

Town to explore alternate development for property on Southwest Avenue

By Tom Shevlin

With no progress on plans to convert the former town offices at Southwest Avenue into affordable housing units, town officials are poised to explore alternative development projects for the property.

Per a request by Councilor William Kelly, Town Administrator Bruce Keiser reported on Monday that there had been no new developments regarding critical state funding necessary for the development of the Southwest Avenue site by Newport-based Church Community Housing Corporation (CCHC).

CCHC had applied for funding under the state's \$50 million HousingWorksRI bond to develop the property into a proposed twelve-unit affordable housing complex. However, in June, CCHC learned that no funding had been allocated for their proposal, though revised proposals could be considered on a rolling basis.

With no firm or projected timetable for further state review, Kelly asked the town could do anything to move the process forward.

Keiser suggested that introducing an element of competition could spur activity by CCHC, but no other avenues for the town were

immediately available to win state funding.

Keiser said whatever the project, "we want the best deal for Jamestown."

Councilor Barbara Szepatowski suggested the town explore developing the site as a mixed-use facility in order to generate additional revenue for the town.

However, town officials stressed that exploring alternative developments doesn't diminish the town's commitment to offering affordable housing or Church Community Housing.

According to a report issued by CCHC last year, less than half of

Jamestown's required 10 percent of housing units meet affordability requirements for low-income residents. And while the town has no formal agreement with CCHC, councilors reiterated their support for their plans and their organization.

The sale of the property, which the town has appraised for \$700,000, has been the topic of debate since plans for consolidating municipal offices at the new town hall were introduced. CCHC has indicated that it would conduct its own appraisal as well as continued engineering and site work in order to win approval from the state.

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