



OBSERVER REPORT

FAIR HOUSING COMMITTEE (FHC) – January 20, 2022 at the Jacobi Community Center and via Zoom LWVM Observer – Bonnie Grenier

Members Present -Debra Larkin, Dirk Isbrandtsen, Mimi Hollister, Teri McDonough, Deacon Joseph Whipple, Kurt James, Katie Farrell, Frank Evans
Guests: Jason Silva, Becky Curran Cutting, Emily Battaglia, Louis Meyi, Bob Neuss

Emily Battaglia, project manager from MAPC requested feedback from FHC members about the December 7th: community meeting which was held to discuss development of the Coffin School property. Dirk Isbrandtsen had compiled a list of reactions from the previous FHC meeting:

- Any development must help enhance the neighborhood
- Some of the multi-family/condo developments on nearby Green Street are not particularly attractive and any new housing should not mimic those properties
- Mixed feelings about retaining some/all of the original building
- There is a tension between building the maximum number of units and maximizing green space
- The appearance of the new building(s) should be “timeless” (New England colonial)
- Many on the committee feel that occupancy should be mixed although that may not be feasible economically for the developer
- Some like the idea of townhouses while others envision a larger multi-family building
- Investing in thoughtful landscaping should help neighbors appreciate the town’s thoughtful management of this project

Other thoughts from the December 7th meeting and on the project in general:

- Some neighbors are extremely opposed to the project and it may not be possible to change their hearts and minds
- Need to educate people as to how much open space the town already has, especially in comparison to similar communities
- This project is an opportunity to bring cultural diversity to the town
- Affordable housing could help people who work in Marblehead afford a place to live in town, i.e., teachers, fire fighters, police, nursing home workers
- This will have to be a 40B project since the neighborhood is zoned single family
- 30-40 units is a likely minimum for this to be a financially feasible project. Thus, town houses are probably not an option.

- Those with 30%, 50% or 80% of the minimum household income should qualify
- A state-wide lottery system would be used to market these units. Up to 70% local preference is allowable for people who live or work in Marblehead
- There is some cost saving with re-development of the school; some tax credits may also be available
- This project would have to be approved by Town Meeting
- Abbot Library is renting space in the Coffin School until 2023 allowing more time for planning.

The next step is an RFI (Request for Information) to developers for ideas for financially feasible affordable housing on the site. Various renditions of possible construction might help alleviate existing fears and concerns as to how the property could look.

The Housing Production Plan Implementation Committee (HPPIC) has not met since October 28th. With Jason Silva leaving as Town Administrator, Becky will not be able to carry on sole leadership of this committee given all her other responsibilities. The FHC would like to see one member of the Board of Selectmen take a more active part on the HPPIC.

Bob Neuss still has not been interviewed by the Board of Selectmen for the open seat on the FHC despite his having submitted a letter of interest several months ago.

Committee members are still looking for information from other towns as to where they get money for their Affordable Housing Trust Funds, how they expend those funds, and what they've tried that has or hasn't worked.