Introductions. Please note that two guests from the Commission on Disabilities were present, William Edes and Kathleen Haynes, as well as Joe Lemay from the Finance Committee.

Quorum established at 3:05 pm.

Our first discussion was how to fill the handicap accessible units that are offered in town by affordable housing developers, who are having a hard time finding qualified renters and buyers for those units. The need to create a network to find folks with disabilities was brought up. Ed and Carla Feroni have developed a list of Falmouth committees and organizations that can publicize 40B lotteries to the general population, but not specifically to folks with disabilities who need housing. Karen mentioned that it could be the income restrictions, that the units might not be affordable enough for folks who make under a certain income. Mike Galasso suggested there may be issues with marketing the handicap units, that developers should be required to submit a full-scope marketing plan when submitting their projects to the town. Ed believes that there is a state requirement for AH marketing for 40B’s, but further research is needed.

William mentioned that CORD (Cape Organization for Rights of the Disabled) has a list of folks with disabilities who may need housing, but the question is whether all developers are submitting their projects for posting. Kathleen has in the past wanted the Disability Commission to compile a Falmouth disability list, but perhaps it cannot do so due to HIPPA restrictions. She suggested that the Commission should reach out to homeless shelters, sober houses, and nursing homes to find disabled individuals in need of housing. William mentioned that the Mass Access Housing Registry could be an important resource. Sam Patterson suggested we get in contact with Mass Health and that the VA might know of homeless, disabled veterans that are in
need of housing. Kathleen mentioned Allan Wilson’s “Joe Q” veterans organization in Falmouth as another possible contact. Mike stated that what is missing is a concerted effort by developers to reach out to CORD and the Mass Access Housing Registry. Jessica suggested that a list of such organizations be compiled and then given to developers to use as part of their marketing. Ed asked William and Kathleen along with AHC member Renie Brunn to do some research on all of these ideas and report back to the AHC in February and March with their findings.

The second agenda topic was focused on finding ways to get money from new avenues into the Falmouth Affordable Housing Fund. In order to meet Falmouth’s HPP target of adding 72 new affordable units per year, we would need close to $5,000,000 a year (at $65,000 per unit). Clearly there need to be other streams of money in addition to CPA funds to subsidize affordable housing in town. (Currently a 3% surcharge on Falmouth real estate transactions plus a small state “match” goes into the Community Preservation fund.) Other communities have a tear-off on their tax bill to allow citizens to make voluntary contributions directly to the Affordable Housing Fund. Pam agreed to look into this option for our town, with help from Jessica.

Karen mentioned perhaps taxing million-dollar home buyers a little more to support the FAHF. Mike suggested allocating a percentage of the currently collected hotel/motel tax and the meals tax. His thought is that many low-income folks work specifically in those industries, which is why it may make sense to have some of those taxes directed to the affordable housing fund. Ed wondered if there was initial concern about the well-being of hotels/motels and Air BnB’s during the pandemic, but it turns out they were not hit as hard as expected this past year in Falmouth. Joe stated that if the expected income from the Air BnB tax is around $1 million, AH might at most get $400,000 of that, which is not nearly the amount that we need. Could the $400K be used to bond $10 million? Alternatively, if we made support for AH a line item in Falmouth’s annual budget, everyone’s property tax would increase; to support affordable housing at an annual level of $5 million, a relatively small amount per taxpayer would be
needed. But broad-based tax increases are never popular. Instead, taxing those who own houses valued at $1 million or more, many of whom are part-time residents, might make more sense. Two or three other towns on the Cape have extra taxes on higher priced homes. Mike noted again that a connection should be made between any new tax or fee and affordable housing. Sam stated that the Select Board could be asked to support a petitioner’s article for Town Meeting. The Warrant would be in August for the November Town Meeting. An AHC Working Group was established to do research on these ideas, consisting of Onjale Scott Price (Chair), Karen Bissonnette, Pam Harting-Barrat, Mike Galasso, Jordan Frye, Joe Lemay, and Carla Feroni.

Pam reported that there has been no further discussion of or revision to the Planning Board’s proposed Multi-Family by-law. It will likely be presented at Town Meeting in November.

Next up on the agenda was a brief discussion of the spreadsheet that Kerry created on the Google Drive for AHC to collect information about the various affordable housing developments in town. AHC members can make changes at any time, which makes updating it convenient. It also allows for Carla and others to keep track of the information. Ed urged AHC members to check and update information regularly for each AH project that they are tracking. Jessica will forward a link to all members to access relevant ZBA information about AH developments.

One last update was that Habitat for Humanity will be putting six of their ten homes on Willett Place up for sale in the near future, which is great news.

A motion to adjourn was passed unanimously at 5:00. Our next AHC meeting will be held via Zoom, **Thursday, February 18, 2021, at 3:00pm.**