



BRISTOL PLANNING BOARD
APRIL 11, 2024 MINUTES

TOWN HALL
10 COURT ST.
BRISTOL, RI 02809
401-253-7000

Held: April 11, 2024 in person

Present:

Charles Millard, Chairman; Anthony Murgo, Vice Chairman; Steve Katz, Secretary; Member Brian Clark; Alternate Member Jessalyn Jarest

Also Present:

Diane Williamson, Administrative Officer/Director of Community Development; Edward Tanner, Zoning Enforcement and Principal Planner; Andrew M Teitz Esq., Assistant Town Solicitor

Not Present:

Member Richard Ruggiero; Alternate Member Michael Sousa

Chairman Millard called the meeting to order at 7:05pm and led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Director Williamson mentioned that she made some edits to the March minutes to accurately reflect that the variance was not granted for 68 Magnolia Street.

A motion was made (Murgo/Katz) to accept the March meeting minutes, as amended.

In favor: Clark, Jarest, Katz, Millard, Murgo

Opposed: None

There was some discussion around the parking situation at Oliver School. Director Williamsom reminded the Board that they will have another chance to review the details at Preliminary Plan review.

C1. Update to Housing Chapter of Bristol's Comprehensive Plan - Presentation, Review, and Discussion to start the update with Jeff Davis from Horsley Witten Group consulting firm. Update will include strategies to achieve the goal of 10% Low-Moderate Income Housing.

Jeff Davis from Horsley Witten Group presented.

Jeff explained that Bristol has received a grant from the State, which is being used to update the Housing Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. All aspects of housing will be included, not just low-moderate income housing.

Jeff reviewed the latest data on Bristol's housing, including housing costs vs income, both owner occupied and rentals. Bristol is now in the top 10 most expensive communities in Rhode Island in terms of single family homes. Jeff also reviewed the age of the houses in Bristol; 61% of rentals were built before 1960, compared to about one third of owner occupied housing. The majority of these older homes are located in the downtown area.

As of 2023, there is a healthy mix of housing types (single family, two family, multi-family, etc.) in Bristol compared to our neighboring towns. Most rentals have two bedrooms, while most owner occupied homes have three bedrooms. These stats are very similar to the state averages.

Any family who is spending greater than 30% of their income on housing is considered cost burdened, and greater than 50% is considered severely cost burdened. In Bristol, 27% of owner occupied households are considered cost burdened; over 1000 renter households are considered cost burdened. Jeff confirmed that his source for all of this data is the US Census. 14% of households are considered severely cost burdened, which includes both owner occupied and rental households. Member Clark inquired about the breakdown between owner occupied and rental households, as the Roger Williams rentals could be driving some of this.

The overall poverty level is 7.8%, but the 18-34 year old population, which includes students, is driving this. The unemployment rate in Bristol is 2.5% most recently. Median household income has been steadily increasing, which could indicate that renters are earning higher salaries, or that people with higher incomes are moving into Bristol.

As of 2022, 5.73% of housing is considered low-moderate income (LMI), and the Rhode Island goal is 10%. Bristol is making good progress compared to all of its immediate neighbors. Elderly housing is the majority (over two thirds) of this LMI housing.

Eviction levels in Bristol have been decreasing. Jeff explained that homelessness is very hard to track, and that the current approach is to look at the number of school children that have been identified as homeless. There were 22 homeless school children in the Bristol/Warren school district as of the 2020/2021 school year. Chairman Millard asked if we have updated numbers from 2024. Member Clark felt the number was very high. The Board felt strongly that these statistics need to be updated for 2024, as well as broken out between Bristol vs Warren.

Jeff Davis introduced an exercise for the Board members to participate in. There were boards with the current Housing Chapter goals and policies. Board members had stickers, and were asked to read through the goals and policies, and place stickers to indicate if they still agree (green), would like to reword or change (yellow), or disagree (red).

Member Clark asked for clarification on the definition of LMI. Assistant Town Solicitor Teitz responded that Section 8 are excluded, and that only deed restricted units count.

There was a discussion about potentially adding rent control, and better control on short term rentals. The Board had mixed feelings on these topics.

Jeff Davis stressed that the Board can't solve all of these problems, but there are things that can be done to make progress.

The Board got up and participated in the exercise of putting green, yellow and red stickers on the existing Housing Chapter goals and policies.

Items with red stickers (comments in parentheses):

- Goal 1: Range of Housing:
 - Direct Town efforts toward addressing housing needs that the private market does not, or cannot, meet.
 - Work toward a range of housing types to match residents' differing preferences and resources for their physical environments. (Word salad)

- Encourage a range of housing ownership and rental options to match residents' differing preferences and resources, to include: home ownership, rental, accessory apartments, condominium, cooperative, and congregate. (ADU)
- Goal 3: Waterfront Property
 - Continue participation in the National Flood Insurance Program in order to allow property owners the ability to purchase flood insurance. Any waterfront property development should be required to provide public lateral access to the waterfront. (Restricted building in the flood zone)
 - The Town will pursue federal and / or state funds to purchase flood prone properties. (Wetland / unbuildable has 0% value)
- Goal 4: Affordability & Diversity
 - Revise the zoning ordinance to promote affordable housing and housing that meets the needs of all Bristol citizens. (No to ADU)

Secretary Katz added that in general, these still seem like good goals.

Jeff Davis reviewed the strategies that are specific to LMI housing and how effective they have been.

1. List of properties the Town wants to encourage affordable housing to be built on
 - This has been valuable
2. Inclusionary housing
 - This was rescinded
3. Accessory dwelling units
 - Very popular in town, but up for discussion
4. Deed restrictions in exchange for zoning relief
 - Some success

There was discussion on the potential for a senior / age restricted housing development in Bristol.

5. Allowing infill development on vacant lots in R-10 in exchange for LMI deed
 - Inconsistent, some success, but overall didn't work well
6. Deed restricting existing housing stock in exchange for rehabilitation assistance
 - Not very successful
7. Buying tax sales properties and deed restricting them for LMI housing
 - Hasn't been used yet
8. Allowing multi-family dwellings in single family zones in exchange for LMI housing deed restrictions
 - No one is volunteering / applying

There was discussion on deed restrictions being a turn off, 30 year minimum state requirement, etc.

9. Mixed use Commercial / Residential

The Board brainstormed new ways to address affordable housing:

- Director Williamson brought up the pilot program in Jamestown where municipally owned land is being used for LMI via a community land trust. Jeff Davis explained that the Town owns the land and they sell the house that's on the land. The owner will pay a mortgage for the house and a lease for the land. There is a cap on how much the house

can be sold for so it remains affordable. This is popular in Vermont and gives the municipality a lot of control. The Board discussed pros and cons of this approach.

- Vice Chairman Murgo added that more elderly housing in Town would help. The Board discussed existing town owned land that is available for a 55+ community, and possibly using surplus schools like Reynolds, Guiteras, etc.
- Member Jarest suggested more 3 bedroom units for families, and mentioned that Robin Rug doesn't have any 3 bedroom units.

Jeff Davis will schedule a public meeting to cover the same topics as today's meeting. There will be a Board meeting in May to discuss how the trust money can best be used.

A motion was made (Murgo) to adjourn the meeting.

In favor: Clark, Jarest, Katz, Millard, Murgo

Opposed: None

Meeting adjourned at 8:44pm

Respectfully submitted by Doran Smith, Recording Secretary

Date Approved: 9 May 2024 Planning Board: 