City of Oxford Housing Advisory Commission
Minutes of the April 20, 2020 Virtual Meeting
Held via Zoom App and Broadcast to YouTube in accordance with HB 197


Staff members in attendance: Zachary Moore and Sam Perry

Meeting was called to order at 1:31 pm.

Glenn moved to approve the agenda, Shana seconded. Roll call: Bracken-yea; Ellerbe-yea; Lind-yea; Rodrigues-yea; Rosenberg-yea; Straker-yea. Motion passed.

Scott moved to approve the February 18, 2020 meeting minutes. Glenn seconded. Roll call: Bracken-yea; Ellerbe-yea; Lind-yea; Rodrigues-yea; Rosenberg-yea; Straker-yea. Motion passed.

Sam shared an update with the group on the Comprehensive Housing Study and Needs Analysis. The study was budgeted in 2020. It is still being targeted for completion this year, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, albeit in a more cost-effective way by leveraging staff time to complete some of the components. There is a chance it may not need to go before Council for approval because it would cost less than the $20,000 requiring an RFP. The plan is for the hired consultant to do some of the work upfront now, while delaying outreach to local rental owners until Fall Semester when the students hopefully are in session under more normal circumstances. The proposal will be shared with the City Manager soon. Sam asked whether the Commission wanted more direct involvement, or if staff could continue coordinating primarily with Sherry on the study. General consensus was expressed for the latter. Glenn inquired as to whether the Butler County Consolidated Plan update was related to the housing study. Sam responded that some of the same questions may be asked of different entities, but these were otherwise separate projects. Sherry mentioned that she is active with ITGA, and is staying on top of how other college towns are dealing with various issues related to the pandemic.

Steve entered the meeting at roughly 1:43pm.

Zach shared an update on the Western Knolls property. As a follow up to the November Charrette, staff is currently putting together a summary report that showcases the five development scenarios generated by the participants. There has also been collaboration with planners at OKI Regional Council of Governments to run the five scenarios through their fiscal impact model, all of which showed a net deficit for city finances due to a large focus on residential use. The report, which could be used in the future to attract a developer or in conjunction with an RFP, will hopefully come together within the next couple of weeks. Sherry asked whether the report will be made publicly available upon completion, Zach replied yes. Steve was happy to hear about the progress. Jason asked what the timeline was for the report’s completion, Zach responded an exact date is not known at this point but it is currently being drafted and more will soon follow.

Nicola gave an update on the homeless population in Oxford. She expressed she has not witnessed an increase in the number of homeless due to the crisis, but the FRC is providing financial assistance for rent and utilities to a number of clients. No evictions are occurring at this
time, but the fear is that evictions may occur in the future once restrictions are lifted due to non-payment. There may still be folks who are experiencing homelessness due to the pandemic, but have not reached out to FRC for assistance. There is a scarcity of affordable housing in Oxford, so she is now turning to Hamilton and Middletown to find housing. Interaction with clients is taking place via email and phone, but they are still seeing people in person at the office who do not have access to these methods of communication. There have been some international students who are experiencing difficulty finding a job at this time, so FRC has coordinated with Miami (which has a student emergency fund) to help those students.

Steve commented that SCRC had discussed students abandoning belongings in their units, but did not discuss the emergency fund or students’ financial difficulties. He also expressed disappointment on the County Commissioners designating HUD funding for the tiny house project as a “wait and see,” as well as over the misconception that there are few struggling with homelessness in Oxford. He believes many in Oxford who are experiencing homelessness are not coming forward, to which Nicola agreed stating there can be a stigma attached to it. She said it can be difficult for some to find housing, especially if there are past records like evictions or felonies.

Sherry asked whether Steve could reach out to the County on behalf of the Commission. Sam said that would be fine, and that staff is continuing to remind the County that the tiny house project is a priority. Glenn asked Nicola how many of the evictions had occurred pre-“shelter-in-place” vs. post-“shelter-in-place.” She responded that when it came to the homeless, many had experienced an eviction a year ago or longer, and it was difficult to find housing even before COVID because many landlords will not house them. Scott asked where these individuals were currently living; Nicola said the Butler Inn, the Budget Inn, or in their cars. Sherry mentioned an idea from ITGA, to approach landlords of long-standing vacant properties to see if they would be willing to house the homeless. There was general discussion about how much motels are renting their rooms for – the conclusion was roughly $50 per night, or approximately $1,500 per month. Nicola said there are families that have resided at local motels for a year or longer. Many expressed frustration that this type of situation was occurring. Home sharing was discussed as a possible alternative.

Discussion moved on to revisiting the 2020 Goals in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The consensus achieved from the discussion was that all 5 goals should be kept as-is. There was general concern expressed over enrollment and the number of units being rented in the Fall Semester, depending on whether Miami chooses to conduct their classes in-person or online. Many of the prime units are rented for a 2-year period, so a lot of the lease agreements would still be in-tact for the fall. The other significant conclusion from the discussion was to create a special assessment fund for housing similar in spirit to the economic relief funding already provided to the CIC for the gift card program. Sam articulated that the City could benefit from having a third-party entity to handling housing in a more ongoing and dynamic way, that way the government is not directly involved and reduces potential for conflict – this could come about in one of three ways: (1) the CIC could take it on; (2) a new entity could be formed; or (3) the HAC could spin-off as its own third-party entity. Steve also suggested we could look to another non-profit in the County that could take over responsibility. Sam suggested the previous proposal last year to Council for moving funding over to the Community Foundation could simply be re-introduced, with a greater relevance now to insecurity caused by COVID-19. Sherry expressed a desire to retain a more local organization that could handle the funds. Sam proposed that staff could write
up some example scenarios of potential uses, and share them with the Commission and poll everyone before it goes to City Council – a strong consensus was reached on this direction.

Shana volunteered to work on Goal #1, incentives for residential set-asides.

Steve mentioned that Episcopal Retirement Communities continues to look at bringing low-income senior housing to Oxford. He also expressed his hope that future CDBG funding go to worthy projects.

Glenn shared that there is a virtual public meeting taking place via Zoom on Tuesday April 21 at 6:00pm on the subject of Butler County’s effort to update its Consolidated Plan and Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice.

Steve moved to adjourn at roughly 2:48 pm, Glenn seconded. Bracken-yea; Ellerbe-yea; Lind-yea; Rodrigues-yea; Rosenberg-yea; Straker-yea; Schnabl-yea. Motion passed.