



THRESHOLD
Lexington's Housing Commission
Wednesday, April 26, 2023 - 4:00 P.M
Second Floor Conference Room, City Hall
300 E. Washington Street, Lexington, VA

AGENDA

- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Approval of Agenda**
- 3. Approval of Minutes**
 - A. Approval of March 22, 2023 minutes*
- 4. New Business**
 - A. Review and editing of underutilized property survey letter
- 5. Adjournment**

*indicates attachment

MINUTES

THRESHOLD

**Lexington's Housing Commission
Wednesday, March 22, 2023 – 4:00 p.m.
Second Floor Conference Room, City Hall**

Threshold:

Present: Shadrey Sands, Chair
Marisa Charley (arrived 4:03 pm)
Nadine Craney
Marylin Alexander, Council Liaison
Nicholas Betts, Council Liaison

Absent: Fred Kirchner, Vice-Chair

City Staff:

Arne Glaeser, Planning Director
Kate Beard, Administrative Assistant

Guests:

Lynne Johnson, Habitat for Humanity
Steve Neas, Habitat for Humanity
Robby Robertson, Mission Next Door

CALL TO ORDER:

S. Sands called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

AGENDA

The agenda was unanimously approved as presented. (N. Betts / M. Alexander)

MINUTES:

The minutes from the February 22, 2023 were unanimously approved as presented. (N. Betts / M. Alexander).

NEW BUSINESS:

A. Conversation with representatives from Habitat for Humanity and Mission Next Door –

Remarking that several members of the Threshold Commission are relatively newly appointed, Chair Sands thanked the guest speakers for their willingness to share the history of their organizations.

Steve Neas, Chair of Habitat's repair committee, reported the repair program completed 16 projects in 2022, some of which were multi-phased projects. He emphasized the importance of having a clearly defined scope for the work to be undertaken and a clear understanding of who will be served. Habitat's program has defined its scope as "critical" repairs (accessibility inside and outside the house, preventing further structural decline, and roof and floor repairs). He explained Habitat works primarily with volunteers, which limits the size of the projects they can feasibly undertake, though they do hire contractors when there is available funding. He said defining a project's scope helps with client expectations and the ability to tailor the work to a group's abilities. He has a regular group of 5-6 retired volunteers with some carpentry skills. He indicated there is a W&L student volunteer group that has been very effective completing repair projects, provided the person leading the project has the experience to lead a group with no skills to insure quality control.

Mr. Neas said Habitat receives applications largely through word of mouth, often from other property owners in the same neighborhood as completed projects. In order to qualify for Habitat assistance, an applicant must have below 60% of the area median income and own the property. Habitat Executive Director, Lynne Johnson, said she offered to share Habitat's repair policy and explained repairs are prioritized with "critical" repairs being given highest priority, then aging in place, and then roof repairs. Mr. Neas said additional volunteers would be needed to exceed the number of projects completed in 2022. Ms. Johnson added that additional funding sources would also be needed to increase repair numbers. She extolled the impact the repair program has on affordable housing by keeping people from being displaced from their homes.

S. Sands asked how Threshold could add to Habitat's efforts. Mr. Neas said Habitat needs help engaging additional volunteer groups. Ms. Johnson suggested additional repair programs are also needed, as are incentives for contractors to build affordable housing in the area.

Mr. Robertson reported that Mission Next Door completed 34 projects in 2022, only two of which were in Lexington. He said Mission Next Door shares the Habitat program's priorities and he reiterated the importance of understanding the program's capabilities. He said the main difference between the programs is that Mission Next Door has plenty of volunteers but only two skilled individuals to manage projects. He provided a copy of the program's application and said their referrals are also largely word of mouth, though they do receive some from Social Services and the Senior Center. He indicated that a significant amount of their repairs are indoor projects, necessitated by damage caused by plumbing leaks. He suggested a charitable plumbing program advertising the importance of "fixing a leak before it ruins your floor" could prevent many larger repairs.

Ms. Johnson remarked that in the past, Habitat received a yearly grant from the City which, if reinstated, could be used for outreach to potential volunteers or to support volunteer teams. She remarked that frequently projects cannot be scheduled ahead of time, so it is most helpful to have a group of volunteers who are able to be somewhat on-call. A. Glaeser mentioned the surveys Threshold conducted in Lexington neighborhoods which resulted in several project referrals and asked if there were other ways the City could help fill gaps or expand capacity. Mr. Neas and Ms. Johnson answered that additional volunteers and funding would be most helpful. Mr. Neas said the cost of a typical project is in the \$1,500 - \$2,000 range. Ms. Johnson added that a substantial expense for the repair program's budget was for subcontractors to help with roof repairs.

