



THRESHOLD
Lexington's Housing Commission
Wednesday, November 29, 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 August 23, 2023 minutes*
 - B. Approval of October 25, 2023 notes*
- 4. New Business**
 - A. Discussion of options for people experiencing homelessness in the community.
 - B. Update on CDBG planning grant for windshield housing assessment.
 - C. Update on CSPDC Regional Housing Study survey.
- 5. Adjournment**

*indicates attachment

MINUTES

THRESHOLD

**Lexington's Housing Commission
Wednesday, August 23, 2023 – 5:00 p.m.
Second Floor Conference Room, City Hall**

Threshold:

Present: Shadrey Sands, Chair
Marisa Charley
Fred Kirchner, Vice-Chair
Marylin Alexander, Council Liaison
Nicholas Betts, Council Liaison

Guest Speaker:

Olivia Raines, CSPDC Housing
Program Manager

City Staff:

Arne Glaeser, Planning Director
Kate Beard, Administrative Assistant

Absent: Nadine Craney

CALL TO ORDER:

S. Sands called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm.

AGENDA

The agenda was unanimously approved as presented. (F. Kirchner / N. Betts)

MINUTES:

The minutes from the July 26, 2023 meeting were unanimously approved as presented. (N. Betts / M. Charley).

NEW BUSINESS:

A. Public Meeting for proposed city-wide housing conditions windshield survey and needs assessment and application for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Planning Grant to fund the proposed project.

1) Overview of proposed CDBG Planning Grant and housing conditions survey –

Olivia Raines, Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission (CSPDC) Housing Program Manager, gave a presentation on the proposed City-Wide Housing Conditions and Infrastructure Windshield Survey and Needs Assessment. She outlined the services provided by the CSPDC, the role it would have in the grant application process, and how housing conditions had been identified as a priority for Lexington. She noted a windshield survey would allow for a complete inventory and needs assessment of the City's housing units which could help the City to make evidence driven decisions about how to prioritize areas of future investment. She described how the study would be conducted, explained how the data could and could not be used, and provided context as to why CDBG planning grant funds were being pursued to fund the project. She outlined the draft scope of work for the consultant hired to conduct the survey which, in addition to the actual windshield survey, included an assessment of the City's existing housing initiatives, including meeting with local stakeholders, a needs assessment analysis based on both the data and public input received from at least two public meetings, the development of strategies for implementation, and a final report and presentation. She demonstrated how the project was in line with CDBG goals and provided a timeline for the planning grant

application process. She noted that for this particular grant, DHCD requires a Project Management Team to meet once a month to ensure the project is staying on schedule, meeting all of its objectives, and was being overseen by a variety of people with knowledge of Lexington's needs. She identified the current team, comprised of herself, her colleague from the CSPDC, Steve Bolster, City Manager Halasz, City Planning Director Glaeser, City Councilmember Alexander, and Threshold Chair Sands, and indicated the intent was to add one or two additional members with interest in local housing needs. Before opening the floor to questions, Ms. Raines encouraged those present to stay involved throughout the process.

2) **Questions, Comments and Discussion**

Threshold Commissioner Kirchner asked if apartments, particularly those above retail space, would be included in the windshield survey. Ms. Raines confirmed the consultants were trained for that type of assessment and would include those apartments in the data. Mr. Kirchner then asked if any other locality served by the CSPDC had conducted a windshield survey. Ms. Raines responded that while no other locality in the region had, other localities throughout the state had and cited Martinsville and Radford as examples.

Responding to a question from City Councilmember Betts about the data from the Martinsville study, Ms. Raines indicated the analysis tended to identify areas or neighborhoods for potential investment rather than individual properties.

Responding to questions from former Lexington City Manager Jon Ellestad, Ms. Raines indicated that in Lexington, 80% of the Annual Median Income (AMI), an important income threshold for the CDBG funding, would be in the low \$40,000 range for a single person household and \$57,900 for a four person household. She further clarified that the City of Lexington will be the grant applicant and would enter into an agreement for the PDC to provide the grant administration.

