

Islesboro Housing Committee
Regular Meeting
Tuesday, August 15, 2024
In-Person Meeting at 5:00 PM, Town Office

APPROVED
10/10/24

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Chair Mike Nelson called the meeting to order at 5:07 PM.

2. Establishment of a Quorum

Quorum was established with over 3 members present

Members Present: Chair Mike Nelson, Tom Tutor, and Cate Blackford (5:10).

Members Present via Zoom: Susan West

Members Absent: Ginnie Hess, Melissa Burns, Ex Officio

Others Present via Zoom: Donna Leone

3. Approval of minutes of June 20, 2024

Motion: To approve Minutes of June 20, 2024, as written, T. Tutor, seconded by S. West. No discussion. Roll Call. Motion passed, 3 yes, 0 no, Unanimous.

4. MCOG Housing Working Group.

- Mike reported that the Midcoast Council of Governments (MCOG) representative he'd been in contact with had been sick, which is why the follow-up Housing Group meeting was delayed.
- Mike went with Melissa Burns to the MCOG General Assembly in Rockland on June 27th, and he was able to connect with this representative, Adi Philson.
- The Working Group had a sparsely attended meeting in July.
- Mike's concern is they seem to be focused on low-income/affordable housing, which might benefit IAP. Mike articulated that our committee is more focused on workforce housing. They all agreed that it's an issue, but the small group that was in attendance was more concerned about low-income housing. Unfortunately, a lot of people who were at the meeting use the term "workforce" instead of "affordable" housing. Mike will see if he can shift the focus at the next meeting.
- The next Housing Working Group meeting will be next week, Wednesday, August 21st. They're scheduled 5:30-7:00 on the third Wednesday of every month, via Zoom.
- Cate reported that she met with Alex from the Island Institute about their housing group to see about some of the innovations that Missa had shared from MDI and some of the other islands. They talked a lot about transportation, but there didn't seem to be a lot to share on different approaches in collaboration with other organizations. Mike stated he went to one meeting where Bar Harbor presented info on their housing models. Cate will see if we can get a copy of this presentation.

5. Further discussion – Next steps

- Tom stated he is still interested in investigating if there are any communities that give some sort of tax break or incentive for workforce housing, for workers making \$75,000 to \$125,000 a year.

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- Tom stated we need to get a handle on any available grant money. He sent some info via email today. The Biden administration announced \$100 million worth of investments in new housing in the form of grants to state and local governments to spur the production of new housing.
- Cate asked if this is the same money that was already announced. There is some money coming to Lewiston through a recent Biden administration investment in housing. If it's the same money coming to Maine, it's dedicated to a project in Lewiston. If it's a new source of money, that's different.
- Tom asked if there is federal money for grants applicable to our problem, how can we find out? Mike stated that MCOG would know, and can direct us. Mike stated he will ask Adi at the MCOG meeting next week. Cate stated that the Island Institute could possibly help.
- Cate stated that she is curious about grant money for water/sewer infrastructure. If we can put in water treatment centers in the other two town centers, that could facilitate more housing.
- Mike stated that Jen Hayden did work for Select Board. Part of that was looking at cross-committee needs for grant writing, etc. Mike will contact Jen about that.
- Tom stated that there are some aspects of the new density rules in Town Centers that use water treatment systems. We can only do so much without that. Tom read from the Ordinance. "All new construction in a Town Center shall be connected to a public sewer and water system if available... If a public sewer system is not available at the time of construction, a multiple family dwelling must be served by a common subsurface wastewater disposal system." The difficulty with Town Centers and small lots is the separation distance between subsurface wastewater disposal systems and wells, which in the Town Centers must be a minimum of 200 feet (on a 20,000-sf lot, this is difficult to do), unless a pre-treatment system is installed. Then there can be a minimum separation of only 100 feet.
- Mike stated there are a lot of new methods of treating wastewater, including in-house units.
- Susan asked if greywater needs to go through a septic system. Are composting toilets a possibility for housing where it's not possible to have water treatment? Tom thinks that's an option.
- Mike stated we could get an answer from the Planning Board. Mike will ask Dave Dyer.
- Cate asked if the Planning Board also tracks wells and access to the aquifer. Do we have restrictions in terms of density and enough water? Tom stated there's a Groundwater Protection Committee that does that. Wells could run dry or be contaminated, but we haven't heard about any problems recently.
- Cate is thinking that if the Housing Committee or the Town collaborates with a developer, such as IAP, that the Committee's role might be to do some initial research on alternative water systems options to smooth the pathway for something that's not a traditional septic system, and present those options to anyone who's thinking about developing on the island. Tom agreed. We might be the intermediary before an applicant goes to the Planning Board.
- Susan asked if the Town ever buys derelict properties. What is the possibility of purchasing these properties as a way to facilitate workforce housing? There are probably existing septic systems that could be viable. Or if taxes haven't been paid, can the Town take over a property?
- Mike stated that the Town hasn't foreclosed on a house for decades. In general, the Town is not interested in owning any other property.
- Cate stated that there's an entity at the state level that functions as a land bank to help municipalities with this question around derelict buildings, brownfields, etc. The intention is to provide a mechanism to do takeovers through eminent domain or tax liens and turn those properties to public use.

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- Tom stated we could ask Janet or a Select Board member that if there are properties in arears on taxes, could we look toward the Town taking those over for the specific purpose of providing year-round housing.
- If there were public funding to do remediation, and if we're receiving the land as a donation, would that bring down the cost of development enough for IAP or another group to do something?
- Discussion about the high cost of land now.
- Mike went over the list of actions:
 - Tom will look into tax incentives for developers of workforce housing.
 - Mike will look into grants. He will talk with MCOG and Jen Hayden.
 - Mike will talk with Dave Dyer about composting as a potential option vs. septic, and rules about wells.
 - Cate will look into tax increment financing.
 - Susan will look into advances in the technology of composting toilets and greywater systems, and state rules around these items.
- Cate is doing research on what island employers are paying. This is an informal survey for IAP. She will share the results.
- IAP is looking at state funding, such as the Rural Affordable Rental Housing Program, if funds are available. This has a minimum of five units in a project. Tom asked Cate to send info on this.
- Discussion about Area Median Income (AMI) in Waldo County. Home ownership might be a better target.
- Mike stated that maybe Islesboro Affordable Properties becomes the housing authority on the island. We don't want developments competing with each other over funding opportunities.
- Discussion about home ownership requirements and possible models. Co-op? Hybrid? Limited equity co-op model?

6. Comments from visitors

- None.

7. Next meeting date

- Next meeting Thurs, October 10, 5:00 PM.

8. Adjourn

Motion by T. Tutor, seconded by C. Blackford, to adjourn at 5:58 PM. Roll Call. Motion passed, 4 yes, 0 no, Unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,



Carrie Reed, Secretary

