Minutes of the AHAC Meeting May 14, 2019

Members Present:  Sandra Shank, Thomas Stauffacher, Denise Santa Maria, Carmen Bongiovanni, Jay Roberts, Tammi Marquis.

Members Absent: Commissioner Joe Mullins, Rick Belhumeur, Dorothy Sperber, Tammy Yorke, Diana Seydlorsky.

Staff Present: Ralston Reodica – SHIP Administrator

1. Call to order: Sandra Shank

2. Sandra Shank made a motion to approve the minutes of the last meeting on April 9, 2019. Carmen Bongiovanni approved the minutes and Thomas Stauffacher second it.

3. Reducing Barriers to Affordable Housing
   Guest Speakers: Brianne Heffner, Southport Financial Services
                   Toby Tobin, Grand Living Realty

Brianne Heffner of Southport Financial Services gave a presentation on affordable housing. Southport Financial is a for profit company, however, they build affordable homes. Southport is currently working in 19 states. Brianne conducts training sessions to non-profit agencies who pursue affordable housing. She explains how to brand affordable housing to the public and try to get them on board to understand the importance of such housing. Flagler’s designation was changed by Florida Housing Finance Corporation a few years ago from a small county to a medium county. Small counties do not receive much funding. However, Flagler County has now expanded into the medium category due to population growth. The medium category is more competitive for funding opportunities though. She spoke on affordable housing barriers. Affordable housing is making sure a household is paying no more than 30% of income on housing. If they pay more than that the family will be housing cost-burdened and will not have enough funds for other essential expenses like food and healthcare. Flagler County AMI just increased which means businesses may be considering Flagler County, however, we need affordable housing for workers. Barriers for affordable housing is misunderstanding, costs, land, etc.

Misunderstanding – need to educate everyone on what affordable housing means. Stress the term development where people need to live, this is not a project.

Rebranding – Use the word development, not project. Use the word affordable not poor, workforce, etc. as teachers, EMTs, police officers, military personnel, etc. are in this category.

Pounding the Payment – Spread the word to everyone, include organizations, government entities. The more we talk about the need for affordable housing the more the public may come to understand it.
Barriers - Try to help create regulation, etc. Try to break through barriers. Inclusionary zoning, near transportation, shops, etc. Be creative and try to explain the need and vision for single and multifamily units.

There is a need for affordable housing incentives to be given to developers, builders, etc. Expedite permits as to not exceed the time limit. There is a great need in Florida as we are netting 800 people a day that relocate to the state.

Surplus land owned by the county may be a way to obtain land for a development. For example, partner with another agency and working with an affordable housing developer to attain our goal. Have our priorities and those of others discussed and resolved. Aligning priority areas for housing is important, for example, near hospitals, airports, schools, etc. Centralized jobs with access to services, etc. is important.

Costs – Cost of land is expensive, affordable housing need to be close to jobs, shopping, etc. For profit developers charge a premium for this convenience. Construction costs have gone up considerably, for example, cost of lumber, etc. Some of the cost factors are out of our control. To offset these costs one needs to work with various funding agencies to support the program. Unfortunately government funds have been cut for affordable housing, however, we still can work with funds allocated and be very careful in how the funds are spent.

Land – There is only so much land in Florida, surplus land is a way of obtaining property. Also, land lease may be attainable. Pinellas County charges a small tax for which they buy property and lease it back for 99 years to be used for affordable housing only. Land trust may be another avenue to explore. Leverage the difference sources of funds for affordable housing.

Southport Financial Services works and partners with nonprofits, government agencies, etc. Their mission is to build quality safe affordable housing for everyone. They partner with housing authority, public housing, etc. Brianne gave a very informative presentation.

Toby Tobin – Presented affordable housing from a few angles: one being social service the very poor needing housing and the other for the workforce, employed/employable people but do not make enough money to live here. People misinterpret the term entry level or workforce housing as section 8 or a project. Perhaps the term “starter home” may be used to avoid negative feelings and resistance. Income for teachers, police officer, fire fighters, etc. at approximately $40,000.00 per year and using 30% of income for housing one can only afford to pay approximately $900.00 per month. There are only a very small number of homes that sold at $150,000.00 or less. For $900.00 per month one can only obtain a one bedroom apartment which would not be enough for a family.

Affordable housing affects everyone, the median age has climbed in Flagler County. Public school enrollment has been steady. Labor market is affected and people will
work in the counties that they can afford to live in. Because of the prices of homes in this county, we are at risk to get quality workforce to work in Flagler County.

Cost to build - building affordable housing in Palm Coast is very difficult. All fees are very high on top of the cost of building the home, etc. In the City of PC you must have a 1200 square foot home and two car garage. Developers and builders push to build larger homes which may not cost them as much but larger homes are profitable. Mobile homes, modular homes, that are quality made, can be an alternative to regular homes and are affordable. Mobile or manufactured homes are not permitted in the City of Palm Coast. However, Jim Manfre stated that newer manufactured homes are built with quality and may be another avenue to explore for Flagler County. For example, Plantation Oaks has manufactured homes and are in very good condition now after 15-20 years.

Toby stated the “Not in my back yard” (NIMBYism) must be overcome. The public needs to be educated on the importance of affordable housing and how it will benefit our community. Many places have developed beautiful affordable homes. Education is the key! Town Center is developing housing that includes affordable housing. This is a step in the right direction. There are changes in community leadership and they are starting to understand housing needs. Toby is an advocate for affordable housing.

Sandra thanked the speakers for their presentations. She stated in our next meeting on June 11, 2019 we will review and discuss the Fair Housing Ordinance.

National Housing Week of Action begins May 30th - June 5th. A video titled “Our Homes, Our Voices” is being created to state the importance of affordable housing. Real stories are shared from a family who is now a homeowner due to Habitat for Humanity and received SHIP funds. A former inmate who has turned his life around and has attained homeownership. Also, a single mother who lives in Palm Coast but has to work in St. Johns County in order to make a decent wage tells her story. There are others featured on the video. This video will be shared with the public as we strive to make affordable housing a priority. Hopefully the public will understand the need and assist us with our goal.

Adjourn – Carmen Bongiovanni made a motion to adjourn, Denise Santa Maria second the motion.