

Town of North Canaan  
Housing Steering Committee  
April 6, 2022

Present: Jocelyn Ayer, First Selectman Charlie Perotti, Ashleigh Bergenty, Mike Pallone, Will Perotti, Marybeth Wabrek

Ms. Ayer opened the meeting at 5:34pm

We are working towards the next meeting with the public. This committee needs to be comfortable with the goals and strategies.

Listening into this meeting is a property owner who is interested in the possibility of housing on his property.

Ms. Ayer shared the draft zoning analysis with the committee. There was a discussion regarding permitted residential uses in towns vs special permits and the complications that go with them. Other towns are allowing additional accessory apartments – 1 in house and 1 in garage for example. There is a law on the books and if the town does not opt out of it then with a site plan it could be allowed. Other towns are removing the owner occupancy requirements as well. In our regulations it is unclear if two family homes or duplexes are allowed, and this should be clarified in the regulations. Also not clearly defined is mixed use. Many places in town have both residential and commercial – could be grandfathered in. We need to make sure regulations don't prohibit or make it more challenging than it should be for housing. Selectman Perotti will bring all of this to the board's attention.

The resource links in the housing plan can be just the link making the document shorter.

It is up to the committee whether they just want to do a plan for affordability or if they want to include all types of housing. The plan has to be done per legislation, but it doesn't not have to be only affordable. Most towns want to do a broader view rather than focus on just the one item. Ms. Bergenty stated that accessory apartments won't necessarily be affordable. Selectman Perotti suggested including all options on the plan.

A lead entity for each strategy needs to be determined – otherwise things won't get done. For example, perhaps the EDC can take on a strategy or two. Or maybe sub committees should be created. Selectman Perotti thinks the EDC is a good place to start. There is not currently a housing committee. Will Perotti will bring this up at the next EDC meeting to see if there is interest.

A discussion of partnering perhaps with Geer for apartments ensued. Ms. Ayer spoke with Geer and the apartments would not just be for Geer employees. They understand the broader need for housing options in town. Ms. Ayer will work on getting clarification around the language of partnering.

Question of ARPA money. Selectman Perotti explained where the town was in the process with getting letters from groups requesting money and putting the committee together to discuss. The money can be used for certain housing items. The sewer department has requested some money.

Ms. Ayer will speak with Zoning Enforcement Officer to get more clarity on the regulations especially around conversions of larger houses into multiple units.

Need for senior housing. Ms. Bergenty stated she is unsure how much buildable land there is at Wangum site.

Suggestion was made that zoning allow up to 2 accessory apartments and should have the ZEO bring up to the board. Also remove the owner occupancy requirement. Mr. Perotti mentioned that Great Barrington reinstituted a rule like that because of out of state homeowners buying property and making it air bnbs

We have to make sure that the plan we create gets implemented. Making it part of the town plan of development will help. Some items are on a regional scale and some individual town information. The more resources in the plan the better. Housing is a huge need everywhere.

Ms. Ayer will work on a draft plan to then have another town forum for people to see the plan and give feedback. We will choose a date for the forum next month. Also get a housing committee started.

Mr. Pallone stated that getting some of the zoning information less complicated would help in keeping people from aborting plans. Still do due diligence but have less headaches by clarifying what the process is and what is needed up front. Selectman Perotti said maybe they can streamline some of the zoning regulations. Mr. Pallone will write up his suggestions and send to Ms. Ayer.

Monetarily this group is doing fine withing the technical assistance grant funding.

Next meeting is May 4.

Meeting adjourned at 6:34pm

Respectfully submitted,

Ayrslea A Odell

Recording Secretary