

City of Oxford Housing Advisory Commission
Minutes of the August 17, 2020 Virtual Meeting – 1:30 p.m.
Held via Zoom App and Uploaded to YouTube in accordance with HB 197

HAC members in attendance: Sherry Lind, Glenn Ellerbe, Jason Bracken, Shana Rosenberg, Nicola Rodrigues, and Steve Schnabl.

HAC members excused: Scott Straker

Staff members in attendance: Sam Perry

Sherry called the meeting to order at 1:30 PM.

Jason Bracken moved and Shana Rosenberg seconded the approval of the July 20, 2020 minutes with no changes.

Sherry Lind reported a brief update on housing availability in Oxford as of mid-August College Property Management/Coldwell Banker has 12 vacancies for families, and 13 vacancies for students as of July 17, 2020 with 450 total units that's a 5.5% vacancy rate. Alpha Remax has 3 vacancies in non-student rentals, 1 student rental vacancy with a total of 55 available units with 5 being remodeled, that's a vacancy rate of 7%.

Shana Rosenberg asked Sam Perry to clarify the status of the Housing Trust Fund. Sam stated that the current plan is for the Trust Fund to be at zero balance until revenue sources are identified. Staff will plan on keeping the Fund this way for the 2021 budget year. Ideally a revenue source would be identified, but if there is not one, it will be OK to leave it at zero balance. This will be addressed in the City Council budget in October 2020. Funding sources: grants and other outside sources, Steve volunteered to check with housing funding sources he knows and suggested that once the housing report is completed that some of the large organizations in the area that appreciate housing needs could be approached. He suggested that Bud Scharf of Butler Metro Housing Authority would be a great resource. Steve stated that a stated specific need is usually needed before asking for funding. Steve suggested that it would be advantageous to have some income streams identified even with a start date in the future. Foundations want to know the plan for use of the money and documentation of need along with plans for sustaining the specific use for the money. Jason suggested that there is some data stating that per population density, Oxford has one of the highest homeless populations in Butler County. He said that there are data on homelessness at the Family Resource Center. Nicola stated that they have a count of approximately 75-80 persons came by looking for services for homelessness and she suggested that the Housing Crisis Response Program out of Warren County (utilized for Butler County) might be contacted to help provide housing funding for the homeless. She suggested that finding housing in Oxford is the most difficult part of the process. FRC has been in contact with the Crisis Response Program to see if some housing might be found in Hamilton for some of our Oxford residents in need. Sherry suggested that the Trust Fund have two buckets, one for homelessness and one for establishing affordable housing in Oxford. Jason suggested that there be a listing of all of the grants that would be available to us. Sherry suggested that this year accurate figures will be more difficult to determine due to the flux in housing with the University still determining its housing needs and uses due to COVID-19 and how the academic year will shake out. Delaying the

study implementation until this fall will prove valuable as things are in flux in terms of occupancy rates, etc.

Shana then moved to discussion of a percentage of the Transient Guest Lodging tax as a source of revenue. Glenn stated that the transient lodging services need to be folded into the Hospitality Tax. He suggested that since this has been discussed in City Council for about a year, that this would be a judicious time for the City to finalize a decision. Shana reminded us that HAC had recommended that Glenn take our positive response to that move to City Council. Glenn stated that City Council has been meeting to discuss funding goals due to the current pandemic funding issues. Sam stated that the number of transient guest lodging (TGL) houses have increased in recent years.. Steve suggested that this is the time for Council to discuss this because of timing of cancellation of events. Jason stated that the City needs the revenue and that the needs of our population will be increasing. Glenn pointed out that the need for TGL's will not decrease because there are weekly college oriented non-University events that go on that will need this source. Glenn emphasized that in order to fund the funding assistance from the City we want to for programs we need to make sure we find as many sources for funds that we can and the transient tax is one that needs to be tapped. Sam said that he is in ongoing discussions with the City Finance Director about the transient tax and that HAC's support for it is known. He said to look for decisions to be made in October and November. Jason asked for a definition of a B&B and asked if it applies to the tax. Sam said the definition was in the documentation approved by the Planning Commission and it would only apply to the current state code of "more than 5 beds". But the local amendment needs to be made to the State code for it to apply to all TGL's. This is all assuming that owners submit their usage to the City. Shana stated that the next step is for City Council to finalize this.

