

Town of Lewisboro Housing Committee Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, September 14, 2021

6:00pm -- By Zoom

Jane Lindau called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

During Tuesday night's Lewisboro Housing Committee meeting, Chair Jane Lindau provided an update on Lewisboro Commons, a 42-unit affordable housing complex being constructed by Wilder Balter Partners on Route 22 in Goldens Bridge.

Ms. Lindau read a letter she received from John Bainlardi, vice president of Wilder Balter Partners, regarding the project's progress. It stated that construction on the complex is going according to plan and that most of the blasting activities on the property are completed. The letter further stated that crews have begun framing the first building.

"We expect to be in a position to occupy the first building in April and be fully constructed and occupied by the first quarter of 2022," Ms. Lindau read from the letter.

Ms. Lindau said she asked Mr. Bainlardi to update the town on a funding shortfall that Wilder Balter previously reported due to sharply higher raw materials prices, which were not accounted for in the project's construction estimates prepared five years earlier.

She said that Mr. Bainlardi confirmed that Westchester County committed to providing additional funding for the project through the federal HOME Investment Partnerships Program. Ms. Lindau noted that while not all Westchester municipalities qualify for this funding, Lewisboro is one that does.

Ms. Lindau also referenced a prior discussion regarding a section of Wilder Balter's agreement with the town, which stated the firm would contribute \$50,000 to improvements in Goldens Bridge. Due to higher costs associated with the

drawn-out but unsuccessful legal battle to overturn approval of the building project, as well as other financial difficulties, Wilder Balter was only able to contribute a partial payment of \$15,000.

Ms. Lindau questioned whether there was any further discussion with the developer about reinstating more of the community improvement funds. Committee member Linda Rae responded that she did not think that was possible, saying the shortfall was the unfortunate outcome of the costly legal fight. She noted, however, that there were ideas to use the \$15,000 contribution for sidewalks, playgrounds and parks, and other improvements in Goldens Bridge.

During the meeting, Ms. Lindau also announced that committee member Elana Shneyer was leaving her position due to her recent election to the Katonah-Lewisboro School District Board of Education. Ms. Lindau noted that Ms. Shneyer's Board of Education role might pose a conflict for her on matters before the housing committee, such as discussions on school-owned properties, which Ms. Shneyer sought to avoid.

Ms. Lindau said the committee is seeking to fill the vacancy with a resident of Goldens Bridge.

Bedford's approach

During Tuesday's meeting, the committee also hosted a presentation by Tom McGrath, chair of Bedford's Blue Mountain Housing Development Corp. The committee invited Mr. McGrath to discuss how the Town of Bedford develops affordable housing and to answer questions from committee members.

Mr. McGrath explained that Blue Mountain Housing Development is a nonprofit organization that works alongside the Bedford Town Housing Committee to develop affordable housing properties. He reviewed several different funding strategies that have made it possible for the development arm to purchase land

and create new affordable housing. One of the strategies involves an “in-lieu of” provision updating Bedford’s zoning code, which allows developers to put money into a housing trust fund instead of creating affordable housing.

Mr. McGrath said a significant amount of financing came from when the town acquired property on David Lapsley Road, and Blue Mountain worked alongside Habitat for Humanity to renovate a house already on the property, as well as build a new house. Funds from the sale of those two properties, said Mr. McGrath, helped finance future projects. Available assistance from Blue Mountain to sponsors of affordable housing projects can take the form of payment assistance, pre-development loans and financing for various studies required for the development of specific properties, such as percolation tests for septic systems.

Blue Mountain’s status as a tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organization enables it to take a larger role in affordable housing planning and to work alongside experienced developers.

Ms. Lindau noted that since the 2009 housing settlement between the county and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the county has frowned upon efforts by developers to opt out of building affordable housing.

Mr. McGrath noted that following the settlement, Bedford changed its zoning code to mirror the county’s, which requires that 10% of single-family homes and 20% of multi-family homes be affordable housing.

Ms. Lindau said the committee would like to replicate Blue Mountain’s success at obtaining project financing but said there were fewer options available now due to greater restrictions adopted at the county level.

Mr. McGrath advised the committee that the best way for them to develop affordable housing would be to accumulate capital for future development through grant and other funding sources, and to focus on acquiring houses in

bank foreclosure or with tax liens. However, due to the recent controversy regarding the attempted sale of two town lots to a local resident, Ms. Lindau expressed doubt that this strategy would be viable.

Ms. Lindau said the committee currently has no funds to acquire any properties, but she wanted to begin discussing ways for the committee to get more involved in development.

Goldens Bridge unit

Among other items discussed at the meeting, Ms. Lindau mentioned an affordable housing apartment currently available in Goldens Bridge that has not received any interest despite being heavily advertised.

Councilmember Tony Goncalves also mentioned the property during Monday's Town Board meeting. He said the 600 square foot one-bedroom apartment is available for \$900 a month and is located on Park Road, Goldens Bridge.

Mr. Goncalves said the unit would be eligible to a single person who makes below \$44,650 a year and any couple with an income below \$51,000. He said the apartment is accessory to an owner-occupied house, is handicap accessible and also has a parking space.