Lexington Planning Commissioner Gladys Hopkins observed that it was likely that most of the units in need of rehabilitation in Lexington were rental units with owners who would not necessarily meet the income requirements to qualify for rehabilitation funding. Ms. Raines reiterated that the planning grant would only fund the city-wide conditions assessment. She added that if a rehab grant were to be pursued in the future for a rental unit, the property owner would be involved, but the tenants' income would be used for qualification rather than the property owner.

Looking ahead to possible grant applications to address the need identified by the planning grant, Mr. Ellestad asked if Lexington was likely to be penalized by the fact that it has received numerous housing grants in the past. Mr. Kirchner remarked that Lexington's early programs were very successful. Ms. Raines added that DHCD worked closely with its grantees to keep them on track and the CSPDC had a lot of experience in administering DHCD programs, both of which she saw as mitigating factors. City Councilmember Alexander noted that many of the things happening in Virginia were grant driven so there were localities that applied for numerous grants. She didn't see Lexington as being an outlier in that regard.

Addressing the need for the windshield survey, Ms. Alexander pointed out that any future housing grant application would benefit far more from impartial, fact based data than from anecdotal evidence based on assumptions. City Councilmember Betts added that the survey results would also help to identify where to direct those funds.

Responding to questions from City Councilmember Chuck Smith, Ms. Raines said windshield surveys were conducted by trained teams who could make a full assessment of the city in as little as two to three days. She said the metrics used in the assessment would need to be solidified, but pointed to foundations, windows, roofing, and paint chipping, as indicators of maintenance on the home. She said existing data, such as the age of the home, would also be considered. She has been assured by consultants who conduct these surveys that a trained eye can provide a good picture of the overall home maintenance in an area. Mr. Sands cited the data from the Martinsville survey as an example of what can be gleaned from a windshield survey. Those results were passed around among the meeting attendees and Director Glaeser said staff would share digital copy with anyone who requested one.

Ms. Raines reminded the attendees that an implementation grant would be needed to fund any actual future rehab to a property, and to apply for those funds a more in depth assessment of the property and its owners would be needed. Ms. Alexander again clarified that the windshield survey would report data on home conditions on the city block or street level and would not identify individual “problem” parcels.

Lexington Planning Commissioner John Driscoll was encouraged by the fact that the survey would be both city-wide and would also consider the City’s existing housing data. He noted there are three or four strategies in the Comprehensive Plan that directly relate to this issue that could be referenced in the planning grant application. Mr. Kirchner was also supportive of the fact that the survey would be of the entire city.

Mr. Ellestad pointed to the historical difficulty of being awarded grant funds for individual properties. Ms. Raines confirmed that DHCD does prefer to award funds that target areas or neighborhoods but added that a CDBG implementation grant was not the only option to achieve rehab in the city. Ms. Alexander remarked that TAP has a weatherization component that will focus on individual homes.

Having reviewed the Martinsville survey data, Mr. Driscoll noted it seemed to report findings at the individual parcel level. He suggested that survey methodology be well established prior to Lexington’s study to assuage public concern.

Citing the recent and on-going attention paid to the Spotswood and VDOT parcels, Ms. Alexander maintained the City has shown a commitment to improving housing options. Mr. Betts pointed out that it was important to adequately maintain existing housing stock so that as new housing is build, it actually adds to the available units. Mr. Smith asked if improvements to rental units might adversely impact affordable housing in the City by allowing landlords to increase rent for those improved units. Ms. Raines acknowledged his concern but pointed out that inadequate maintenance could result in a reduction of housing stock as units become inhabitable.

Mr. Driscoll commended the Threshold Commission for starting this process and recommended, as the survey consultant’s scope of work was being developed, that consideration be given to best practices specific to Lexington, as well as to identifying partners to undertake eventual rehabilitation projects.

Mr. Ellestad asked whether there would be any appetite to reestablish the rental inspection program, should the windshield survey identify rental units as a problem area. Ms. Alexander said that while she would like to see the program reinstated, the City lacked the properly trained personnel. Mr. Kirchner suggested it might worth looking into the possibility of enlisting a consultant or outside company. Ms. Alexander also mentioned Threshold’s past success with its forgivable loan program.

