

## A Message from the Township Committee

### Township has a plan for affordable housing

After months of litigation, Chatham Township has reached an agreement in principle on a plan to meet the Township's Affordable Housing obligation.

The tentative agreement came following two mediation sessions between representatives of the Township and the Fair Share Housing Center (FSHC) which represents the interests of low-income families. The agreement would allow the Township to meet its Third Round obligation of 200 Affordable Housing units by using up to six sites with a mix of Group Homes and family apartments, some of which would offer a preference to Veterans.

The plan, if approved by Superior Court Judge Michael C. Gaus, would withdraw all the legal motions between FSHC and the Township. It would grant an extension until Friday, June 19, 2020, for the Township to come into compliance, with a Fairness and Compliance Hearing to be scheduled before the end of June, 2020. The plan would establish a calendar of actions the Township must take under court supervision to stay on schedule. And it sets an extended construction schedule calling for ground breaking on the final units by early 2022.

This plan is a significant modification from the original Affordable Housing settlement the Township and FSHC reached in December, 2018. Mayor Michael J. Kelly extended the Township Committee's thanks to all residents for their patience during the many months of hard work to resolve the litigation and get to this proposed new plan. The Mayor thanked the many members of the public who offered their help and suggestions. He recognized all the Township Committee members for their unanimous support of the plan, and the Township's professional staff for their long hours and late nights working toward reaching this solution. He thanked the two different developers who will be working with the Township to execute the plan. And he thanked FSHC for its willingness to amend the original settlement to allow this new plan which will be better both for the Township and for our future neighbors who will be the residents of these affordable homes.

The new conceptual housing plan calls for:

- Approximately 62 family rental units on vacant land owned by the Township located between 476-490 River Road near the Cardinal Hill Apartments. Some of the units would be offered with a 90-day preference

for Veterans.

- Approximately 12 Group Home beds in three separate homes located on properties still to be determined, but scattered throughout the Township.
- 24 family rental units already approved at Arbor Green, to be built between the Skate Park and Police Headquarters by the builder of the Dixiedale Townhomes.

The settlement also gives the Township credit for:

- The 72 existing owner-occupied units at Vernon Grove, and
- A surplus of 8 units carried forward from Round 2 of the Affordable Housing process, plus bonuses for providing rental units.

One of the major changes in the amended settlement, if it is approved by Judge Gaus, would be the allowance of up to three group homes for special needs individuals. These group homes, which provide supportive housing for residents with physical or developmental disabilities, are key to meeting our residents' frequent requests for scattered sites.

Each Group Home typically would serve four special needs residents with shifts of 1-2 caregivers present around the clock. Sites for these Group Homes must still be purchased by the Township, and anyone who knows of or owns a potential site is invited to contact the Township.

If the Township cannot purchase the necessary Group Home sites, or if the lack of available financing makes the cost of Group Homes prohibitively expensive, the plan would still allow the Township to build up to 12 Affordable Housing rental apartments on the skate park site.

Another major change in the amended plan would be the reconsideration of the location and number of 74 units – later reduced to 64 units – originally proposed for the Municipal Building site and now identified as 62 units on River Road. The Township Committee's original strategy was to address three challenges simultaneously by locating Affordable Housing on the Municipal Building site and building a new combined Administration and Police Building next to the existing Police Headquarters. In addition to providing Affordable Housing, this would have replaced the existing Police Headquarters, which does not comply with Department of Correction standards, and the existing Municipal Building, which requires a major investment in repairs to the roof, windows HVAC and other systems have reached or are reaching the end of their designed lifespans.

The revised plan to locate 62 units at River Road will reduce the Township's cost

for Affordable Housing by millions of dollars. It will spread out repair costs at the Police and Municipal Buildings because they would no longer need to be done to meet affordable housing deadlines, and the River Road location is expected to be eligible for millions of dollars in financing through tax credits for which Affordable Housing at the Municipal Building would not have qualified.

As a bonus, the Group Home option calls for no immediate re-use of the Skate Park itself. This means skaters could continue to use the ramps and jumps, with the recognition that the equipment is nearing the end of its expected life span, and the Skate Park remains within the Township's Affordable Housing Redevelopment Area for possible future use.

Finally, the agreement in principle and the withdrawal of FSHC's litigation allows for the re-opening of public discussion of the Township's Affordable Housing situation, starting with the Township Committee's regular meeting this Thursday, Feb. 27, at 7:30 p.m.

In addition, informal Meetings with the Mayor will be held at the Municipal Building every Saturday at 10:30 a.m. for anyone who cannot come on weekday evenings or who prefers a small-group discussion.

“It has been a challenging, complex and difficult task finding a workable solution to the constitutionally-mandated Affordable Housing obligation,” said Mayor Kelly. “Thank you again to all who have helped.”