

**Planning and Zoning Commission's**  
**Affordable Housing Subcommittee**

**Wednesday, December 1, 2021, 12:00 PM**

**No physical location. Meeting held electronically.**

**ACTION MINUTES**

P&Z Commissioners and Town Hall Staff in Attendance:

Danielle Dobin, Subcommittee Chair and Planning and Zoning Commission Chair  
Michael Cammeyer, Planning and Zoning Commission member  
Paul Lebowitz, Planning and Zoning Commission member  
Jen Tooker, 1<sup>st</sup> Selectman  
Elaine A. Daignault, Director of Human Services  
Mary Young, Planning and Zoning Director  
Michelle Perillie, Deputy Planning and Zoning Director  
Michael Kiselak, Planning and Zoning Planner

Public in Attendance:

Jonathan Steinberg, State Representative  
Helen McAlinden, President/CEO Homes with Hope  
Harris Falk, RTM District 2 Representative  
Jeff Wieser, RTM District 4 Representative  
Wendy Batteau, RTM District 8 Representative  
Bill Rubidge, Resident  
Elizabeth Rubidge, Resident  
Catherine Onyemlukwe, Resident  
Tom Foran, Resident  
Ross Burkhardt, Resident  
Cheryl Scott-Daniels  
Serenity Bishop  
Lisa Mann, Resident  
Rebecca Martin  
Rick Redniss, Redniss and Mead

Ms. Dobin, the Planning and Zoning Commission Chair and Affordable Housing Subcommittee Chair, welcomed all attendees and introduced the first and only agenda item.

**1. Discussion of strategy for drafting the §8-30j Affordability Plan.**

Ms. Dobin started by asking Ms. Perillie, P&Z Deputy Director, to discuss the Town's obligation to develop an affordable housing plan and discuss the timing set by the state.

Ms. Perillie provided background information about the plan and its content. In 2017, the state enacted Public Act 17-170, which mandated that each municipality shall develop an affordable housing plan and update it every five years. The plan should identify how the town plans to increase affordable housing stock. The CT Department of Housing released guidance in 2020 which identified six basic elements that a plan should address:

1. Community Values Statement
2. History of Affordable Housing in your town

3. Housing needs assessment
4. Land use and zoning assessment
5. Understanding your housing market
6. Plans principles, goals and actions

Ms. Perillie continued to explain that WestCOG is working on creating a regional affordable housing plan which will include an appendix for each member municipality. The WestCOG plan or parts thereof can be incorporated into our plan if the Town so chooses. Westport's own plan can focus on our community values and specific actions.

Ms. Dobin discussed the process for bringing the plan into fruition. She wants to have opportunities for community-wide discussion on diversified housing, keeping in mind state-level requirements. She posed the question: do we want to take control of developing affordable housing through the public sector or leave it to the private sector to develop? She laid out the timeline for producing a plan that was developed with P&Z staff. The goal is to engage as many different stakeholders in Westport as possible and think outside the box for solutions moving forward.

The 1<sup>st</sup> item on the timeline is this meeting on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. In January 2022, a discussion is planned at the Westport Library with 1<sup>st</sup> Selectman Jen Tooker. The forum will be sponsored by the P&Z Commission, Board of Selectman, Westport Library, and Fairfield County Center for Housing Opportunity (FCCHO) to provide people with a history of affordable housing, potential aspects of the plan, and a general Q&A opportunity. The information will be collected and used to generate and distribute a survey throughout January/February 2022. Then, a forum sponsored jointly by Westport's four political parties (Save Westport Now, the Coalition for Westport, the Westport Democratic Party, and the Westport Republican Party) will be held in February 2022. This forum will be designed to engage voices from across the spectrum. The Affordable Housing Subcommittee will meet in March 2022 to review findings, outcomes, and hold further discussion. A draft of the affordable housing plan will be presented in April 2022 to the Affordable Housing Subcommittee for initial public review. The plan will be refined and finalized in May/June 2022.

Ms. Dobin explained that the Town often hires consultants to prepare reports and plans, but the P&Z Commission wants to develop this plan in-house with help from P&Z staff. Rather than create an addendum to the WestCOG affordable housing plan, Westport can create its own plan, pull relevant data from WestCOG, and use WestCOG's plan as an addendum.

