

# Affordable housing proposal cancelled due to lack of funding

By Tyler Will

The Church Community Housing Corporation, a Newport-based non-profit company that builds affordable housing, has withdrawn its application to build a housing complex at 79 North Rd. in Jamestown, the site of the former Ocean State Scuba.

The project cancellation was announced during the Planning Commission meeting on Wednesday, Aug. 19.

Town Planner Lisa Bryer told the planning board that the town did not receive necessary funding for the affordable housing project from a federal grant program.

In a letter dated Aug. 13, CCHC Executive Director Stephen Ostiguy wrote that the prospective site for a housing complex did not receive sufficient funding from the

Community Development Block Grant.

"Without these funds, the project is not financially viable," Ostiguy said in the letter. "Additionally, it has been discovered there exist complications associated with the property's dimensions that would require additional time and expense to clarify and/or correct."

Those complications included an inaccurate land survey, according to Ostiguy. He said the actual size of the lot was smaller than was indicated in the estimate.

"It was represented to us smaller than it really is," he said. "We could not fit what we were proposing on the lot."

The proposal called for 10 units of housing, including two-bedroom apartments, which would

have allowed families to live in the units.

The location would also have offered a short walk to downtown, and easy access to public transportation, the library, schools and the likely location of the pending Jamestown Arts Center.

Commissioner Nancy Bennett said she recalled the town only receiving money from the block grant program the first year it applied several years ago, and Bryer concurred.

When Bennett asked why the town keeps applying, Bryer said, "We always hope."

A town zoning ordinance update also drew controversy revolving around lot restrictions, which some residents claimed were added without public notification.

According to the planning

commission, Town Solicitor Peter Ruggiero now has the second draft of the ordinance ready for review. The Press received a copy of comments from three commissioners and Betty Hubbard. Among the commission comments, 14 pages came from Bennett, and less extensive remarks came from Chairman Michael Swistak and Vice Chairman Gary Girard.

After the meeting, Bryer said she read all the comments and changed what was appropriate, based on her experience and the town's needs.

Among the major discussion topics was the fact that Commissioner Richard Ventrone wanted any proposed demolition of buildings to come before the planning commission, while the rest of the commission either wanted community input on the issue or said it was not necessary.

"Even if it does come in front of us, what can we do about it?" Bennett said. "Can we really tell someone not to demolish a building?"

Most of the discussion regarded lot width minimums and maximums. When Swistak asked for a consensus, Ventrone was the only commissioner "strongly in favor" of keeping maximums in the residential districts.

"If somebody wants to build a house and a barn next to it within two blocks, that is up to them," Commissioner Duncan Pendlebury said. "I don't think it's our prerogative to say we want everybody to be a Disney World from here to the other end of R-8 and R-20 [the residential zoning districts]."

Ventrone argued that fewer lot restrictions could compromise a neighborhood's character and leave gaps between buildings – an argument that Michael Smith, who has replaced Jean Brown on the commission, labeled as "arbitrary." Smith said gaps between buildings allow for future development, and added that the town looked much different 100 years ago.

Bennett also said that "missing teeth" are not a bad thing.

"I do not mind missing teeth in Jamestown," she said. "Jamestown is organically evolving. I would

hate to see this place all look the same."

The planning commission also discussed commercial lot width minimums and maximums, and may adopt a controversial limit that would make it difficult for a business to buy an adjacent lot and build a single structure on the two lots. As an example, the commission discussed what would happen if a businessperson bought the Bank of America and gas station properties on Narragansett Avenue, and then tried to build a large structure on the two lots.

"You are limiting construction to the developer, and to the growth of the town," said Jack Brittain, owner of Jack's Electric. "This is totally wrong...I do not agree with this 100 percent, and I think it is illegal."

After the meeting, Brittain elaborated, saying he thinks the measure is illegal because it interferes with civil liberties.

When starting his business, Brittain said he had difficulty complying with town regulations.

"It's frustrating," he said. "I'm concerned after all the trouble we had...all [of a] sudden I am going to have a non-conforming lot."

Brittain also said the commission added those restrictions after public input on the Charette, the town's future downtown plan. In the Commercial Limited district, the proposal – which was displayed on a screen during the meeting – allows 80 to 120 feet per lot; the CD district calls for 60 to 96 feet per lot.

After the meeting, Swistak insisted the dimensions were in the original proposal, adding that the proposal is a long and dense document that people did not have enough time to look through.

If the dimensions pass, businesspeople will still be able to buy two lots and build a single structure on them, but they would have to go before the commission for a variance.

In other business, Commissioner Jean Brown resigned because her job situation has changed. She was replaced by Michael Smith, who previously served on the commission from 1993 to 2000.

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Teens are needed to play and supervise games for younger children. Activities will include pumpkin painting, gunny sack races, three-legged races and more.

Teens are asked to sign up for a three-hour shift, from either 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. or 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Ideas for fun nature and farm conservation-related activities are also needed.

Contact Debbie Tungett at [jamestownteens@yahoo.com](mailto:jamestownteens@yahoo.com) or Anne Kuhn-Hines at [westferry@cox.net](mailto:westferry@cox.net) for more information or to volunteer.

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