Town of Sherman  
Housing Commission  

Special Meeting Minutes  

Monday, December 14th, 2020   5:30 PM  
Via Zoom (due to COVID-19)  

Members Present: Frank Copsidas, Barbara Ackerman, Catharine Cooke, Katie Harrison, Ted Hollander, James Philipakos  

Members Absent: Carol Faure  

Also Present: Don Lowe—First Selectman, Janet Wey, Art von Plachecki, Melanie McNichol, John Cilio, Michele MacKinnon—Commission Clerk  

Call to Order: F Copsidas called the meeting to order at 5:32 PM.  

A draft Housing Commission Final Report was read into the record by T Hollander. Discussion followed and the report was revised accordingly.  

F Copsidas asked for a motion to approve the Housing Commission report as written.  

Motion was made by T Hollander.  
C Cooke seconded the motion.  
Vote for: Unanimous.  

Adjournment:  
K Harrison moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:45 PM.  
B. Ackerman seconded the motion.  
Vote for: Unanimous.  

Respectfully submitted by:  
Michele MacKinnon  
14th December 2020  

Enc: Report to the Board of Selectmen, dated 12/14/2020
To the Selectmen and fellow residents of Sherman,

Our mission statement, as published on the town’s website, reads as follows:

The Housing Commission was created to promote and encourage the development and continued availability of Senior Housing and/or affordable housing for the people of Sherman by bringing together public and private resources, developing recommendations for comprehensive housing policies and goals, and facilitating the accomplishment of those goals.

This commission is an advisory commission to report findings directly to the Selectmen’s office.

At this time, we feel we have accomplished our mission. These are our recommendations.

In summary, we focused on Senior Housing, but not State of CT defined “affordable housing.”

We accomplished the following:

- input from the Connecticut Statewide Program Local Initiative Support Corporation.
- most importantly we heard from Sherman seniors through direct contact as well as a written questionnaire.
- visited some of the senior and affordable housing in nearby towns that are similar in size and character to Sherman.
- reviewed typical building plans and the associated costs for rentals.
- along with representatives from the Commission on Aging and the Director of Social Services attended a daylong seminar sponsored by the AARP on “Roadmap to Livability [for Seniors].
- communicated with developers and management companies to gauge the level of interest for a comparatively smaller project as described below.

We have concluded, as previous commissions have, that there is indeed a growing need for Senior housing. We think this need can best be met with a two-pronged approach.

The first approach is a mix of 18-24 apartments (studios, one and two bedroom apartments) in a two story building with architecture in keeping with the New England vernacular style similar to that of the building presently housing the post office and the American Pie restaurant. These would be reasonably priced rental apartments, not to be confused with ‘affordable housing’. This could also include shared professional space, such as medical and/or dental offices, for the public’s use, with the obvious advantages to our local townspeople and the senior residents.

This project could also include space for the Senior Center, which needs a new, larger home. If this combination of services were deemed feasible then the Senior housing could still be a privately developed and managed project. If the Senior Center is included, it could become a public/private venture - in keeping with our mission statement. Either way, a change in zoning rules would be necessary to move forward.

Land evaluated:
We considered several privately owned parcels.

Another possibility discussed was leasing town-owned land which would result in positive tax revenue for the town. There are two parcels we have considered. The first is a parcel west of the Senior Center but it has inherent physical limitations. The other is a portion of the large parcel behind the American Pie restaurant, which does not include the soccer field. This was previously considered but turned down by a town vote. Since that vote the need for Senior housing has only increased. The negative reaction at the time of the vote was due in part to the misperception that the project would infringe or take over the soccer fields when, in fact, it would have been far removed from the fields and would not have been visible from the road.

Sherman seniors, with their extensive array of talents, volunteerism, and tradition of caring for their neighbors, are one of our most valuable assets. Town-owned property is used for open space and other town uses. With tasteful housing for seniors, both needs can be met by preserving and/or expanding any nearby existing hiking trails for all to enjoy. Benefits to the town for leasing land is significant 1) additional tax revenue a private facility would contribute, 2) the town retains ownership of the land, 3) the town does not incur additional costs for essential services.

The second recommendation is to allow guest houses on 4-acre lots. Guest houses are already allowed on 8-acre lots. This is a simple approach that can be done with a zoning revision.

To conclude, we have learned there is no 'one size fits all' in meeting the needs of our valuable seniors. The guest house option may be attractive to seniors who are self-sufficient, able to drive and do not suffer from isolation or loneliness. A senior housing facility option works for those who no longer need or want the responsibilities of home ownership but do want greater socialization and less isolation - especially in winter months. Isolation in rural areas must not be taken lightly; it can lead to serious depression and is downright dangerous in inclement weather. Also, a senior living complex close to the town center with a well designed physical layout, would allow easier and safer access for our wonderful volunteer first responders.

In summary, we recommend a senior living facility with or without the senior center on site and allowing one guest house on 4-acre parcels.

This commission has followed through on our mission and achieved what was asked of us in good faith. As to the last sentence of the mission statement, while we are happy to facilitate any of the above, we feel it is time for the town to decide what we, as citizens, neighbors and friends, want for our town and our senior citizens.

The Housing Commission thanks the town for the opportunity to serve and we hope we have helped to further define and offer creative solutions for our seniors.

Signed,

Frank Copsidas, Chairman, on behalf of the Sherman Housing Commission