



PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

1019 Main Street, PO Box 150, Branford, CT 06405
Tel: (203) 488 - 1255, Fax: (203) 315 - 2188

MINUTES PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION THURSDAY March 24, 2022 SPECIAL MEETING 7:00 P.M.

This meeting was held remotely, via ZOOM.

Commissioners Present: C. Andres, M. Palluzzi, F. Russo, J. Chadwick, J. Vaiuso, M. Liguori, S. Huttner
Commissioners Absent: P. Higgins
Staff Present: H. Smith, AICP -Town Planner, M. Martin-Clerk
Also Present: Consulting Planner Glenn Chalder, AICP of Planimetrics, Inc.

1. Call to Order

Chairperson Andres opened the meeting at 7:04 pm. He reminded everyone that they needed to identify themselves when speaking per state law so that anyone calling in by phone to the meeting can know who is speaking and he said there was a quorum of PZ Commissioners.

He stated this was a Special Meeting of the Commission to introduce and present the draft of the Affordable Housing Plan to the Planning & Zoning Commission and public. This is a plan that the state legislature has mandated that all towns have in place by June 1, 2022. To do that Branford formed a committee and hired a consultant who is going to speak this evening.

H. Smith (Town Planner) spoke next and acknowledged Board of Selectman members, Angie Higgins and Raymond Dunbar who were in attendance. There were also two members of the Steering Committee that were present: Stephanie Farber and MaryAnn Amore. Also present were several members of the RTM:- Representatives Erlinger, Ingraham, and Amore. He displayed the agenda for the meeting and reviewed it.

2. Introduction and Presentation of the *Draft Branford Affordable Housing Plan*

Glenn Chalder (Planimetrics) then spoke giving a brief history of the prior work he did for the town. He displayed a PowerPoint on the contents of the draft plan. He explained the Affordable Housing Plan is required by all towns in Ct and must be in place by June 1. He stated the plan must state how the towns plan to increase the number of affordable housing developments in each town.

He described the formation of the Steering Committee and their work on this task. He noted there are 4 key components to the plan: Planning for Housing Choices, Background Data, Benchmarks and Strategies.

He reviewed the background data with a chart noting that housing should not cost more than 30% of one's income. He reviewed the time frame from the 1960's to the late nineties and said housing that was formerly affordable to most people but has become more unaffordable as time has passed. He then reviewed the data for Branford and the percentage of people who are housing cost burdened.

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He noted that if a housing unit is affordable but not deed restricted then it's not considered affordable by the state of CT. Branford does have 477 units that do count as affordable housing by the state of CT. He went into more detail regarding these. He said that because this number of units is under the minimum required by the state, Branford is subject to the affordable housing procedure which means applicants can file Land Use applications and don't have to strictly comply with Zoning Regulations.

He then talked of benchmarks which were the results received from the housing survey that was given to Branford residents. He reviewed the percentages for each response.

He noted the overall goal is to provide a variety of housing choices in Branford for everyone, regardless of income, age, race disabilities, etc.

He then talked of strategies to achieve this such as establishing an Affordable Housing Advisory Committee and to encourage the formation of a Branford Housing Exchange. Also another goal is to set up a special housing fund which would be a dedicated place for funds to support affordable housing efforts.

He then went over several Strategies proposed in the Plan noting establishing design guidelines or requirements for multi-family housing had been noted in the survey as important. He showed some samples from the Town of Simsbury. Another strategy is to look at ways to guide the location of affordable housing; such as near the town center or near the train station or bus routes. Also, along major roads etc. Other strategies would be to work with the housing authority to increase assisted housing and to increase deed restricted housing and other state recognized units.

He then reviewed the data for mobile home parks and talked of landlord owned versus resident owned. Another strategy talked about was reviewing the regulations and increasing housing options available to people. He spoke of middle housing and all the different types of housing that includes.

He then talked about preparing for deed restricted housing as another strategy. This could mean preparing standard documents for all deed restricted developments. Also, the administrator that oversees the affordability plan be chosen by the Planning & Zoning Commission to be certain they are qualified.

