



HOUSING COMMISSION MINUTES

Regular Meeting
Wednesday, January 7, 2009
5:30 p.m.

Administrative Building Conference Room, First Floor
701 Laurel Street, Menlo Park, CA 94025

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Lasensky called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. in the Administrative Building Conference Room.

ROLL CALL -

Housing Commission Members Present: Patricia Boyle, Don Brawner, Elizabeth Lasensky (Chair), Carol Louchheim, Brian Steuer, Anne Moser

Housing Commission Members Absent: Clarice O'Neal

Staff Present: Douglas Frederick, Housing Manager; Margaret Roberts, City Clerk

A. PUBLIC COMMENT - None

B. BUSINESS ITEMS

1. Election of New Commission Chair and Vice Chair for 2009

Commissioner Louchheim thanked Commissioner Lasensky for serving as chair for last year and Anne Moser presented her with a plant.

M/S Louchheim/Boyle nominated Commissioner Moser to serve as Chair for 2009. She was appointed by acclamation. Commissioner Lasensky turned the meeting over to the new Chair.

M/S Lasensky/Steuer nominated Commissioner Boyle as Vice Chair for 2009 and was unanimously appointed.

2. Selection of Housing Commission Representative to the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan Oversight and Outreach Committee and Appointment of Subcommittee for the Overall Specific Plan Process

Commissioner Lasensky stated that she would like to continue to serve on the committee representing the Housing Commission.

M/S Moser/Louchheim nominated Commissioner Lasensky to serve on the committee and by unanimous vote of the Commission she was appointed.

Commissioners Steuer and Brawner advised they would be willing to be on the sub-committee. It was recommended by Chair Moser to have Housing Manager Frederick obtain more information and bring it back to the Commission in February as to the role of the subcommittee.

Commissioner Boyle stated that the project is missing community engagement, but that is a goal for the upcoming year is to have more community engagement. Commissioner Louchheim asked why there

was a need for this subcommittee. Housing Manager Frederick advised that the City Council wanted to have more Commission input. City Clerk Roberts advised that a discussion would need to be placed on each Commission agenda per direction of the City Council.

3. Commission Input into Council Project Priority Setting Process

Commissioner Boyle stated that the City Council had their first round on 12/5 and they arrived with 18 potential goals. There were two left off the ranking list inadvertently, one of which was housing. During public comment at the City Council goal setting on January 6, 2008, she spoke to number 6 on the Council list of 18 – Menlo Park has an updated General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. She urged the Council to put importance to this issue and that the housing element would be included. She also suggested that they look at SB375 and realize that the state is going to require a comprehensive plan. The Council had a discussion on having a General Plan update. Commissioner Louchheim advised that the City Council understood that this is a major undertaking. Commissioner Boyle stated the City Council acknowledged that doing it piece meal was not the way to go, but for some projects it has had to happen that way. J. Murphy stated during the goal setting meeting that had they started ten years ago it could be done by now. Commissioner Brawner stated that there is nothing wrong with the current General Plan. The Community Engagement Manager is supposed to smooth out items between the developers and the community. Commissioner Louchheim stated that the consensus of the City Council appeared that it needed to be updated. The question was how it was going to get done. The City Council mentioned the M2 development area and how it would be developed and they were open to the idea of looking at the bigger picture of Menlo Park. Everybody feels that doing the General Plan takes time but what is happening now is taking staff time. Commissioner Louchheim stated there is a lot of the downtown plan and the El Camino plan and there is more than downtown in Menlo Park. Commissioner Lasensky stated that she would hope it would contain more. Commissioner Boyle does not know where they are with the ranking.

Chair Moser asked where that leaves the commission with setting their goals. Does the commission move ahead with that? Housing Manager Frederick advised they can work with what they have from the December 5, 2008 meeting and go forward.

Chair Moser stated that there were 3 items in the minutes from last meeting:

1. Housing Element – Critical
2. Senior Housing – could fit into 7 – Inequities across the community are decreased / or unranked housing
3. Possible uses for BMR Fund

Commissioner Boyle stated that in the 26th letter it stated they want Commission input but to limit it to 3-5 goals. Chair stated that in the past there have been between 3 and 5, but other commissions come in with large lists.

Commissioner Lasensky asked if there are other goals that the Commission might be overlooking.

Chair Moser stated the commission has talked about senior housing and it is a huge concern. There could be some BMR housing for seniors. Commissioner Boyle stated that there is an opportunity to do something with that money and timing is important. That would be part of the use of the BMR funds and using them during the current financial climate. There will not be projects with inclusionary funds for BMR. There needs to be some direction or guidance on how to use those funds. Chair Moser asked if the Commission should come up with thoughts and get some approval on those thoughts. Commissioner Louchheim advised that staff can take it to Council and it can be set from there. Commissioner Boyle wants to send the three goals to the Council. There would be a large amount of

staff time involved with the three goals. Housing Manager Frederick advised he has been talking to Council Member Andy Cohen about BMR housing.