Responding to a concern about vacant properties voiced by Ms. Hopkins, Ms. Alexander provided some details about the underutilized property survey recently conducted by the Threshold Commission.

Chair Sands concluded the discussion by reporting that Threshold would continue to act as the public-facing arm of the grant and survey process. He encouraged the public to attend the future public meetings.

B. Elect Chairperson

- 1) Nominations – Shadrey Sands was nominated to serve as Chair.
- 2) Motion & Vote – **M. Charley moved to elect S. Sands as Chair. M. Alexander seconded and the motion passed unanimously. (5-0)**

C. Elect Vice-Chairperson

- 1) Nominations – Fred Kirchner was nominated to serve as Vice-Chair.
- 2) Motion & Vote – **S. Sands moved to elect F. Kirchner as Vice-Chair. M. Charley seconded and the motion passed unanimously. (5-0)**

OTHER BUSINESS: None

ADJOURN:

The meeting adjourned unanimously at 5:54 p.m. (S. Sands / M. Charley)

S. Sands, Chair
Threshold Housing Commission

NOTES

THRESHOLD

**Lexington's Housing Commission
Wednesday, October 25, 2023 – 4:00 p.m.
Second Floor Conference Room, City Hall**

Threshold:

Present: Fred Kirchner, Vice-Chair
Marylin Alexander, Council Liaison
Nicholas Betts, Council Liaison

City Staff:

Arne Glaeser, Planning Director
Kate Beard, Administrative Assistant

Absent: Shadrey Sands, Chair
Nadine Craney
Marisa Charley

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Kirchner opened the discussion at 4:05 p.m.

AGENDA

Due to a lack of quorum, the agenda was not approved.

MINUTES:

Approval of the minutes from the August 23, 2023 meeting was tabled due to a lack of quorum.

NEW BUSINESS:

- A. **CDBG planning grant for windshield housing assessment update** – A. Glaeser reported the grant application had been submitted but there were no updates as to the status of its review.

- B. **Discussion of options for people experiencing homelessness in the community** – A. Glaeser reported this topic was added to the agenda by Chair Sands. K. Beard offered that S. Sands had called earlier in the afternoon to say he would be absent and to explain the reason he had requested the discussion. He reported that RARA's program to provide local emergency housing for unhoused individuals has run into some difficulty. Historically RARA has provided vouchers for emergency overnight stays at partnering local hotels, but the hotels have begun refusing to accept the vouchers due to issues they have had with past individuals using them. S. Sands had hoped a discussion might lead to suggestions for other options.

There was then discussion of the following:

- M. Alexander offered that an estimated 644 people in the Lexington/Buena Vista/Rockbridge area are either homeless or at risk of being homeless.

- F. Kirchner and N. Betts suggested researching the business model of Valley Mission, a homeless shelter in Staunton, to consider whether something similar could be accomplished locally.
- The lack of available permanent housing for people awarded rental assistance vouchers locally.
- The possibility of local churches playing a role and the liability associated with transient housing.
- A Seattle program that designates specific parking areas/lots for people living out of their cars.

OTHER BUSINESS:

M. Alexander said she had received a report from one of the last residents served by the housing repair program begun before the pandemic who told her that not all of the repairs had been completed. She asked that staff review the application to determine if the work was complete. A. Glaeser said several repairs were completed by Mission Next Door, but there were others requested which were beyond the scope of the Mission Next Door program. He said he would follow up with the resident to ensure that all parties were on the same page. He reminded the Commission that there was \$2,000 in available funding and suggested it might be used to hire a contractor to complete outstanding repairs at the property.

A. Glaeser reported a demolition permit had been issued for 201 N. Randolph Street and the contractor was made aware the work was expected to be completed in a timely fashion.

M. Alexander said she would provide an update on the regional housing study at the next meeting. Because the November meeting was scheduled for the day before Thanksgiving, A. Glaeser said he would reach out to Chair Sands about whether to reschedule or cancel the meeting.

ADJOURN:

The discussion ended at 4:41 p.m.

Fred Kirchner, Vice-Chair
Threshold Housing Commission