Commissioner Lebowitz stated that he wants to hear what public has to say and is in listening mode today.

Ms. Dobin opened the floor for input from the public in attendance.

Mr. Steinberg, as a State Representative, wants to act as liaison with the state about efforts in Westport and forestall state efforts to create new impositions until a recently-created state commission can further investigate affordable housing issues.

Commissioner Cammeyer said he thinks it's important that the Commissioners listen to residents before offering feedback. These meetings will allow us to have a comprehensive game plan.

Helen McAlinden, President/CEO Homes with Hope, stated that affordable housing is a huge crisis right now for the lower income population she serves. There are people with multiple jobs trying to find an affordable place to live. It's important to set aside affordable housing. She's looking forward to helping everyone have a safe, affordable place to call home.

Ms. Dobin added that she receives calls daily from people trying to move to Westport and looking for affordable housing.

Jen Tooker, 1<sup>st</sup> Selectwoman, joined the meeting and was recognized by Ms. Dobin to provide comments.

Ms. Tooker said that she has had preliminary discussions with Ms. Dobin about affordable housing and will continue to do so in the coming weeks. The initiatives of this subcommittee are very important for Westport. Ms. Tooker plans to be as involved as possible by working with the P&Z Commission, to take these initiatives to provide housing seriously.

Bill Rubidge, 18 West Parish Road, offered support for the goal of providing a diverse housing base. He also wanted to offer specific comments about past plans for an affordable housing solution near his home on West Parish Road that included coordination with the state regarding highway facilities.

Ms. Dobin interjected that she wants to talk about specific projects at a separate forum and keep this discussion about the agenda more general. She offered that she and/or P&Z staff would be willing to set up a separate conversation to discuss his thoughts.

Wendy Batteau said it all sounds well thought out. She asked if, in addition to political parties, the P&Z Commission would consider having RTM committee representation at the February 2022 forum in conjunction with the political parties to broaden the outreach?

Ms. Dobin clarified that the forum planned for the Westport Library and the subsequent forum with the political parties are open to everyone. RTM members are welcome to participate, and she welcomes the RTM representatives reaching out to their constituents. The whole goal is to get the widest attendance possible. Ms. Dobin reminded the attendees that only elected P&Z commissioners are legally permitted to serve on official P&Z subcommittees. Co-sponsors through other RTM committees to boost attendance at affordable housing forums is encouraged.

Jeff Wieser noted that the 2017 Plan of Conservation and Development differs from the 2007 POCD regarding affordable housing. He asked, how does the 2017 POCD impact efforts now to develop an affordable housing plan?

Ms. Dobin responded that people are welcome to review old plans for context and noted that Mr. Cammeyer leads the POCD High Level Review Subcommittee, which is reviewing the 2017 POCD for potential future updates. They are considering incorporating this 5-year plan into the POCD so the POCD continually represents the most current perspective on affordable housing.

Mr. Wieser said he thinks this sounds like a good idea.

Ross Burkhardt offered that he recommends P&Z staff be in contact with the Fairfield County Center for Housing Opportunity. The FCCHO has useful data for planners for creating the affordable housing plan. The FCCHO could also provide assistance if needed.

Ms. Dobin responded by pointing out that Christie [Stewart] with FCCHO will be moderating the first forum at the Westport Library in January 2022. Ms. Dobin agreed that FCCHO is a valuable resource.

Ms. Dobin suggested that Ms. Perillie re-distribute the proposed timeline to Commissioners for discussion in a future Work Session.

Commissioners Cammeyer and Lebowitz stated they have no further comments at this time.

Ms. Perillie added that P&Z staff will be creating an affordable housing web page on the Town's website so that people can stay up to date with the latest developments.

Ms. Dobin asked for any additional public comments and confirmed that there were no more people seeking to speak.

Ms. Dobin concluded the meeting offering her thanks to all who attended, encouraged all to participate in public hearings, and adjourned the meeting at 12:30 p.m.

A full audio recording of the meeting is archived and available on the Town of Westport's website, [here](#).

**Respectfully Submitted By:**

Michael Kiselak; Planner

December 2, 2021