

Sharon eyes hall for housing units

BY RUTH EPSTEIN Republican-American December 31, 2022



The Sharon Board of Selectmen has been approached about the possibility of using Community Hall for affordable housing. Ruth Epstein Republican-American



SHARON – Sharon Housing Trust has approached the Board of Selectmen about the possibility of converting Community Hall at 99 Main St. into four affordable housing units.

The proposal was unveiled during a recent meeting and the topic will continue to be discussed in the new year. Any action on the proposal would need residents' approval at a town meeting.

First Selectman Brent M. Colley and Selectman Casey Flanagan appeared to be in favor of the project, and advised the trust to contact the town's building department and Planning and Zoning Commission. Selectman Dale Jones did not participate in the conversation because he is a member of the trust.

The trust will sponsor an open forum Jan. 15 at 2 p.m. in the Bok Gallery at Sharon Playhouse, 49 Amenia Road, to explain the proposal and seek input. The Litchfield County Center for Housing Opportunity and the Foundation for Community Health have provided a grant to facilitate this session.

Trust members Pat and Bob Whelan made the presentation at the recent meeting. A written document also outlined the plan for residents.

The trust was asked to develop the state-mandated affordable housing plan for the town.

"The need for additional affordable housing options proximate to shopping and schools, as well as other businesses, was clearly defined in this report," the trust stated.

The report said such housing would benefit younger families seeking their first apartments and older people looking to downsize from their present homes. Today, there are very few homes available for sale or rent in town, and the waiting list for Sharon Ridge, the affordable housing complex on Sharon Valley Road, is long, the report noted.

The trust, aware the town wants to retain ownership of Community Hall, wants legal counsel to draft a lease to address the following:

Parties to the lease and successors

Term, value consideration and transferability of the lease

Blanket permission from the town via referendum to contract for repairs and renovations to the structure in accordance with all zoning and building codes

Insurance obligations

Master tenant would be held harmless to the town for the sublet of apartments

Any and all other requirements as recommended by the town or the trust's counsel

The plan calls for four apartments in the approximately 1,800 square feet on each floor – two on the first floor and two on the second. Americans with Disabilities Act requirements would not necessitate an elevator because the building is two stories and less than 3,000 square feet per story.

"Of primary consideration would be the architectural integrity of the external facade, and any plan would involve sensitive treatment and regard for the historical aspect of the structure," the trust stated in its report to the selectmen.

Trust members said fundraising could involve solicitation of private donations and grants, and financing could be arranged by the trust if sufficient private resources could be raised; or fundraising could involve a hybrid of local activities and financial support from the state Department of Housing.

"In either case, private fundraising would involve approaching the entire community, with a focus on certain members of the community who may be able to generously support this effort to maintain vitality in Sharon," the report states, noting the fundraising would be an ongoing activity.

The trust would be the managing entity for the project. Rental structures are yet to be determined and would be driven primarily by income, according to the trust.

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