

Low and Moderate Income Housing Development Task Force

Monday, March 27, 2023 - 11:00 am

Jim Monty - Chairman

Chairman Monty called this task force to order at 11:10 am with the following in attendance: Clayton Barber, Derek Doty, Charlie Harrington, Ken Hughes, Jim Monty, Tom Scozzafava, Matt Stanley, Mark Wright, Mike Mascarenas, Terri Morse (11:15), Bill Tansey, Carol Calabrese and Nicole Justice-Green. Mike Diskin, Krissy Leerkes, and Alan Jones were absent.

Also present: - Jim Dougan, Megan Murphy and Dina Garvey.

MONTY: Thank you, all. Mr. Hughes and I had a discussion last week about the role of the Housing Task Force, since we've already submitted the application, which we'll have Mr. Tansey update us here shortly. Our thought process was we probably should continue to meet, maybe not every month, depending on what we come across on concerns that we have and the direction that we want to go looking at housing situations throughout Essex County, in particular to the grants that we have out there and other things that we're looking to do.

HUGHES: Yeah, I don't have my notes from last time, but I feel like we finished off that conversation after we approved the land bank and all those discussions, that we finished off talking about housing for senior citizens, which is important, rental properties, long term rental properties and the availability of those properties are important. Certainly our partners at HAPEC, our partners at PRIDE and other agencies that deal with housing in Essex County would have more background on different areas. So, I don't feel that just because we have submitted the land bank app that we're done. There are still other things that we really should be focusing on and because there still is a housing crisis and I hate to see us put all our eggs in one basket. So, I am optimistic for further conversations, the frequency of those, as you mentioned remains to be seen and should be discussed today, but I still think that we have a lot of work to do of other segments of our population that need housing assistance.

MONTY: Mr. Tansey, would you like to update us on our application and I know it's out at the Department of State.

TANSEY: I submitted the application I think it was Tuesday or last week, application was the form, the proposed bylaws, there was a proposed certificate of incorporation and there was the resolution that the Board passed to apply for the land bank. Our resolution listed two Board of Director members, the intent of the land bank is to us Board of Directors currently sitting on the PRIDE of Ticonderoga. When our application is to the point where is it close to being approved, we did the resolution and insert all the Board of Directors that actually sit on the Board, so that is upcoming. The attorney, he works for ESD and I have been in touch with him, I attend to follow-up this week about our application. He assured me that he'll provide feedback as to what we need, either to strengthen that application or to complete it. We use the work bank in our corporate title, I think that's what has been used, bank is intended for money and deposits and such, so we have to get special permission to use bank in our corporate name. That seems to be a formality, so we'll take care of that as well. I just that it was an interesting bit of trivia to share. Any questions?
Thank you

MONTY: So, any thoughts on what our direction should be other than what Ken and myself had talked about?

MCNALLY: Has the Governor take out the auction payback thing, out of the budget?

MONTY: That I don't know, I know there has been discussion of it at that level.

SCOZZAFAVA: You mean on the county foreclosure?

MCNALLY: Yeah

SCOZZAFAVA: I think that's a dead issue.

MCNALLY: The Assembly and the Senate I know said no to it, I'm not sure it stayed in. If that stays in there, it's going to make the land bank very, very difficult with the revenue from that, it's going to really further our cause.

MONTY: It is, but it also just forces us to look at our avenues and look at other funding sources, other funding streams. I don't want to use that to give up. I am pretty hard headed in that regard. I think this is something that we need to do and we need to push on it figure out a way that we can do this. I really think the appropriate people, I think the only push back may come from some of the discussion we had earlier today about development in our Adirondack Park. I think that maybe some of the pushback we may receive.

STANLEY: I think if that does end up going through that allows us to actually pull some better properties out of foreclosure, because we have a property that is, we could actually cherry pick the better properties, if that does go through, because there's no point in selling a piece of property that's going to make more than the taxes that are owed, if the county can use it in the land bank, because we have that ability to do that' correct?

