

Affordable Housing Board Meeting

Documented Name: Kevin Stearns

Agency: 222 Laporte Avenue, Colorado River Room, Fort Collins

Date: June 1, 2023

Members Present

John Singleton (Chair)

Bob Pawlikowski (Vice Chair)

Stefanie Berganini

Jennifer Bray

Not Present

Ed Hermsen

Sheila Seaver-Davis

Kristin Fritz

Others

Brittany Depew, Homelessness Lead Specialist

Meaghan Overton, Housing Manager

Sue Beck-Ferkiss, Social Policy and Housing Programs Manager

Summary

The [Affordable Housing Board](#) has been meeting on the first Thursday of each month at 4:00pm since its first meeting on October 13, 1993. On June 1, 2023, board members and guests sat at tables arranged in a horseshoe for a hybrid in person and online meeting. July's meeting will be virtual.

The meeting's [agenda](#) contained many items, but the conversation centered on three areas:

1. Homelessness Response
2. Affordable Housing Board Update
3. ARPA Fee Credit Options

Homelessness Response

Brittany Depew gave a presentation on the status and updates of the [Homelessness Response](#) system created in 2022, which received \$955k in funding from ARPA (the federal American Rescue Plan Act) in 2023 plus \$100k from the general fund. This is a lot more funding than a typical year. 100% of this funding gets allocated to the community through its partners.

The city's Homelessness Response has internal and external partners. Internal partners include Park Rangers, Natural Area TVA Teams, Fort Collins Police, Code Compliance, Transport, Streets, Recreation, Security, and others. Externally, they work with Homeward Alliance, Outreach Fort Collins, Fort Collins Rescue Mission, and many others.

There are many current challenges for the response team. Natural spaces are difficult areas where the housed and unhoused interact the most. Seeing the homeless helps improve their visibility, which can lead to action, but this can also mean that the response ends up rushed and ineffective. Housing first

policies, which allocate most funding to housing instead of support services, can leave the homeless sheltered but without the help they need to recover. Different groups trying to address homelessness can have different goals in mind. They can also have different assumptions about the root cause of homelessness, and as a result, how to respond to it.

The city of Fort Collins has no official response on the root cause of homelessness, though they do discuss the rising cost of housing and the inability of wages to keep up and be a living wage. They are also concerned about medical debt. The city recognizes homelessness as a systemic rather than individual problem.

Data on homelessness has historically been inaccurate. It's assumed that only about 10% of homeless individuals are accounted for, which is the national average. The level of funding for homeless programs is based on these undercounts. Nonetheless, HMIS (Homeless Management Information System) data is getting better. It used to be collected every 2 years, but it is now collected every year. It's difficult to establish a baseline yet because new data is more accurate than data from prior years as more agencies are reporting to HMIS.

Families and children have been the hardest to track. Funding has been mostly focused on single males because that's been what the data has shown is the most needed. As a result there aren't good services for families in need.

Homelessness response planning doesn't trickle down to enforcement. The police system criminalized people for existing when there is nowhere for them to go, and so the homeless do not have positive interactions with the police, even when officers are trying to help. People were left with nowhere to sleep during the pandemic and the city council did not respond to the problem.

The HOPE (Homeless Outreach and Proactive Engagement) team was launched by the Fort Collins Police Services, but has had problems due to a lack of available staff with the necessary training or who have built relationships with those involved. Outreach Fort Collins can be reached through 911, but they are not 24/7 and do not cover the whole city. The police considered sending not uniformed officers, but decided against it. The city doesn't want to just force people out or take their things. There is a tough balance between enforcement and keeping areas safe and clean.

The city is talking about looking towards other places in the community to use as resources for the homeless and there is a competition for funding these programs. Outreach Fort Collins provides training for providing these services, but more would be helpful. Currently, issues relating to the homeless end up on the shoulders of developers who provide shelters, which is an unfair burden. More funding would make a huge difference.

Affordable Housing Board Update

Attendance has been good at the Land Use Code community outreach events, but most attendees have been white homeowners aged 50 and up. More feedback needs to be heard from other members of the community, especially younger renters. There was also good feedback on the walking tours, which was attended by 5 or 6 of the 7 City Council members. Over 80 people have attended.

The schedule for the new Land Use Code:

- Stage 1 – Outreach (March and April)
- Stage 2 – Feedback (April and June)
- Stage 3 – Draft Potential Alternative (June and July, the current stage)
- Stage 4 – Recommendations and Adoption (August and September)

There were 6,500 signatures collected in opposition of the last Land Use Code (though only about 4,000 of these signatures were valid). Only about 600 of these people have shown up to the city's outreach program despite a lack of outreach being their primary concern. The city sent out 97,000 postcards about the Land Use Code this time. Why is the city not reaching these people?

The city is between 40-50% rental units. Ownership used to be at 65%, but it's been going down. This is a national trend. Allowing more duplexes and ADUs (accessory dwelling units) are seen as ways to increase housing stock, but opposition believes they will change the existing character of neighborhoods despite large buildings next to single detached housing already being allowed by the current code. The board and council are generally on the side of trying to expand duplexes (and triplexes etc.) and allow for ADUs while taking steps to preserve the character of neighborhoods. City Council wants the new Land Use Code to apply to the whole city regardless of HOA requirements. They also want a more efficient review process for developers.

In December 2022, proactive rental inspections went to council, but did not pass. Instead, there is a plan for mandatory rental registration, enhanced mediation, education, and outreach to enhance the current complaint based system for rentals which will be presented to council next Tuesday (there will be a chance to speak up between then and June 20). The registry will have monthly rent as an optional entry, as it's hard to get individuals to report financial data such as their income (30-40% of people will not report). There is concern that landlords will not register if they have to report monthly rent, but this makes it difficult to know how affordable an area is for the city.

With the current system, if a tenant files a complaint, an inspector is sent to the property. If a violation is found, the owner has to respond in a timely manner, but this system needs more support and resources to make it function in a way that serves everyone effectively.

ARPA Fee Credit Options

No units this year at 30% AMI (average median income) were available for funding from ARPA. The next closest option would be to allocate the fee credits to the [Heartside Hill](#) project, which would have 40% AMI units. ARPA allows allocation to projects for units up to 65% AMI, but going above 30% AMI would require approval from City Council. This would also be a good opportunity to discuss with the City Council allowing the funding of units up to 40% AMI if there are no options available at 30%. Funding should be focused on helping develop the lowest units under development.

Motion: Approve the request to seek City Council approval to utilize the remaining ARPA funds for Heartside Hill and expand the use of these funds for units up to 40% AMI.

Vote: 1 Support, 1 Abstain (John Singleton)

Further Questions

Criticism of housing first policies was focused on the cost of housing. Does a housing first policy work when the cost of housing isn't as extreme or when the community is already providing support such as free healthcare, community gardens, public transit, ect. so that these services do not have to be additional funded by the government specifically to deal with homelessness?

Though collecting data on the homeless is useful for funding and responding to issues relating to homelessness, what are the negative consequences of expanding surveillance over the least fortunate?

Increasing density through more multifamily housing, including the expansion of duplexes and ADUs is in the hopes of increasing supply and thus reducing prices. Is there evidence that increasing the supply of housing actually reduces prices if landlords and investment firms can still purchase the new units that become available on the market?

Allocating funds to the developer who provides the lowest cost housing units seems like a very reasonable strategy, but what is to stop developers from benefiting from this funding while still increasing the unit cost over time?