

Quality of Life Committee, Town of New Lebanon
Minutes for monthly meeting held via Zoom
May 26, 2022

Present: Bob Gilson, Tistrya Houghtling, Sharon Powers, Erminia Rasmussen

Tistrya Houghtling called the meeting to order at 4:03 pm.

Tistrya Houghtling asked for an approval of the April 19th minutes. It was noted that some committee members did not receive them. Tistrya said that she had given the minutes to Marcie Roberts to post on the town website, but they were not emailed to the committee. She said that she would email them to the committee along with the minutes for the May 26 Meeting. The approval of the April 19th and May 26th minutes would occur at the June meeting.

Discussion:

Tistrya said that she had spoken with Sharon McArdle, a local and long-time real estate agent, about what it would take to attract young families to New Lebanon. She would like to invite Mrs. McArdle to the June Quality of Life Committee Meeting. Sharon Powers said that her husband Steve's sister works in affordable housing in Colorado. In Colorado 10% of the units in any new development must be affordable and she would like to invite her to also speak with the committee. We will invite both to the June meeting.

Tistrya said that she and Bob Gilson had spoken with Brenda Adams, Town Supervisor for Canaan, and the former director of Columbia County's Habitat for Humanity, about affordable housing. They spoke about the fact that many teachers in New Lebanon do not live in town. Brenda said that it was not so much the issue of affordability, but rather that their families are established elsewhere. It was agreed that we need to attract young families. We not only need affordable workforce housing, we also need affordable rental properties.

Brenda Adams said first step in figuring out what we need is data collection. At present it is estimated that Columbia County needs 440 units of affordable housing. One idea is to create cluster housing on a large piece of land that would space houses relatively close together to preserve as much open space as possible. The goal would be to create a mixed use development that provides affordable housing for farm families and working families, as well as affordable housing for seniors that would allow them to age in place. Part of the idea is that a significant part of the vacant property could be used as farmland.

It was noted that it is important when planning a mixed use development that it is built in a way that does not devalue the neighboring properties. Also, the best way to attract a developer would be to have a project shovel ready, with all the approvals in place. It was agreed that it would be best to find ways for our respective communities to work collaboratively.

Tistrya mentioned that the Zoning Rewrite Committee is looking into drafting zoning that would allow residents to add a tiny home to an existing lot as an accessory dwelling. The premise is that the tiny home would be considered as an additional bedroom, and that it would be able to be tied into existing infrastructure such as well and septic. One idea is that in order to add a tiny home to a property, one bedroom in an existing house would have to vacate. Bob Gilson said that to preserve property values, he hoped that there would be some regulation as to which areas of town tiny house could be located, and that they would not just be turned into Air B&Bs.

Any ideas about creating affordable housing in town would have to rely on the Comprehensive Plan. Tistrya mention a Hamlet Revitalization Plan which was created in 2013, as a model of how to move forward. There was an effort at that time to make improvements to the "downtown." A grant to install sidewalks was written, and the grant was received, but the measure was opposed by the public at the public hearing stages.

The next Quality of Life meeting, scheduled for June 23 at 4:00 pm, will be held in person. It was also agreed that, if necessary, a person could attend over zoom; however, s/he would not be able to vote.

Bob Gilson moved to adjourn the meeting at 4:49 pm. Ermina Rasmussen seconded the motion. A roll was called. The motion to adjourn was approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted: Bob Gilson