

Windham Affordable Housing Listening Sessions Summary

Presented To: The Windham Town Council

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A HUD Community Housing Development Organization



Windham Affordable Housing Listening Sessions Overview

Listening Session Held on February 10, March 10, March 12, 2020

Purpose: Summary of housing needs identified by members of the Windham community obtained through a series of listening sessions conducted by Westbrook Development Corporation and Westbrook Housing.

Objective: There are commonly three objectives to be achieved through listening sessions:

- Citizens provide observations, identify needs or wants, present insight to tasks and goals related to affordable housing and housing in general.
- Collate and synthesize the public comments, needs, and recommendations into summary form to present to the local municipality and other interested parties.
- Evaluate needs with the purpose of coordination between the municipality, interested parties, and the CHDO to establish tasks, goals, timelines, and measured objectives to develop achievable outcomes that address the identified housing needs through production.

Background: The Westbrook Development Corporation Is a HUD Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) that was founded by Westbrook Housing Authority in 1987. The purpose of Westbrook Development Corporation is to cooperate and work with local municipalities and organizations to foster local and regional economic development through the development of affordable housing. Westbrook Housing Authority is a Public Housing Authority that is an administrator of federal housing programs with an operational area that encompasses the Town of Windham. Westbrook Development Corporation and Westbrook Housing are development partners that closely collaborate to develop and maintain affordable housing for working families, disabled families, and elderly families.

As a CHDO, one of Westbrook Development Corporation's responsibilities is to conduct outreach to communities to conduct "Listening Sessions". The purpose of housing needs listening sessions is to provide a forum for members of the community to identify local housing needs, types of housing desired, impediments to the production of or access to affordable housing, and to provide ideas and recommendations on how to respond to the local housing needs.

Listening Sessions are conducted in a manner that information is gathered. The information is the collection of comments, insights, opinions, observations, data, objections, and wants, of the members of the community. Listening sessions are facilitated in a neutral position by the CHDO without bias or input by the CHDO so that it can garner local input that is solely reflective of the community's needs.

Action: Dick Begin, the President of Westbrook Development Corporation and Chris LaRoche, Executive Director of Westbrook Housing approached the Town Planner and the Town Economic Development Director to identify the viability of a series of listening sessions related to housing. On

January 14, 2020 A presentation was then made to the Windham Town Council requesting support to conduct a series of listening sessions. Three housing needs listening sessions were scheduled, and notices were made through advertising in the local newspapers to invite the general public to attend to provide input. All meetings were open to the general public. On February 10, 2020 a session was conducted at the Public Works Building with the Windham Age Friendly Community Committee. Two separate sessions were conducted at Town Hall on March 10th (afternoon) and 12th (evening). Each session had active participation by 12 -16 members of the community who were present per session.

Summary of Listening Sessions Public Input: The following is a summary of the public comments and input provided by the members of the Windham community. Citizens raised these points and engaged in discussion. The topics have been categorized for ease of review. Many of the topics overlap categories.

Types of Housing

Senior Housing

- Windham Seniors desiring to stay in place is primarily offset by their fixed income resulting in not being able to keep up with home maintenance needs
- The two Windham Affordable Housing Senior Developments operated by Avesta Housing each have very long wait list
- There aren't many options for seniors
 - Need more options for senior housing including apartments, condominiums.
 - Need to be affordable
 - Need for senior housing is immediate

Family Housing

- Not many options for young families to purchase single family home
- Single family homes are not affordable to most local families
 - Land cost and construction cost too high
 - Sale price of existing homes too high
- Need apartments for some families who cannot afford a house or are not ready for home ownership

Single Family Homes

- Windham's housing structures are mainly single-family type
 - Not enough
 - Prices unaffordable
 - Not everyone wants a house
 - Options such as condominiums or apartments should be considered

Apartments

- Not enough options
- Current rents are too high

Impact on Community

Zoning -Density- Neighborhoods

- Windham Farm and Residential-Farm Districts are zoned net residential 40,000 sq. ft.
 - Current area of growth that is not where growth is wanted
- Density issue, 60% of Windham currently Zoned Farm and single family
 - Results in subdivisions farther from City center
 - Desire for neighborhoods with smaller lots, tree lined streets, with sidewalks, and a gathering spot (store, park, luncheonette).
- Building Height zoning restriction 35' limit
 - Results in low density, sprawl, higher building cost
- Current growth located in areas not conducive to Town Planning goals
- Need for housing close to shopping and activities of daily living
 - North Windham ideal area for housing

Public Amenities & Social Needs

- Many individuals who are employed in Windham cannot afford to reside in Windham
 - Lose sense of being part of community
- Need to be a multi-generation community
 - Adult children can't afford to stay in Windham
 - Children who go away to college cannot afford to return to Windham
 - Loss of age and economic diversity of next generation of Windham families
- Lack of Public Transportation and sidewalks hinders mobility
- Need for Housing close to services
- Lack of public Sewer and Water is major obstacle to overall development
- Cannot be close to services
- Density issue, 60% of Windham currently Zoned Farm and single family
 - Forcing sprawl that is causing loss of Windham farm community identity

Affordability

- Families starting out cannot afford
- Too expensive to own or rent for elderly
- People have misconceptions on who needs affordable housing
- Land cost and current zoning criteria hinders developing affordable units
- Windham residents seeking housing affordability are forced to move to neighboring communities that offer affordable housing opportunities
- Cost to build affordable housing needs support of Town Government
 - Tax Increment Financing
 - Zoning
 - Infrastructure – water & sewer services
 - Use or re-use town of owned properties such as old schools, undervalued, or under-utilized properties
- Town support to build affordable housing – policy

Observations: The community members present identified a significant pride of community and commitment of wanting to be able to afford to live and remain in the Town of Windham. There was much historical knowledge shared. Community members presented with insight to the needs of their own demographics whether that being of senior housing or family housing. Older citizens present identified their concerns for their adult children's ability to remain in Windham due to the lack of housing and housing affordability. Senior citizens present identified that they had no options to downsize to affordable homes or apartments and cannot afford to remain in their existing homes. There were citizens present who appeared to understand the difficulties and costs related to housing. There was concern that persons who work in Windham cannot afford to live in Windham. There appeared to be a mood of consensus that Town Government would need to have and should have a leadership role facilitating opportunities for housing. There was no apparent opposition on the issue of the growth of senior and affordable housing and its impact on the municipal infrastructure or resources such as police and fire-rescue, roads, schools, water-sewer, taxes.

Final Notes: It was our intent to arrange listening sessions with the business community. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, this outreach has not been scheduled. This presentation is a summary of the comments and observation of the citizens who participated in the listening sessions and we do not form any conclusions. Any conclusions or recommendations, (Objective #3), would be presented as a separate activity and provided upon request.