

**BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD MEETING
BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY
130 RIVER STREET
BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2014

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Greg Van Houten- Chair; Sharyn Brush-Vice Chair; Tom Jacobs; Jim Carroll; John McFadden; Michael Keane; Justin Corcoran

Absent: None

ALSO PRESENT: Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Mike Harrington, Economic & Community Development Director; Paul Doucette, Chief of Police; John Broderick, Director – Shires Housing; Keith Witcomb - Bennington Banner; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (85) Citizens.

At 6:00 P.M., **Greg Van Houten** called the meeting to order.

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Greg Van Houten, recited by all.

2. SHIRES HOUSING'S MONUMENT VIEW DEVELOPMENT GRANT AWARD DISCUSSION

Greg Van Houten briefly discussed the grant award process relating to Shires Housing. No vote would be taken this evening. The grant shall be voted upon at the next Select Board meeting scheduled for September 22nd, 2014. Mr. Van Houten noted there was a signup sheet at the door. All those who wished to speak this evening needed to sign in. Names shall be called in the order they are written. Each person will speak only one time and will be restricted approximately (3) minutes. There are many names on this list the Board asks that everyone be respectful of opinions and time.

John Broderick was asked to step forward to make a presentation regarding this project. He noted that the State of Vermont has set priorities regarding housing. Their focus is to build housing close to downtown and develop smart growth and village centers. He noted this project is consistent with not only with the State's priorities but the Town of Bennington's Zoning Regulations, Town Plan and the Regional Plan developed by Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC).

Mr. Broderick continued by reviewing Shires (formerly known as Regional Affordable Housing Corporation– RAHC)'s history. It has been in business over 24 years and is fully sustainable. He noted this project would not only provide stable housing but also provide work for local contractors etc.

Mr. Broderick continued by addressing many of the concerns that have been brought up several times such as “character of the neighborhood”. He noted that although there are many single family homes in the area, there are also many rentals. He listed the Nathaniel Court Condos as having many rentals, (4) of the Appleridge Condos are rented and the many other buildings along Silver Street that are multi-unit rentals.

Overcrowding of schools and over capacity for water system were also some of the other concerns he addressed. Mr. Broderick noted that the School Superintendent and (3) local principals all stated that the likely increase would only be 10-12 students. This would not be a big impact on the system. Relating to the water system, Mr. Broderick noted that there had been no evidence that this would cause a strain on the system. He also added that they would be an additional paying customer into the water system.

Crime and drugs are not tolerated within any housing complex Shires owns and operates. Lastly Mr. Broderick addressed the issue of real estate taxes. He noted that the State allows for an “up to 10%” reduction in the school portion (ONLY) of the taxes. When calculated, Shires receives only a 6% discount on only the school portion. The total tax amount paid by Shires Housing last year was \$109,000. He noted that if the grant were to be awarded he would not celebrate. The time to celebrate would be one year after the last tenant moves into this development.

At this time Greg Van Houten opened the floor to the public for comment. The following people spoke:

- Chris Williams stated he is a resident of Shaftsbury and has served on many boards including the Shires Housing Board. He reviewed Shires history of uplifting neighborhoods with their rehabilitation work over the last 24 years. He feels this shows their credibility. He also noted that their plan is to build fewer units than had already been approved (24 units verses 28 units approved). He encourages the Board to live up to the Town plan and vote Yes.
- Dave Crowley stated he felt this was not a meeting about traffic, overcrowded schools etc. He feels this is about not wanting “them” in our neighborhood, whoever “they” may be. Mr. Crowley feels Shires deserves this project.
- Loyal Wescott discussed criminal background checks.
- William Colvin stated he was a resident of the neighborhood and supports this project. He believes this would be a significant economic community development. Mr. Colvin encourages the board to vote Yes.
- Abby Shapiro stated she did not think this was an issue of prejudice. She feels this project would double the density of the area and goes against the vision of “small town Vermont”. Urban density brings Urban problems. Ms. Shapiro believes this project will bring more rentals to the neighborhood and less homeowners.
- Don Miller urged the board to focus on the facts. He questioned different aspects of the grant application. He encouraged the board to vote NO. He feels they should not take the money simply because it’s available.
- Jessica Chapman stated she was a new homeowner in this neighborhood and supports this project. She feels that Shires has improved the aesthetics of the different

neighborhoods they had invested in previously. These units are not designed for the poorest members of the community.

- Mary Gerisch stated she is a renter in Bennington and supports this project. She feels that one of the issues is the vision of what Bennington is vs. what Bennington wants to be. Ms. Gerisch feels that if this is voted down then the most vulnerable will feel that they are not valued members of the community.
- Mary Morrissey stated she was a taxpayer, voter and resident of Bennington. She is concerned with the present and future state of Bennington. Ms. Morrissey discussed the petition against this project. She noted there were over 1,000 signatures from people who ranged from 21-96 years old. She feels it is a diverse cross section of the community and is not mean spirited or bigoted.

At this time Greg Van Houten announced that the Design Review Board (DRB) meeting regarding this project scheduled for Tuesday September 16th, 2014 had been cancelled. Shires Housing permit will be moved to the October 7th, 2014 agenda for DRB.