MONTY: Yes

STANLEY: So, I think, if that does goes through, we now look and see what better properties can we actually do something and keep them for our residents as opposed to selling to somebody that wants to make them a STR. There's no advantage to sell something for more if we're not going to be able to keep the profits.

JUSTICE-GREEN: I was just going to add that the amount of income coming into the land bank from the recouped taxes on those properties is obviously helpful and beneficial, but the bulk of land banks are either funded directly by the municipalities or grant funds and to rehab a home is going to cost us anywhere between \$100,000-\$200,000, maybe less and so the plan, which Ken and I worked in detail on for the different funding avenues, while the recouped taxes were included, I mean they were very far down on that funding list. I mean they will make a positive impact, but they are not going to be what makes or breaks the land bank or certainly is not going to be what is going to fund a rehab outright.

MCNALLY: I am in complete favor of the land bank, don't get me wrong. To your point, you know it would get us better properties, but if you're given a property, say there's \$40,000.00 worth of taxes owned on it, if you get that property to the land bank, that \$40,000.00 is coming from the taxpayers of Essex County, you know maybe it would have sold for \$80,000.00 and we would have gotten \$40,000.00, but it's going to have that effect, also. You know, it's going to give us a chance at better properties, but somebody has to pay for that property.

MASCARENAS: I would like to talk about that a little bit, because there is, you're absolutely right, 100% right, but what people don't understand is what the current process is and the current process also costs your taxpayers a lot of money. So, the current process is, we put a property up at the auction, the property, the last auction we did well, but that has not been the history of tax sales in Essex County. So what happens? Well, if we have \$600,000.00 in back taxes owned and we only collect \$400,000.00 that's \$200,000.00 that your property tax payers are essentially eating through some other mechanism, but people don't look at it that way. They just look at as, well, we got back what we could and we move on, but in all reality, regardless of the mechanism that you're utilizing for these properties, you're losing money, almost always.

MCNALLY: That's also based on where the property is in the part of the county, too.

MASCARENAS: There's a lot of factors that go into it.

MCNALLY: If you go through the auction and find out where there's negatives.

MASCARENAS: Yeah, last auction we were profitable, absolutely were, but up until that point I don't know. Tommy's been here a long time and I can tell you we lost money at auctions almost every time we do it. We lose and the bottom line is, who picks up that cost are the people that do pay their taxes.

MONTY: The County taxpayers. Your town and school districts are already made whole by the County, already.

HUGHES: Without sounding Pollyanna-ish I want to make sure that you understand that when we do get a family into one of those houses that there is a considerable contribution back to the community and I don't think we necessarily talk about those intangibles. They shop local, they go to school local, they work local.

MONTY: They may work for the County.

HUGHES: That's exactly right, so I just want to remember, yes, we do lose, we could lose money, immediately, which is understand the Treasurer does not love and should the Board, but I think there are some other financial benefits.

MONTY: Very good point, Ken. Anything else?

JUSTICE-GREEN: I think we kind of got off track about an important tangent about what the purpose of this committee should continue to be. I wasn't here then this committee was originally

formed and so I guess I would like to ask everyone here, what was the whole, the intent, the mission, strategic plan for this committee when it was formed and if the land bank hasn't necessarily met that mandate, since it's just one tool in the toolbox that we have and do we really start to dive into supporting rental housing, senior housing, I mean like what was the formation element, essentially for the committee?

MONTY: I think speaking for myself, you know we looked at, number one, we looked at affordable housing, because of the situation that we with recruitment/retention, number one for the county. People that want to come here for work can't find homes, can't find affordable homes. Then as we formed and we met, we got looking at everything as a whole, talking about senior housing, talking about congregant housing where were addressing mental health and substance abuse issues. I think these are all issues that we can address as a task force to bring a better quality of life for Essex County residents and I think that should be our number one concern. We all know that a lot of our homes are being purchased for short term rentals, second homes, that really isn't helping the 38,000 residents of Essex County. So, that's something we need, really need to consider and focus on is better those 38,000 while the people coming in contribute to our economy, absolutely and we don't have much business in Essex County outside of tourism and some agri-business, so a lot of it is supported by jobs that we offer here at the county and out there for the tourism industry, but if these people don't have a place to live, we're not going to be able to contribute in that regard. That was my thought.

HUGHES: I would actually reverse the question now and ask you, Nicole and I think Megan, from your housing agencies what do you wish government was doing to support or better fill in the gaps of the situations that you find on a day to day basis, local government?

MURPHY: I do agree with you, Ken, because I think we can do things on the ground, projects and things, but there's also a policy level where what needs to happen from a policy standpoint that supports having these different types of housing available in the right place at the right time and I am glad that we brought up, Terri is here, now, the supportive housing, because I think that has been a big question. Another thing is transitional or temporary housing for those that have maybe lost permanent housing. We do have an issue with that in Essex County. We have one place where our folks go, it has for the first time been full over the last summer. So, I do think that there is an issue with that, that we haven't, I don't know, and again, I 'm new to this group, too, so I'm not sure if this group has discussed that. Also, domestic violence, we do see a lot of folks calling us at HAPEC and so again, that's a transitional housing need that we have seen more and more, actually. We try and get some statistics, but it's a little bit difficult to find out. We have been referring folks to shelters in Franklin and Clinton Counties and looking at some creative options for housing folks temporality coming out of situations like that.

MASCARENAS: I can get you that information. They all come through DSS in terms of the placement, typically.

MURPHY: So, I do think those are some of them, definitely, long term rentals, I mean, for sure, absolutely, I think the plan that will be coming out from Lake Champlain/Lake George Regional Planning will be very helpful in helping us figure that one out, but we're already starting to try to work with different communities and try to figure out how to do some small rental projects to create

better stock of long term rentals. And other course, we're hearing that, too, about some our folks are elderly, so that one, too, is on the list for us. I think off hand those are some of the things that we're on the ground, fielding calls about, almost every day. So, I think we do have a lot to tackle here. It's become a tougher environment, I think about to 22 years ago when I moved here, buying a home and we ran into some of the same things that are happening now, it's just seems to be worse with what's happened. So, I think there's still quite a need for this task force.

STANLEY: To be a little more productive each time is have a different topic for month, so that we can get a little more in-depth and actually brainstorm about that topic? Because I think broadly we talk about things and then we miss things, because we move onto another topic too quickly.

MONTY: I concur with you on that, Matt. I think what we should do is for next meeting, for next month, come back with what we think we need and then out of that list we're pare it down and do exactly what you say, Matt. Okay, transitional housing, let's talk about that and do that accordingly. I think that's a great idea.

MASCARENAS: I was just going to add, that we certainly weren't the land bank task force. That's not what this group was, it was about affordable housing. I think right now our primary task, moving forward should be focused on the Governor's proposal and what they put out there, what they're trying to do and try work through those barriers are in government while the topic is hot. We have sent those letters initially to those groups. So, we have requested that we have a meeting with APA, Community Renewal, representatives from the Governor's office, DEC to talk about some of those barriers and open up that dialogue between us and them and see what they really need. So, my plan would be to focus on that knowing that there's likely to be funding following that and we need to strike while the iron's hot and move on from the land bank, I think into that next segment should be our natural order of tasks at hand, right now is getting into the weeds on the Governor's proposal, that would be my suggestion.

MONTY: And in response to Mike mentioning the letters, we have gotten a response back from OCR, from Mr. Phillion, he was very encouraging by what direction we're going in and he's already assigned someone to our group. We're still waiting to hear from the rest. That being said, I hate to rush us, but we do have a public hearing at 11:30. So, next month come back with something that's important to you that we need to focus on and then we'll categorize them, rank them and move on from there. Thank you, we're adjourned.

**AS THERE WAS NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THIS TASK FORCE
WAS ADJOURNED AT 11:28 AM.**

Respectively Submitted,

Dina Garvey, Deputy Clerk
Board of Supervisors