Mr. Robertson said the Mission Next Door program had a slightly different problem, in that they have only two experienced team leaders, both of whom are at an age that they will not be able to continue much longer. His concern is that Mission Next Door will soon cease to exist unless he is able to find someone to take over. Last year the program completed 34 projects involving 850 labor hours and \$17,000 in material – figures that he said were comparable to those for the eight years he has headed the program.

M. Charlie provided a summary of the United Way community improvement program she was involved with in western Pennsylvania and asked if it was a model that might work well in the Lexington/Rockbridge area. Mr. Neas responded favorably, recounting the history of a similar program in Madison County North Carolina that has developed into a very effective way to organize, coordinate, and oversee out of town volunteer church groups. He said he could see something similar working well in Rockbridge County. Ms. Johnson cautioned that

Habitat has policies for volunteering that would need to be complied with for Habitat to be involved.

Ms. Johnson suggested that if the City has an unused or underused building, Habitat is in need of dry, accessible storage space for materials for both the repair and new build programs. She indicated this would be particularly useful when the seven lot build site off of South Main Street becomes operational. A. Glaeser said he would put her in touch with the City Manager to discuss whether a building on the VDOT site could be used for material storage during the time that the site is being planned for development.

Having asked the group to consider a hypothetical scenario involving \$20,000 being budgeted to Threshold next year, A. Glaeser asked how the money could be best used and if Threshold could work with either program to fund projects in Lexington. Ms. Johnson suggested that if the City was actually willing to put aside that amount of money, it might be worth considering using it to fund a position to address the stewardship issues at Mission Next Door. Mr. Robertson and Mr. Neas both indicated a willingness to scope projects in Lexington and provide Threshold with estimates for the necessary funds, provided the projects went through the application process and qualified. When asked if there might be any flexibility in the income requirements for projects funded by the City, Ms. Johnson said the requirements are set by Habitat International and are not flexible. Mr. Robertson responded the income requirements for Mission Next Door are not as strict as Habitat's and allow for greater discretion when determining if an applicant qualifies.

Chair Sands thanked the guest speakers for their time and opened the floor for discussion. N. Betts remarked that the City could likely help Habitat with storage space, but that the other issues discussed were considerably more complex. M. Charlie floated the idea of having a work study student, paid by the City, tasked with working to create systems to centralize some of the intake, assessment and training for local residential charitable repairs. N. Betts noted that, at least as reported earlier in the meeting, there does not seem to be enough demand for this type of work in the City to justify funding such a position. M. Charlie said the first year would likely be spent fact finding to develop or suggest models that could be implemented locally. There was some agreement that such a program/position would likely be most effective if its focus was regional rather than limited to Lexington, and would require buy in from partners from Rockbridge County and Buena Vista.

There was additional discussion about existing W&L student volunteer and work study programs, as well as how M. Charlie was envisioning harnessing them for community improvement, and what Threshold's role would be in that scenario. A. Glaeser reminded the Commission that the results of the housing study could lead Threshold to adopt a more Countywide focus. N. Betts suggested inviting representatives from the County and Buena Vista to a future meeting to discuss possible shared goals and commitments.

S. Sands said he has been encouraged by Threshold's discussions and energy this year and would like to see the group "have a win" by accomplishing something tangible in the short term. He suggested using the existing funds to sponsor something like a "paint a neighborhood day." He envisioned putting together a volunteer group to paint houses or do yard maintenance in a chosen neighborhood and using the time to make connections with home owners and gauge appetite for future Threshold led projects or other rehab projects. N. Betts and M. Charlie voiced support for the idea and recommended using the survey letter to help pinpoint the Lexington neighborhood to focus on.

B. Review of underutilized property survey letter –

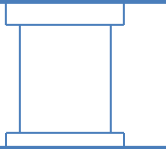
There was general agreement to table this discussion until the April 26th meeting. Director Glaeser offered to compile any suggested letter revisions said if Threshold members would share revision suggestions with him, staff would compile them

ADJOURN:

The meeting adjourned unanimously at 5:27 p.m. (S. Sands / N. Betts)

Shadrey Sands, Chair
Threshold Housing Commission

Lexington Virginia



Department of Planning and Development

Date, 2023

Property Owner
Mailing Address
Lexington, VA 24450

RE: Property Address, Lexington, Virginia

Dear Lexington Property Owner:

Lexington is experiencing a housing crunch and the Lexington Threshold Housing Commission is investigating ways to potentially increase housing supply. It appears the property you own at _____ may be vacant or underutilized and we are hoping you will be willing to share why the property is not being used. Are there any obstacles preventing the property from being used? And if so, what are those obstacles (title issues, limited resources for maintenance, back taxes owed, etc.)?

Admittedly, the City has limited resources, but we may be able to help make your property useable if we know why it is currently underutilized. We know this may be an invasive question about your private property, but please know our only reason for asking is to explore potential ways to increase the number of available housing units in Lexington.

Please call if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Arne Glaeser
Director of Planning and Development