Commissioner Boyle asked what is left of the redevelopment funds. Housing Manager Frederick explained that account is in the red. The loan for Gateway Apartments took all of the housing money and borrowed from the non-housing fund, and it is now being paid back.

Tax increment fund is a fund of the Redevelopment Agency and at least 20% has to be set aside for housing. He explained the boundaries for the RDA. Commissioner Brawner asked why the Council or this Commission does not provide housing outside of the town, just north of Marsh Road. Commissioner Boyle stated that it would be nice to get credit towards Menlo Park numbers. Commissioner Louchheim does not understand how the tax increment works. Housing Manager Frederick explained how the increments or any increase to that revenue goes to the housing fund. Commissioner Boyle stated that this is important for the Council to take another look at. What else can be done with the money? The role needs to be clarified. Could this commission raise this issue for a current reading on this issue? Chair Moser asked that the Commission request a copy of the report and a map of the Redevelopment District. Commissioner Boyle stated that there is unused money and 20% can be used for housing; is this something that Councilmember Cohen can help with?

Chair Moser stated that she forwarded information on 3 pieces of property that were available; 2 were four-plexes and one is a lot which are all on the other side of El Camino. Councilmember Cohen has the idea of buying foreclosed houses, the majority of which are in Belle Haven and those that are not would take a large chunk of funds. If anything is done, it should be equitable across the city. Housing Manager Frederick stated that the Belle Haven area is upset about new development, but they should not be upset with the City purchasing foreclosed houses and putting in home owners. The complaints being received are the typical NIMBY arguments; it is too dense, breeding crime, and too much traffic, etc.

Commissioner Brawner stated that in 1984 when St. Patrick's was brought forward, there was breaking of the rules and regulations and the community came together. Everything needs to be taken into consideration. The problem is over-developing. Commissioner Boyle suggested purchasing an existing apartment complex and converting it to affordable senior housing. Commissioner Louchheim stated that they would be asking for Council to give the commission staff time to see if this is possible. Commissioner Brawner stated that the community is very dense now. Chair Moser stated that there is existing housing that could be purchased, renovated, and moved forward. Her thought is that some of the BMR funds could be used but the City would need to partner with a non-profit agency. Moser stated that she does not want to close off the option to build. Commissioner Boyle stated that all options need to be kept open and discussed.

Housing Manager Frederick will bring these back for final adoption at the February meeting.

4. SB 375 Article Submitted by Anne Moser

Chair Moser wanted to make sure that everybody saw the article.

5. Approval of December 3, 2008 Minutes

On page 2, number 2, first paragraph, and last sentence: The sentences begins "It is estimated" and it should read "She estimated".

M/S Lasensky/Boyle approval of the minutes as corrected above and the motion passed unanimously.

C. REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Update on Housing Activity (Report from staff)

Housing Manager Frederick stated that the Rucks loan was completed. He met with the building official on how to approach future projects and there needs to be process changes. The City has some concerns about the process used to get building permits. There has been some leeway given to the process. More in line with state law and it will be more expensive. Staff recently met with Mr. Hill (whose house burned down) and they are working on building a home for him.

2. Report from the Chair

Chair Moser stated that on a regular basis she would like to report to the Council what the Housing Commission is doing. There is a lack of communication and she would like to stand up at the Council meeting and least every other month. City Clerk Roberts explained that it would need to be agendaized and staff is putting together a schedule for Commission reports. This is in an effort to get all Commissions reporting the Council, but not all at once and it allows the Council to know what is coming. The Commission should work with the staff liaison to get onto the agenda. The Commission, by consensus, gave the Chair permission to speak to the Council regarding the goals.

3. Commission Member reports

Commissioner Boyle is on the ABAG Regional Planning Committee and she is attending other meetings of interest. She gave the announcement to K. Fergusson regarding planning and development in the current environment which is to be held on January 29 in Oakland. It might be useful as they will be discussing what kind of funding will be available, ways to have a project completed with a variety of funding – basically doing things without loans. She is also working on getting in various areas the threshold for community discussions on housing. It is an open forum for discussion. It is being done with the League of Women Voters and other organizations.

D. INFORMATION ITEMS

1. Monthly Report on the Housing Rehabilitation Loan Program for November 2008.

There is no housing activity. Commissioners volunteered for service on the loan committee for 2009. The schedule is:

January – Moser
February – Louchheim
March – Lasensky
April – Boyle
May – Brian
June – Brawner
July – Lasensky
August – Lasensky
September – Boyle
October – Brian
November – Brawner
December – Moser

It was pointed out that there will be 2 vacancies and if the Commissioners know any people that might be interested they should be encouraged to apply for the commission.

E. ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 6:42 p.m.