

Shaftsbury Select Board
Wednesday April 11, 2018
Public hearing on Shires Housing proposal on Paran Road

1. Call to order

The meeting came to order at 6:05 p.m. Present were Select Board members Tim Scoggins (chair), Ken Harrington, Art Whitman, Tony Krulikowski, and Joe Barber. Also present was town administrator David Kiernan.

2. Conflict of interest

No one reported a conflict of interest with any item on the agenda.

3. Announcements

Mr. Scoggins noted that the Bennington County Regional Commission is hosting a forum on hosting on April 18, 5:30p-7:30, Bennington Housing Authority, on Willowbrook Rd.

4. Mr. Scoggins opened the hearing. Mr. Whitman noted that the Select Board is only considering whether to act as a conduit for funding to Shires Housing. The DRB and Act 250 Commission will be reviewing all permit applications.

Stephanie Lane, executive director of Shires Housing, presented an overview of the project. She described the mission of the organization. They are responsible for their units for a minimum of twenty years. All developments meet or exceed residential energy codes. Investments are made monthly to reserve accounts to cover ongoing maintenance costs. She described recent redevelopment projects.

She said of the new proposal: it will consist of 22 units in four buildings, on four acres. A mixed income project, serving families with incomes from \$22,600-\$77,640 for a family of four, with rents ranging from \$575 to about \$1000. 1.9 acres of the remaining three acres will be conserved permanently. Buildings will resemble traditional New England style farmhouse.

A housing study found that Shaftsbury's housing needs are not met. Ms. Lane described some of the secondary economic impacts of their projects such as tax receipts and new jobs. She explained some of the housing problem in the town and regionally, and various approaches to addressing the lack of affordable housing. The apartment vacancy rate is 0.4% at present.

The proposed housing project will provide appropriate housing, improve neighborhood aesthetics, enhance the local rental portfolio, increase investment in Town, and create business for local vendors and subcontractors, and property taxes.

Ms. Lane discussed Paran Rd. The additional housing units will further impair the road. To pave it would cost about \$500K. Additional tax revenues could provide resources for future actions. She volunteered to sponsor a feasibility study re the various options for the road.

Ms. Lane said they are here to ask for a resolution from the Select Board, to allow the submission of a grant application on behalf of the Town. The grant under question would be just a small piece of the total (approximately \$6 million).

Mr. Jeff Goldstone, architect for the project presented further information on the project: a site plan, and two building elevations. A single driveway will serve all units. A secondary driveway will provide emergency (as well as routine) access. Thirty three parking spaces are proposed. Two ADA units will be provided. One bedroom to three bedroom units. Wastewater will be tied into existing sewer. A new well will be drilled.

Mr. Jason Dolmetsch from MSK Engineering joined the presentation. He said the Town of Bennington has entered into a conceptual agreement to provide wastewater treatment for the project.

The project is located in School District 1 (North Bennington).

Heat, snow removal, trash collection, and property management are included in the rent. The units will be wired for cable and Wifi.

Funders could be VHCB, Affordable Housing Partnership through the Federal Home Loan Bank in Boston, VT Community Development program (the grant under deliberation this evening) and VT Housing and Finance Agency. Source of funds includes state and federal sources and private investors.

If the Town decided not to do the Paran Rd. study, Shires would contribute the about \$25K it would cost to the Town instead.

Some of the funding sources would require Shires to maintain the property in perpetuity. If, hypothetically, Shires went out of business, the funders would assign responsibility to others with a similar mission.

Mr. Goldstone said they try very hard to secure local contractors. The bid documents require this.

Ms. Lane said they have a significant wait list. They do credit and background checks and check references. They confirm income levels. Shires runs about a 4% vacancy rate as there is always some churn.

Jonathan Cooper from the Regional Commission gave a presentation on the housing situation in the region.

Ms. Lane said the schools will be asked to absorb about 6-10 new students. The schools have indicated they are able to accept them.

The hearing moved into the comments phase. Several citizens expressed their thoughts.

Mr. Scoggins closed the public hearing. Mr. Krulikowski made a motion to approve the grant application for Shires Housing. Mr. Scoggins seconded the motion. He pointed out that the Town Plan is congruent with the Shires Housing proposal. Mr. Harrington said he sees the project as Shires getting public money that private landowners can't get, and that they are therefore relatively disadvantaged. Paran Rd. already has about all the traffic it can handle. It isn't in conformance with the character of the area. Mr. Whitman noted that Shires would pay taxes on 100% of the assessed value and 90% of the school tax. Mr. Whitman asked Trevor Mance if he had jobs he can't fill (he does); Mr. Whitman said he does. Mr. Whitman said he is concerned about the road, as only 5% of taxes goes to on the ground road repair. We'll never be able to pay for that with taxes. He said people must be able to ride a bike or walk – on a dedicated path or sidewalk. These costs should not be borne by the citizens of Shaftsbury. Mr. Krulikowski said he hopes this action will help come up with creative solutions, that it will help us attract more money to help us address the matter. But the creation of affordable housing must nonetheless go forward, region- and state-wide. Mr. Barber wondered whether the project is a good fit for Paran Acres. He doesn't see how anyone could be going to Shaftsbury Elementary and so no school taxes are likely to come to Shaftsbury. We must consider the residents of Paran Acres. Mr. Kiernan pointed out that class 3 roads can't qualify for state paving grants. (Perhaps the class of Paran Rd. could be changed.) Mr. Scoggins pointed out that taxes paid to the N. Bennington school benefit Shaftsbury residents. The motion passed 4-1-0, with Mr. Harrington voting no.