

Housing moves ahead

Hamilton trust considers deal with Harborlight for affordable family housing at Longmeadow Way
By Tim McCarthy

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The Hamilton Affordable Housing Trust (AHT) and Harborlight Community Partners (HCP) of Beverly, an affordable housing developer, may have tentatively reached an agreement over a potential apartment complex at Longmeadow Way.

At the AHT's meeting on Feb. 27, the board unanimously voted to have town counsel draft a grant agreement between the AHT and HCP, allocating \$300,000 from the AHT's coffers to assist Harborlight in constructing 40 units of affordable family housing at Longmeadow Way, a private way near the Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School on Bay Road.

A condition on the AHT funding, in the early discussions, would be that none of it could be used to fight any legal appeals of the project.

Although called family housing, apartments would vary in size and could accommodate anyone without specific restrictions from single individuals to families with children.

Trust Chairman Russ Tanzer abstained from the vote.

The trust had originally planned to discuss the agreement further at a meeting on Wednesday, March 7, but the meeting was postponed to a later date due to a snowstorm.

The final details and signing of the agreement could signify the

end of a drawn out debate over See HOUSING, A9

the fate of Longmeadow Way as well as Hamilton Development Corporation's (HDC) search for a use of their property at 593 Willow St.

Late last year, the HDC and the AHT voted to award the parcel to HCP, the sole applicant to a request for proposals put forward by the HDC earlier that year, as well as \$300,000 from the AHT to develop a 20-unit senior only apartment complex in the downtown.

HCP, however, said they would accept the award only on the condition they could develop unrestricted apartments elsewhere in town, both as a financial necessity to assure each project could be completed and as a personal mission to provide housing for as wide an audience as possible.

Abutters to the Willow Street property have stated in writing they would not legally challenge the downtown proposal if the size of the building was kept to two stories and avoided commercial uses.

Executive Director Andrew DeFranza said he considered the AHT vote on Longmeadow a positive step towards the project becoming reality.

"Harborlight is very encouraged by the community support," DeFranza said. "We are grateful to the AHT for their support. We're going to decide on our course of action in the coming weeks based on the town's recent actions."

DeFranza said Harborlight's executive board would similarly need to review the agreement before signing on.

DeFranza added the Longmeadow parcel under his control could also accom-

modate a portion of the site for the Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District, which is currently considering a possible new elementary school, based upon further discussion with the town.

If the town doesn't go ahead with a new school proposal at Longmeadow, DeFranza said HCP will have to take stock of their options.

"We're looking to the town for guidance for what they'd like to happen there, DeFranza said.

HCP, which first announced a plan to develop an affordable rental apartment complex back in the spring of 2016, has been a source of agita to town residents - as well as a reckoning about the town's lack of affordable housing.

HCP specifically seeks to build their developments through the state's Chapter 40B law.

Chapter 40B, a state law created in the late 1960s and commonly called the "anti-snob zoning law," allows developers who set aside 25 percent of their housing stock as affordable to override certain local zoning bylaws or restrictions, if the host community doesn't have at least 10 percent of its total housing classified by the state as affordable.

Hamilton is at 3 percent of said total, needing about 200 more units to reach its 10 percent goal. Wenham is around 8 percent.

Over the past two years, Hamilton residents resisted alternative locations for potential developments suggested by the AHT at every angle essentially leaving Longmeadow Way, which Harborlight maintains control over and initially planned to develop on, as the locus for a development in town.



Residents, as well as town
politicos, have specifically
requested time after time as
few units as possible, a focus
on housing for seniors, and to
prioritize Hamilton residents.