Chairperson Andres and several of the other commissioners asked questions.

3. Public Comments

H. Smith reviewed the procedures for participating in the Public Comment portion of the meeting.

1. Lisa Arpin-(Town Clerk) she asked how mobile homes fit into the synergy of affordable housing. She thinks in Branford the land is owned by the property owner and the individual homes are owned by the residents. So, does that mean the mobile homes would not qualify as affordable housing?

G. Chalder said mobile homes fall into the category of naturally occurring affordable housing. They meet the state guidelines for affordable units. But generally they don't count on the state list of units because they don't have deed restrictions on them. However, there was a legislative change in the past 5 years

or so which included resident owned mobile home parks. But the economics of purchasing the land is challenging for lower or moderate income mobile home owners. So, the question is, should or does the town want to get involved in this? This entails property maintenance issues, etc.

2. Jeff Clark-(60 Maple St)-He said he's been a resident since 1947 and has seen the town grow. He has studied the affordability plan in depth and will send H. Smith his comments. He has completed the housing survey and has participated in one of the affordable housing committees and he complimented the committee on their work.

He commented on the strengths and weakness of the affordability plan. One strength is its puts housing right in our face. Since the real estate inventory is at a historic low in Branford. Prices are going to go thru the roof so this issue needs to be addressed. He likes the idea of a housing trust fund.

He also thinks the idea of a list to show buyers and sellers what is available in Branford would be very helpful. There is no main list now.

A weakness in the plan is that it doesn't include pine orchard or short beach and the Commission should only approve the plan if it contains a disclaimer that they are not included in the plan. But, it would be helpful if those 2 associations participated and endorsed this plan or formed their own plan.

He doesn't like the state's number of 10% for affordable housing. He states if you do the math, it is impossible for Branford to ever achieve that number. He went over the number of units that would need to be created to meet this goal. He suggested instead that Branford create more senior housing and housing for the disabled.

3. Eric Steinlof- He asked if transportation costs factor into affordability and if that Factors into the plan.

Glenn replied and said no, it is not factored in although for many people it can be the second largest expense. The Committee discussed this issue and felt that the transit oriented districts could be an opportunity for people in that they would not necessarily have to own a car. Glenn noted that this is an important item to note.

4. MaryAnn Amore- She agreed with Jeff Clark's comment that it's great to have this plan. She said it was a pleasure to participate in the development of this plan and to see the outline of the plan with so many potentials for developments of strategies in Branford. She looks forward to what's going to come out of the plan and she's hoping that this plan is taken seriously and monitored because it should have meaning.

5. Sharon R. –She noted this is a very extensive effort to address a concern that is quite serious. She said she has two children and she has lived in Branford

since 1972. Her son was looking for a family home here in Branford and could not find one he could afford. She thinks that is happening more frequently for the young people who want to stay as part of the community. She noted that affordable housing does not mean that you are getting housing because you don't have money, it's not public housing. That was a big item that came out in the survey that most people don't really know what affordable housing is. People need to be educated on what it is. Affordable housing is something that we could all benefit from. She asked that a big effort be made to educate people in town exactly what affordable housing is.

H. Smith noted that the assistance of Mr. Chalder was funded by a grant by the state of CT.

4. Commission Discussion and Comment

Mr. Chalder then reviewed the timetable of the plan. He displayed a PowerPoint and noted that after this meeting he will be working with H. Smith to assemble the comments received and at the April 7th Planning & Zoning meeting, he will have either a list of changes that they may need input for or he and H. Smith will make some modifications. The goal is for the Commission to set a public hearing date at the April 7th meeting.

Sharon R. spoke again and suggested perhaps putting a notation in the report that the Short Beach and Pine Orchard areas are not part of this plan and should be encouraged to become part of the plan because this is one town.

Chairperson Andres agreed that those two areas should join this plan or form one of their own. He noted that the survey was sent out to the entire town.

5. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 8:25 pm.