Town of Harwich

REAL ESTATE & OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE (REOS)

Meeting Minutes

October 20, 2023

Members Present: Elaine Shovlin (Chair), Dave Callaghan, Kathy Green, Brad Hinote, Margo Fenn and Carol Porter. Absent: Marcie Smith

Guests Present: Joseph Rego (Harwich Fire Association), Michael Lach (Ex. Director Harwich Conservation Trust)

8:30 AM - meeting called to order by Chair Elaine Shovlin

Motion made by Kathy Green to move into Executive Session, seconded by Dave Callaghan - by roll call vote - all in favor.

8:45 AM - returned to regular meeting.

New Business: Discussion on the letter of support for the Harwich Fire Association’s application to the Community Preservation Committee. Joe Rego presented the Harwich Fire Association's proposal for remodeling the old Bank Street fire station. HFA has been an association for one hundred years. It is a booster club for firefighters. Their work includes education and scholarships for youths. They received CPA funding for historical restoration and repair of the exterior of the building. HFA, a group of 40-plus people, sees the future as a workforce not having housing. Plan three one-bedroom apartments. The intention is to make it affordable. They are working with HCT and have reached out to the Harwich Affordable Housing Trust. They have also reached out to some financial institutes that allow grants for affordable housing. $850,000 is needed. Accepting public funds will have to follow Fair Housing Act rules. HFA is also requesting $150,000 per apartment from AHT. The amounts are placeholders. If any funds are received, HFA will reduce the $850,000 request to the CPC. An HFA subcommittee is looking at other fundraisers. Discussion on floor plan and elements of the building. Michael Lach said HCT is grateful to work with HFA on acquiring the two-acre parcel and is impressed by HFA’s exterior remodel. HCT is fully behind HFA’s endeavor. Discussion regarding a letter of support from REOS: there is synergy between open space, housing, and historic preservation with this project. We need these creative, small solutions. The timeline is one and one-half years. HFA can proceed faster than a town committee. The goal is to complete the project in one and one-half years. Kathy moved that the Real Estate and Open Space Committee write a letter of support in favor HFA moving ahead with their affordable housing request to the Community Preservation Committee. Seconded. All in favor.

Report on Open Meeting Law Meeting. Kathy reported on her attendance. She reported that ceremonies such as ribbon cuttings or celebratory occasions do not have to be posted as a meeting. On-site visits do not need to be posted, but in neither case can you deliberate. There was discussion around Executive Session minutes. They should be filed in a central place. REOS should review Executive Session minutes once a year in June. It was also noted that no acronyms should be used on the agenda or in minutes. The agenda and minutes should be understandable to anyone reading them.

Old Business: Dave moved to approve the regular meeting minutes of August 18, 2023, seconded. 5 voted in favor, and Carol abstained.

Update on tax title research: the select board signed a one-year contract with Paul S Kapinos & Associates. Gail McAleer of Kapinos & Assoc. will work on REOS’s three recommended properties to prioritize and will update REOS sometime in the future. The roadblock is because the town has no tax collector or town planner, and the assessor’s office is short-staffed. Without information on action taken to date on REOS’ recommendations, REOS cannot know what to focus on to move forward.

Member Reports:

Kathy reported the CPC has 17 applications for greater than $5 million with a guesstimate of $2.2-2.5 million available. Lots of requests in the community housing area. No complaints from users on the new online submission process. Kathy reviewed the online submission process for REOS.

Margo reported the Planning Committee is working on a community survey. They have already distributed postcards with three questions and received over one hundred responses. The questions are also available online. The committee is doing outreach to specific groups in town to reach different stakeholders. The committee now has a consultant from Tighe & Bond, Sharon Rooney.

Dave reported that he is working on the maps and should have them ready in a couple of weeks. It would be good to put them up on the board for review at the next REOS meeting. Discussion on map data and systems.

Elaine will attend the Affordable Housing Trust meeting on Monday at 1 P.M. Mike MacAskill wants a meeting with REOS, the assessor’s office, the finance officer, and the tax office on cooperation between groups. Mike is working on the priorities lists we recommended. Elaine has gone to Jeff Handler’s and Mary Anderson's open office meeting. It is very informal and they are getting input from townspeople. Kathy and Elaine met with Brianna Powell, the town housing advocate. Brianna was talking about a housing fair with Habitat, HAC, and more. Michael Lach noted an Annual Conference cosponsored by the Housing Assistance Corp. is coming up.

Kathy reported on the HCT and Affordable Housing Trust Presentation regarding open space and housing collaboration. A gentleman from Stowe, Massachusetts spoke on two projects in that town. The presentation was well attended. Behind-the-scenes work to complete the projects was presented in detail.

Next REOS meeting: November 17, 2023

Motion to adjourn made by Kathy; seconded - all in favor - meeting adjourned at 9:45 AM.

Respectfully Submitted, Carol Porter, Clerk