



## MEETING MINUTES

City of Portsmouth  
Housing Blue Ribbon Committee  
School Board Conference Room at  
City Hall\*

Thursday, November 21, 2024  
5:30 p.m.

### **I. Meeting Called to Order by John T Howard Housing Navigator at 5:30p.m.**

Roll call:

Mary Loane, Eric Anderson, Jennifer Stebbins Thomas, Byron Matto, Tracy Kozak, Dagan Migirditch. Staff: Jennifer Smith, Legal Department Peter Stitch, Planner.

Absent: Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley, Councilor John Tabor, Councilor Beth Moreau, John O'Leary, Megan Corsetti, City Manager Karen Conard, Planning and Sustainability Director Peter Britz, Planning Manager Peter Stith

### **II. Discussion on Proposal Responses to RFP 09-25 Below Market Rate Housing Development at 35 Sherburne Road**

The goal of this meeting will be to narrow down questions for the top two ranking Developers for the Sherburn School Redevelopment project into permanently below market rate housing.

Although there may be representatives present, no question should go directly to them the questions will be written and emailed off to both entities and we will get written responses back by the December 2nd city council meeting to be shared with the city council.

Q. Lease with City plus contingency to lease the school separately for tax credit -- needs further explanation of what that meant from a funding perspective. POHA proposed a payment to the city all in advance to create a bigger tax credit but then a non cash transaction. Just for our knowledge to understand why they're why they're proposing this where it wasn't that way in in the in the PHA proposal .

Q. Will there be a comprehensive traffic study? Point of clarification for staff: is that something that is normally just included in a site plan. Do we need to ask or would it come through TAC. Traffic study, between 118 and 130 parking spaces. They have to provide the traffic study based on the number of units they're going to provide. We're not there yet so question is not necessary.

Q. What happens if a problem arises outside the ability of the on call person? Please give us an example or model of how you deal with onsite tenant issues at any time of day? Needs some explanation to the satisfaction of the



community that the residents are not going to be hindered by lack of attention. The RFP specifically requested and it was part of the ranking of the management plans. More specific answer for 24-hour basis?

Q. Is there any reason to check the reference that POHA has submitted? That would have fall on the staff to verify.

Q. Will the Sherburn project as submitted from POHA include eleven Section 8 units? Hard to ask because of different scenarios depending on what they can get financing for. I think the question is: is there a commitment to provide some number of voucher based units? There are probably a lot of questions about the unit mix or scale of the design that could go any direction depending what the committees or city council says.

Q. What happens if a financial component isn't funded -- what replaces the funded component. If there is a change in federal housing grant programs in the next year which eliminates anticipated funding sources for new housing proposals how do you that approach building this project?

Q. Have the cost projections in this commission been based on current standing bu items or has there been reflection of forecast and adjustment factors in in for your construction material? I think they all had the statement that this is current it's so flexible. Goes to Degan's that we're asking a fisherman to show us that he knows how to catch a fish they built they both of these entities have built projects in the last few years and I think they we can trust to them as the two highest ranking to understand you know forecasting of building a project. Committee okay to take that one off.

Q. Is the tenant selection process dictated by a formulated process on which the City of Portsmouth has little influence or does the City have adequate standing in this process. Questions seems to insinuate housing discrimination which we can't do. I recall all the proposals stating that they need to do their tenant selection process through state and federal guidelines and legal requirements. But given those caveats could you create a preference for people who worked in Portsmouth or for artists?

Q. Please clarify the timeline: a PHA completion date of 2027 with the 71 units, mothballing the school for how long? And if the plan is adaptive reuse of it then during that time who maintains ownership and maintenance of it? What's the timeframe on phase one and phase two.

Q. What is the asset allocation and its meaning as there appears to be some structural change at 15 years pertaining to ownership. This subject should be fully vetted that's related the way that LITC credits are structured. I feel like that a question that Legal needs to vet out.

Q. What are all the funding possibilities required for the project and how might the City of Portsmouth need to fund through the CIP? What scenario would require CIP funding?

Q. What Congressional funding might be available? We can do our own research. All okay with removing that question?

Q. The project communication section in community engagement process appears to be more focused on internal city government decisions but it would be beneficial for the proposal to detail Outreach with the affected neighborhood.



Q. If awarded an agreement to PHA do they have the bandwidth to develop two projects.

Q. What strategies would be used to attract AMIs in feeling accessible to young families and co-housing that allows roommates eg have teachers sharing spaces. Our welfare director said we have lots of larger units in the city but there are single people living in them and what we're really short of is one bedrooms.

Q. The two proposals that we were drastically different visual perspective that leaves the opportunity to share ideas, to have flexibility based on your idea of financing and cost yeah to adjust like at what point in terms of number of units does PHA say this isn't really feasible in the mix of specific AMI breakdowns.

Q. PHA proposes potential use of the gym space. I think that that is going to be part of the public engagement process of figuring out what the whole city and the in the more close-knit community from Pannaway to Coakley and I think that we can't ask them to answer that until they hear from them.

Councilors' questions:

Q. In the past few years have you encountered any major projects that did not come to fruition. Over the past years have any municipalities or partners you've worked with face essential costs or expenditures for projects that were not completed or became unlikely to be completed.

