Community Development Committee
Minutes from meeting: June 14, 2018
Location: WRC Conference Room

Community Development Committee present: Tim Arsenault (chair), Lynn Barrett, Edie Mas, Wendy Harrison, and Stephen Dotson (via phone)
Guests: Greg Brown (WRC Housing Citizen Interest Commissioner), Alex Beck (BDCC/SEVEDS), Christine Hart (Brattleboro Housing Partnership), Robert Crego (M&S Development) and Elizabeth Bridgewater (Windham & Windsor Housing Trust)
Staff present: Susan McMahon

Called to order 5:35 pm

1. Introductions/Minutes Approval
   The minutes of 8 March 2018 and 10 May 2018 were approved.

2. Regional Plan Housing
   Susan McMahon asked representatives from housing development organizations to introduce the work of their organization and talk about what they see as trends for housing in the future.

   Christine Hart, Executive Director of Brattleboro Housing Partnership (BHP), explained that her organization is federally funded and currently responsible for public housing, low income housing and section 8 vouchers. BHP has 320 residential units, 180 units and 3 programs for homeless. Recently added a case manager to work with the residents that are very, very low income (30%). This has seen quite a bit of success and rent problems have dropped dramatically. She discussed that HUD is changing its way in working with housing. It is likely that BHP will apply to HUD for two new programs:
   - Rental Assistance Program – This will have BHP operate the housing more like a non-profit and end public housing
   - Moving to Work – Gives housing organizations flexibility on how they use vouchers. This will give them the ability to fit what is needed in the area.

   Elizabeth Bridgewater, Executive Director of Windham & Windsor Housing Trust, explained that her non-profit organization has rental housing (700), home ownership center, and real-estate development for new housing. Currently, working with Groundworks on supportive services for soon to be completed Great River Terrace and developing a new project in Brattleboro (Snow Block) that they are working with Youth Service for housing for young adults. In the future her organization will be:
     - focusing on northern Windham and especially Bellows Falls
     - working on new ideas on how to help landlords
     - working on the best way to coordinate resident services and talking to other related organizations on this issue

   Bob Crego, M&S Development, explained that his company focuses on downtown mixed use revitalization and small industrial projects. They provide development services and creative financing tools. Currently, they are working on projects to reenergize downtowns such as the Putnam Block (Bennington) and Windham Hotel (Bellows Falls).

The Committee and the guests had a discussion about needs and trends, which is summarized below:
There is a strong need for workforce housing at the 80-120% range
- There is a benefits cliff
- Millennials are not only interested in living in downtowns they are interested in living in the woods
- Need for more downtown rentals
- Need to improve the housing stock
- Need for healthy and more energy efficient homes
- Second home owners generally have lack of community involvement
- Decline (nationally) of new homes being built
- Land value in rural areas has increased
- Cost of housing (both rental and homeownership) out pacing wages
- Need to get housing out of a silo and work with other organizations
- Need for a larger regional discussion
- Need a special subchapter in the regional plan for creative ideas and approaches to this issue.
- Need for code enforcement and rental inspection program
- Important for housing to be convenient to transportation

3. **Sister Region**
   S. McMahon summarized the status of the Sister Region project. She explained that at the April 13, 2017 Community Development Committee meeting Stephen Dotson, discussed the Sister Region Program. In Fall 2017 Ralph Meima contacted WRC about a “sibling-region” candidate in Sweden – Hässleholm and asked if WRC would write a short letter stating that the Windham Regional Commission is interested in establishing contacts with municipalities in Sweden. In October 2017 the WRC Executive Board approved sending a letter. The letter was sent and Hässleholm is very interested. Chris Campany, Ralph Meima, Stephen Dotson and Susan McMahon met and it was felt that it would make sense to establish a sub-committee of the Community Development Committee to continue to work on this issue. The purpose of the Subcommittee is to provide both strategic leadership and operational coordination of international sister region relationships. S. McMahon asked the Community Development Committee to review this request at their June 14th meeting and make a recommendation to the WRC Executive Board. Ralph Meima made a brief presentation about Hässleholm and opportunities to encourage exchange of ideas. Stephen Dotson made a motion and was seconded by Wendy Harrison to recommend to the WRC Executive Board a Sister Region Subcommittee to the Community Development Committee be established. The motion passed unanimously.

4. **Other Business/Next Meeting**
   Next meeting – July 12, 2018 – continue discussion on housing
   Meeting adjourned at 7:17 p.m.