Glenn stated his concerns about inactive commercial properties and finding a way to incentivize performance of those properties. There has previously been a group dedicated to a business improvement district—an overlay district where contributions from the City were tiered based on performance of the property. This group no longer exists due to many members no longer being part of City administration. Steve suggested that perhaps those previously involved return to present to City Council a summary of their work so that someone could pick it up and continue progress on the issue. Glenn stated that this affects housing if you expand the idea to all commercial properties. He would like to see a redefinition of commercial property to include non-owner occupied housing properties. Jason suggests that this issue be addressed not just in terms of an income source for the City, but also in terms of blight. These properties draw in crime, drug use, often the properties are not kept up, the shortage of housing. Glenn suggested that first the transient tax needs to take place in October/November. Once that happens perhaps we could hire a company to audit the performance of these properties. Even though this would cost money, it would bring in money and save the time of City employees. Then we can come up with a set of regulation defining active usage of the property in a set time (perhaps 180 days). The owner then has a time period where they have some active use of the property. Focus would be on defining the property as "blighted". This could be discussed starting the first of the 2021 year. Sam suggests that a link to the housing study would help proving the housing needs of the City and provide another solution to our current affordable housing issues. Sam says that they should have the housing study draft the first week of October, the fee discussion is typically in November and it would make sense for the transient tax to go into effect at the start of a calendar year. The housing study should be available prior to the fee ordinance and tax discussion. Glenn suggested that there may be an example of this in Austin, TX. Perhaps someone could research this.

Shana suggested that we table the part of her discussion on the possible uses of the housing trust fund to the next meeting as well as updates on the agenda.

In lieu fees for incentives instead of actually providing affordable housing units—would a cash payment be a possibility to go into the Housing Trust Fund? Steve stated that in recent history, most of the development in housing has been in student housing. Glenn would prefer to present our housing conversations as not just “affordable housing”, but as “mixed-use housing”. He would suggest that we look at low-income housing, senior or intergenerational housing, contract month-to-month lease housing--year-round units instead of semester housing, Incentive programs to be presented to a developer. An example would be Miami Village where there was student housing as well as efficiency apartments for work-force housing mixed together. Shana has examples of codes which can be applied which she has found in her research and it could be put in place. Glenn asked Sam that in negotiations with developers on the 732 property, can you negotiate what we would be codifying in the future? Sam says that in terms of the 732 property, the City would prefer to do it as part of the sales agreement with the developers. But once there is legislation, the City could stipulate that it apply to other sales of property the City does not own. Glenn suggested that we use the 732 Western Knolls property as a trial run. To say we want X percentage of this to be mixed-use housing or you pay X dollars. Sam stated that we can do that depending on how the proposals go. If they have proposals from people with experience in mixed-use housing, they can apply it, if not, the City would have to use the code for future projects, but Council could decide not to sell to that developer.

Steve wondered about underperforming University properties (e.g, the old IT building on Brown Road). He also suggested that in Hamilton redevelopment government properties agreed to contribute to the fund. So, as a member of the community, the University also has underperforming properties.

Jason wanted a clarification that in lieu fees regarding mixed-use housing would go toward the Housing Trust Fund. HAC agreed.

Steve moved, and Glenn seconded, to table the homeless shelter, Western Knolls and Cottage Community discussions to the next (September) meeting. Sam stated that the Zoning Text amendment only will have its first reading at the first Council meeting in September.

Glenn moved to adjourn the meeting, Jason seconded. All members concurred. Meeting adjourned 2:45P.