Q. If you do not keep the gym, to create a neighborhood feel, how does this affect the affordability of the units, how many bedrooms at what percentage. What is the maximum number of affordable units. See proposal?

Q. What are your plans for reinvesting in affordable housing in the future and what is your relationship with any potential partner for a community center in the school building.

Q. Who do the renters contact when there's a complaint with the property management staff. How do they escalate that concern?

Q. PHA your proposal lists the specific preference for allowing artists under section 42 of the AR code could you please explain this more?

Q. What are the what are the competitive advantages of POHA

Q. One of the pieces that we heard a lot in public comment at the work session was the excitement around artists residences but if that's going to be if the school's that's going to be mothballed it's going to be several years and there's a consideration to create senior housing more immediately.

Q. If the school is mothballed, what would be the anticipated completion date for that part of the project. What is your preferred scenario: asking the developer explicitly what they would want to do and if one of them says well we want to tear the school down and build as many units as possible then perhaps that's not the ideal developer or the other one says we want to transform the school into artist residences but in order to get units as quickly as possible we are phasing our approach then that's a question that goes out into the public arena and is more of a public engagement question.



What is our level of involvement as the committee after this? After we got the RFPs it was thought that the committee should make a recommendation. The city council has requested that the committee take a straw vote if people feel that they got enough information from the rfps to make a decision and reconvene after Dec 2nd before the 16th to go over the written responses before the city council votes on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Anderson I think your recommendation is to receive the answers that of the questions

Mary: I want more answers

Byron: I think taking time to deliberate. I don't know what we're doing here if we're not going to hear the answers to their questions.

I think we have enough information and I just feel so strongly that we need to keep pushing this forward and we need to come to a resolution.

At the city council meeting on the second representatives from the two firms are invited to speak and there may be counselors who ask more questions. However, we will not be setting up more questions this will be the only set of questions.

### **III. Public Comment:**

- Speaker: What are the advantages in the community if we go with PHA. There's a wonderful piece of work being done here to solve housing which we know is pressing and I think there's a wonderful opportunity to go to strength and Portsmouth Housing Authority build on that success.
- Linnea Grim speaking as co-chair of the Portsmouth Arts and Cultural commission which urges the city council to support artist live workspace as called for in the 2023 Portsmouth New Hampshire Cultural Plan as a key component of any Redevelopment of the Sherburn school property. We are committed to work with any developer chosen for that project as a resource for Implement for the implementation of that goal and supports adaptive reuse of the existing building.
- Speaker: New Hampshire Municipal Association Contracting 101: can contract specifications be changed during the bidding process in response to the changing conditions (the proposal process) municipality cannot after putting out one set of spec specs for bid decide to accept the bid that is calculated on different specs. If the municipality decides to use a new specs it must reject bids and advertise new specs.
- Looking at PHA's proposal for the 2027 completion is important to everybody on this commission and the council to get this as soon as possible. If the 2027 completion date was only phase one I would like to see PHA address that as it raised doubts in my mind. The only other thing I want to say is on getting a performance bond so the city would have something to go back on.
- Jennifer Hallway, 367 Colonial Drive in the Pannaway Manor neighborhood and I want to thank you for your steadfast service to our city and getting into the weeds and the nitty-gritty. They are both great proposals. As a resident of Portsmouth the deciding factors are local management and local accountability and I feel like PHA offers that to us so that would be my vote.
- I'm Peter first, local resident and my real concern is to have local management. I think it's a lot more important to have an organization that has a lot of history in the community. They're connected with local resources and I feel that expanding the number of units at PHA would strengthen their ability to serve the residents in the future. Working with POHA as a Boston based developer, have experience in the SE Coast but it's pretty huge compared to PHA and I would support PHA and try to keep Portsmouth a place where people of all incomes can live, work and contribute.
- Jim Smalley: Both are excellent but PHA controls 25% of renting units in the city. I think competition would help improve both of us



- John Logan, resident on Dennett Street and I'm really happy to see this project moving forward but I'd like to address a more future oriented question and I'd like to see this committee think about how to take advantage of the interest that's been shown by several different housing developers in working here. I think there's at least three more sites available in the city to work on and somebody's going to have to start pushing on the next project and the next project and the next project. The job isn't done until many more projects move forward so that's what I'd like to ask you to do as a committee is to plan after this is all settled and you've decided who the developer
- Moren Mills, 911 in Greenland Road and my husband and I are the abutters. I want to support the selection of the Portsmouth Housing Authority for the project. Keeping things local and having that kind of response that that they've already proven is valuable.
- Bar Boer on behalf of the Portsmouth Advocates, the preservation arm of the Portsmouth Historical Society and we strongly support the sensitive adaptive reuse of the former Sherburn School building. This building is a tangible piece of our City's history and we believe it holds great potential to meet the pressing need for below-market rate housing while maintaining its architectural and cultural integrity. We encourage the committee to work closely with the top firms to incorporate preservation best practices into the projects planning and design doing so we'll ensure this property continues to serve the community in innovative and meaningful ways.

IV. Adjourned 6:41 pm