- Jim Gulley noted he was a former Select Board member, and served on several additional boards such as DRB and BAC. He does not support this project. He discussed being a landlord himself and what it costs him in taxes etc. Mr. Gulley stated he did not feel he could compete with what Shires can charge for rent.
- Police Chief Paul Doucette stated he was not speaking to choose sides. He was asked to report facts only on the crime stats for all (17) of Shires Housing locations. The Chief noted that between January 2012 and September 15, 2014 there had only been (2) arrests made on Shires property. One of these just happened to be walking past the location. That person had no connection or affiliation with Shires. There were several calls associated with 814 Gage Street (Cora B. Whitney) but that is because the Police Department assists the Rescue Squad and Fire Departments. Loyal Wescott questioned criminal background information. The Chief noted that Superior Court now has a public computer to conduct your own criminal background checks. All that is needed is a name and date of birth.
- Fionia Simpson stated she was a resident and does not support this project. She discussed the “failed expectations” of Jack Appleman and his different projects. Ms. Simpson stated she felt that that neighborhood has more than its fair share of apartments.
- Tim Morrissey stated he was a voter and taxpayer and does not support this project. He questioned investor funding and analyzed the total cost of the project. He continued by breaking down the cost to per unit and compared the real estate taxes that would be paid versus what a single family home would pay.
- Becky Ames stated she was a taxpayer and voter. She is against this project. Ms. Ames discussed the “de-densifying” of Rutland. She feels this area of Bennington is compact already. No adequate green space was given for kids to play.

- Judith Fellows-Miller stated she was a homeowner in this neighborhood. She discussed Historic Value, Safeguards and Accountability.
- Jeanne McKenna stated she was a homeowner in the neighborhood and is against this project. She feels there would be a big impact on already overcrowded schools. She asked the board to re-read the market study and the grant application itself
- Kathy Hoisington stated that she wished there was this much involvement from community members on all subjects in Bennington. Ms. Hoisington stated she was a real estate agent and that there is plenty of affordable housing available. The housing market is strong and good for homes under \$180,000.
- Jack Carmody stated he was a resident of Crescent Boulevard. He wanted to remind everyone to keep their eye on the ball. Mr. Carmody feels this project is in the wrong place at the wrong time. He suggested Shires withdraw their application and let the Town heal and move on.
- Chris Oldham stated that he and his girlfriend were renters. They have a large amount of student loan debt and could not afford to buy a home any time soon. He also stated that Mary Morrissey should be representing all residents of Bennington not just the 1,000 that signed the petition.
- Michael Briggs stated he lives in Hoosick Falls, NY but is the President of Shires Housing Board. He discussed who made up the Shires Board stating they were all local (Bennington) people from different backgrounds. He supports this project
- Vic Milani stated he was an owner in the Appleridge Condos. He thinks this is a bad decision and in the wrong location. He discussed increase traffic and noise. He stated he is against this project and was deceived regarding the “Phase II” location.
- Jonah Spivak stated he was very active in the community and a local business owner. He has worked with Shires over many years and believes they provide top quality work-force housing. He supports this project. Mr. Spivak questioned if an outside developer took the existing permit that allows for more housing would there be any meetings etc. He feels this is really about the grant money. The neighborhood already changed years ago when the first permit was granted and the woods were cleared. He asked the board to support this project.
- Kevin Callanan stated he was an Appleridge Condo owner. He feels this is dividing this town. He is against this project. Mr. Callanan questioned where the money was coming from. He feels we pay for the rich and the poor.
- Bonnie Callanan stated that this was their actual front yard. The sign stated a “private condo community”. This project will make it so it is no longer private.
- Jon Hale stated he runs a similar business to Shires. He buys, rehabilitates and either rents or sells dilapidated homes. He is against this project but not against affordable housing. He feels this will cost the community money. He asked the Board to vote No.

- Jeanne Jenkins stated she supports this project. She lives in the neighborhood for 25 years and has raised here children there. It is a mixed neighborhood from Doctors to students, renters to homeowners. Green space is not an issue. There are other wooded areas close by. Ms. Jenkins stated that the overcrowded schools are an economic development issue not Shires. She asked that the Board do the right thing.
- Rick Guerrero stated he was a long time resident and is an abutter to an existing Shires property. Before they took over it was awful. They have been good neighbors for 10 years. The clock cannot be turned back and the woods returned; it's already done.
- Bill Wolfe stated he is a resident of Nathaniel Court. He feels Mr. Broderick does not care about those who signed petition or about Bennington. Mr. Wolfe stated he felt that the only thing he cared about was getting money. Mr. Wolfe stated that if Shires withdrew private contractors would come to develop that section.
- Bruce Laumeister stated he was a resident and former business owner in Bennington. He has had a long history with Affordable Housing and has awards to prove it. Mr. Laumeister stated he used to support Shires until they began accepting Federal money. He cannot support that. Mr. Laumeister thinks that they should stop using grant money, stick to rehabilitating old buildings.
- Jim Vires stated he applauds Shires efforts. He loves this community and wants to see Affordable Housing. Mr. Vires stated no matter how this turns out he would like to see this community continue to build up.

Greg Van Houten thanked everyone for coming this evening

Motion: Jim Carroll motioned to close the meeting. Michael Keane seconds the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary