended the two departing Trustees for their excellent work on the Trust. Ms. Darwin thanked everyone for their kind words and reflected on her experience sitting on the Trust.

MEETING MINUTES

Upon a motion moved and seconded, by roll call of eight in favor and one absent (Mr. Stockard), it was voted to approve the minutes for the meeting of April 25, 2024.

CDD UPDATE

Jefferson Park Federal: Staff are working with the CHA on the full construction closing.

Rindge Commons Phase 1: Construction is complete, and tenants have begun moving into the property.

52 New Street: JAS is having a groundbreaking event on May 28th.

Walden Square II: Staff are reviewing a Trust funding request, which will be brought to an upcoming Trust meeting.

35 Cherry Street: JAS held their first AHO community meeting regarding the development of 35 Cherry Street on May 15th.

37 Brookline: JAS held a community meeting regarding the development of 37 Brookline Street on April 25th.

87-101 Blanchard Road: B'nai B'rith will have its second of two required Planning Board Design Advisory meetings on Tuesday, June 4th at 6:30 p.m.

OTHER UPDATES:

Housing Committee: The City Council's Housing Committee held a meeting on April 22nd regarding the feasibility of city-funded housing vouchers. Another meeting will be scheduled soon to continue the discussion. The Committee also held two meetings on May 8th and May 22nd regarding the creation of zoning language that would allow multi-family housing in all neighborhoods in Cambridge.

In response to a question on whether staff were conducting an analysis on the impact of building multi-family housing in low density areas. Staff responded that the meetings were more conceptual and for public comment and that the next meeting will talk about next steps to assess options. In response to a question whether allowing multi-family housing everywhere in the City will undercut the advantages of the Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO), Mr. Cotter answered that until the zoning language is clearer, the impacts are unknown, but it is likely that a change in zoning could reduce the advantage of the AHO.

Ms. Cardosi asked for clarification on the permits that AHO projects need and the AHO advantages. Staff responded that all large development projects over a certain size require a special permit.

NEW BUSINESS

35 Cherry Street Predevelopment Funding Request

Ms. Dolmatch presented a funding request from Just A Start (JAS) for up to \$300,000 in Trust funding for their affordable housing development at 35 Cherry Street. Previously owned by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the property was acquired by the City as part of a community benefits agreement. In October 2023, the Trust voted to designate JAS as the developer. Since then, JAS has worked on developing initial project designs and began the community outreach process.

JAS is requesting a commitment of \$300,000 in Trust funding to support ongoing predevelopment work, including architectural design and environmental testing. JAS anticipates more community meetings before presenting their designs to the Planning Board for review.

In response to a question regarding the parameters on what JAS can do on the site, Ms. Dolmatch answered that these will be large, family-sized homeownership units. She also explained how the community process produced a set of guidelines for the project. Unlike other City properties, this property came with a stipulation that it be used to benefit the community. Staff and Trustees discussed the importance of having the community's input on this project as this is a unique opportunity to build affordable homeownership units. Ms. Stein asked how JAS was designated as the developer for the site. Mr. Cotter explained that the JAS was selected through a Request for Proposal process run by the City.

Staff then recommended to the Trust to designate JAS as the developer given their qualifications and extensive experience with building affordable homeownership units. The Trust then voted on the matter late last year.

Upon a motion moved, seconded, and approved by roll call of eight in favor and one absent (Mr. Stockard), it was:

VOTED: to approve the Trust funding request of up to \$300,000 from JAS to support predevelopment activities at 35 Cherry Street, all as further described in the meeting materials.

Griffin Shepard, et al. Zoning Petition

Mr. Cotter informed the Trust that since the last meeting, the Planning Board and the Ordinance Committee both held their respective meetings on the zoning petition. The Planning Board voted neutrally on the matter but acknowledged the importance of the petition. The petition remains active at the Ordinance Committee. Both groups were very policy focused, especially on municipally-funded vouchers and supportive housing.

Staff noted to each body that the Trust has always been supportive of supportive housing and that many of the goals of the petition are already underway. Members noted that some aspects of the petition are still at odds with the enabling legislation, such as adding more Trust members, need to be made through a Home Rule Petition, which can be a cumbersome process.

Ms. Darwin added that when she participated in the Ordinance Committee meeting, she noticed a lot of interest for project-based vouchers, regardless of where the funds come from, and that the petitioners were open to changes to the petition. Trustees acknowledged that the Trust and the petitioners are on the same team with the same goal of increasing affordable housing. Ms. Schlesinger suggested that the Trust have a meeting with these petitioners to further the discussion on what the Trust could do more of.

Ms. Darwin commented that new programs, such as a vouchers program, are expensive and will potentially take away from projects. Chair Huang added that Trust money has historically been allocated into the preservation and creation of affordable housing. He acknowledged the importance and impact of vouchers, but also noted that there are tradeoffs of a municipally-funded voucher program that need be discussed with the City Council and the community. The City will need to look at how a voucher program could be funded long term.

Ms. Schlesinger suggested a report to showcase all the work that the Trust has done and to promote more transparency with the community. Trustees commented that they want to play a role in the voucher program discussion. Trustees discussed the importance of publicizing the projects and programs that the Trust funds.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a motion moved and seconded, by roll call of eight in favor and one absent (Mr. Stockard), it was voted to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for June 27, 2024 at 4:00 p.m.

Meeting Materials:

- Agenda
- Minutes from the Trust's April 25, 2024 meeting
- Project Update
- 35 Cherry Street – Predevelopment Funding Request
- Memo re Griffin-Sheperd, et al., Zoning Petition
- Griffen-Shepard et al. Zoning Petition
- Law Dept. Opinion – Griffin-Sheperd, et al., Zoning Petition – Ltr to Pl Bd and AHT
- Planning Board Report – Griffin-Sheperd, et al., Zoning Petition