



Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

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Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments and Lower Connecticut River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization

MINUTES OF REGIONAL HOUSING COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, January 23, 2024 – 2:00 PM

Members & Alternates Present: Pat Bandzes (Chester), Bonnie Bennet (Chester), Carol Jones (Deep River), David Rosengren (Essex), Carey Duques (Essex), David Lahm (Lyme), Marek Kozikowski (Middletown), Michael Fogliano (Old Lyme),

Others Present: Kara Capone (Mercy Housing), Karla Lindquist (HOPE Partnership)

RiverCOG Staff Present: Megan Jouflas, Eliza LoPresti, Susie Beckman, Kevin Armstrong, Marcos Gonzalez

Call To Order

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Fogliano at 2:02 p.m. The meeting was held in person and via Zoom video conference.

Approval of Minutes of December 19, 2023 Meeting

Ms. Bandzes moved to approve the minutes of the December 19, 2023 meeting; second by Ms. Joens. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Speaker – Kara Capone, Mercy Housing

Ms. Capone explained that Mercy Housing, which is a part of Community Housing Advocates, supports people that need to get back on their feet and focuses on permanent housing solutions. Established in 1983, they help formerly unhoused people to stay housed. They work with landlords, individuals and families, the CAN (coordinated access networks), towns, and other agencies. Throughout Middlesex County they have about 100 different housing units. They have outreach, diversion, and prevention programs and services can be light or intense depending on the client's needs. They are funded from wherever they can get it – grants, Dept of Health, Dept of Mental Health & Addiction Services, HUD, donations, foundations, etc.

When asked about trends she is seeing in homelessness, Ms. Capone stated that more elderly and disabled folks are becoming homeless, for reasons such as people getting priced out of the apartments they are in if they are on a fixed income, out of town (NY-based) landlords buying properties and raising rents, and only a 2% rental vacancy rate. Additionally, family homelessness is on the rise, with new families who have never been part of the system before. Other causes for rising homelessness that she is seeing are high interest rates have created too many renters for what is available, zoning issues, lack of infrastructure, perception of affordable housing, and property management firms or owners that sit on their properties and watch their value increase.

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There was discussion on calling affordable housing workforce housing and what that means, and suggestions on approaching those hard conversations at a municipal level. As Mercy aims to keep people housed in their existing communities, iterating that their children might want to move back home, or that they might want to age in place could help. There was discussion on loosening up ADU restrictions as well. Ms. Capone mentioned that churches are good partners for holding these discussions as well.

A possible partnership between HOPE Partnership and Mercy Housing was touched upon, especially as HOPE properties sometimes have residents that require more services than they offer.

A good way for towns to support Mercy is to find landlords with rental properties at fair market rates, have more discussions on opening the town up to be more affordable for young families, talk about other roadblocks like wetlands, parking studies, etc., that can come up within towns, and that community investment grants from the state that can support infrastructure to support housing would be helpful. Ms. Linqvist noted that HOPE has an education and advocacy group that can help present to towns if needed.

Kara Capone, Chief Executive Officer
Mery Housing/ Community Housing Advocates
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Toolkit Item – Glossary of Acronyms/Terms

Framework for Upcoming Meetings

For 2024, there will be recurring agenda items when relevant, listed below.

- a. **Speaker Series**
- b. **Legislative Updates**
- c. **Funding Opportunities**
- d. **Development Opportunities**

Housing Needs Assessment Methodology

One of the charges of the committee is to come up with a methodology to assess housing needs in the region. The state is also working on this, so the idea is that we can get out ahead of that and present to them what we've created, and/or go above and beyond the state to a methodology that suits our preferences and needs. There was discussion of a few regular meetings being replaced by working sessions dedicated to just this. It was suggested that the speaker series focus on this topic as well.

Updates From Members

Chester is creating a housing committee.

Essex has a proposal to change setbacks (to make them smaller); Mr. Rosengren asked for others' experiences with this.

Other

Mr. Gonzalez offered an advanced mapping exercise. He is looking for one town to get a detailed, parcel-level list for non-profits like Mercy Housing, HOPE Partnership, Habitat for Humanity, etc. that matches what their needs are. He will get a catalogue of their requirements. This will help connect what they are looking for with what a town may have/know about. This will be on the agenda for the February meeting.

Adjournment

Ms. Jones moved to adjourn the meeting at 3:39 PM; second by Mr. Rosengren. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Eliza LoPresti