

## **Affordable Senior Housing...Why It's Right For Sherman**

Recently, the Board of Selectmen voted to move the Sherman Affordable Housing project to a town-wide vote. If the town votes in favor of the lease on town property, the Sherman Housing Commission, which last year formed a corporate entity called The Sherman Housing Trust, will apply for 501 C3 non-profit status. The non-profit status enables us to compete for state and private funding to build this project.

This is a very exciting opportunity for Sherman. The Sherman Housing Commission has been working to bring Affordable Senior Housing (age 62 +) to our town for the past four years and this is the last step to make this a reality. The funding will take several years, as Sherman must compete with other towns for state and private monies. However, without passage of the lease, demonstrating our town's intent to move forward, we cannot apply for funding. The members of the Sherman Housing Commission all firmly believe that qualifying seniors, who for financial and or physical reasons cannot continue to live in their homes, should have a place to live in Sherman.

Being a widow or widower 5 miles outside of the town during a winter storm can be a very lonely and frightening experience. Having neighbors right next store and being just minutes from Emergency Services is extremely comforting. Some of those against Affordable Senior Housing have said that seniors don't want to leave their own homes. Nobody wants to leave his or her home. Unfortunately, that decision is often made for us by father time.

Others have asked how many people would benefit from this project. If a few dozen seniors were able to remain in Sherman and continue to contribute to our community, wouldn't this be a blessing. This project will start with 12-16 units, although the results of a Commission on Aging study found that over 40 seniors have expressed interest. As additional financing becomes available, more units could be built. The property can accommodate up to 40 units and we are confident that our aging senior population, now in excess of 1,200, will fill these apartments as seniors have in our neighboring towns.

Seniors are volunteers, friends, parents and grandparents. They are just like you and me. Unfortunately, some seniors don't have the means, ability or the good health of those who oppose Affordable Senior Housing. They can't remain in their homes and don't have the financial wherewithal to hold onto their homes and spend winters in a warmer place.

Those against this project also ask what are we doing for those seniors that don't qualify for Affordable Housing. What kind of government-subsidized housing is available for us?

If other seniors choose to live on less money, (80 percent of the annual mean income in an approximate 20 mile radius of Sherman) approximately \$54,000 a year for couples and \$47,250 for singles, and shoehorn their possessions into 700 square feet or less, they are welcome to apply for these units.

If you are fortunate enough to be able to maintain your home and your quality of life, why not allow those less fortunate, who want to remain here and continue to be a part of our wonderful town, to do so.

Those above the income restriction can petition our local town officials to build senior housing, but it will have to be paid for by taxpayers or outside developers. The Affordable Senior Housing project will be paid for by state agencies that fund affordable senior housing projects. Their revenue comes from Connecticut taxpayers. We've been funding similar projects in other Connecticut towns, now it's our turn to apply for funding.

There have also been absurd comments that seniors will run over children playing soccer as they make their way to the housing units? Most of these people who want to scare us are indeed seniors themselves. In reality, it's those under 25 years of age who have the most accidents and pay the highest insurance rates. When it comes to driving, experience is a good thing.

And these same people claim that the Affordable Senior Housing Project will run right through the Community Gardens, the Soccer Fields and swallow up all the free space in Colonial Park. As the accompanying map demonstrates, this is a bunch of nonsense.

The project will be 900 feet, **about three football fields**, from the Community Gardens. And even further from the Soccer Fields. And with a dedicated entrance/exit road going only to the Senior Housing Project, it will improve the safety conditions within the Soccer Field parking area.

This dedicated road will have a stonewall and or trees segregating it from the current parking area. And if emergency vehicles need to use this road to assist seniors, aren't we all better off knowing that they can reach people quickly and improve their chances of being helped. The current locations of many seniors, often-single women, are in areas that can present a challenge to the fire department, ambulances and other service providers.

Another reason given for opposing the project is that there will be increased traffic along Route 37. If a dozen or so cars were to enter and exit the facility once or even twice a day, it would have little impact. And most seniors drive less often than those who pick up children and drive to their jobs.

Some Sherman residents have expressed concern that non- Sherman residents may want to live in these units. At both the state and federal level, there is a Fair Housing Act that prevents discrimination based on race, religion, age, sex, or handicap. With regard to Affordable Senior Housing, we are able to stipulate that one of the two residents in an apartment unit must be 62 or older.

As a practical matter, statistics show that an overwhelming percentage of seniors who apply for affordable housing already live in that town or a neighboring town. If you don't have family or friends, there's little reason to move here, especially when you're a senior and have to drive to get most places

To insure that Sherman residents receive whatever preference is available under the law, the Board of Selectmen inserted the following language into the lease for the senior housing project.

“Lessee agrees that it shall give preference in the selection of tenants for such housing units to applicants who, at the time of their application, are residents of the Town of Sherman or who are a parent or child or a parent or child in law relation to one or more residents of the Town of Sherman, provided however, that the foregoing residency preference shall be administered by Lessee in a manner that is consistent with state and federal fair housing requirements prohibiting discrimination and promoting equal housing opportunity, including such requirements and/or limitations concerning residency preference as may be imposed by state or federal project funding sources.

Those who say that the project is in the wrong location and that it will seriously harm a valued public park are again using fear tactics. This is a perfect location. The units are near town, although not visible from Route 37, close to emergency services, the church, the community gardens, the post office and American Pie. In fact, the water system that would be used for the project can easily divert water to the community gardens, so people will not have to bring their own water.

There are 67 acres in Colonial Park and the Affordable Senior Housing Project would use about 15 of those. If any trails are temporary impassible due to this building project, they will be fully repaired.

This will also provide an opportunity to make some of these trails handicapped accessible so that all people of various abilities can get out and enjoy Sherman. Currently, most trails are not safe for those who have physical challenges. There are now and will always be acres and acres of trails in Colonial Park and throughout Sherman.

As for tax increases and hidden costs, there are none. Yes, the town approved \$20,000 a year and a half ago to survey the whole 67 acres of Colonial Park. This was done in order to determine its legal boundaries after the Iroquois Pipeline Company agreed to finalize the deed to Colonial Park with the town of Sherman. The cost of establishing our legal boundaries was money well spent.

In addition to the survey, which was essential for the town from a liability standpoint, perks and deeps and a civil engineering study were performed to determine if the proposed site for Affordable Senior Housing was viable. These costs were less than \$5,000 of the \$20,000 appropriation. The results from these studies, which were performed by Beatty Construction and Arthur Howland Engineers, indicated that the property has excellent access to water and is an easy build.

If the townspeople of Sherman pass the lease for Affordable Senior Housing, which is provided elsewhere on this web page, and on display at town hall in both its original and summarized form, it will enable us to compete for state and private funding to build this project.

The aforementioned Sherman Housing Trust will be comprised of John O'Connor, Jeanette Perlman, Michelle Hansen and Steve Roffwarg. These are the same people who have worked on this project since the inception of the Sherman Housing Commission. We plan to add a few more Sherman residents with experience in architecture and engineering.

It will take 3 or 4 years to raise the funding necessary to build the first 12 + one-bedroom units. Passage of the lease gives us the opportunity to compete for state and private funding. Once we obtain funding, the project still has to be approved all along the way by the Planning and Zoning Commission. For example, some who oppose the project have said that the units must come with enclosed garages. The Planning and Zoning Commission could stipulate this feature.

Many seniors, who want to live there today, may not be around when the units are ready. Many more, however, will become seniors and will be able to stay in Sherman because we provided them with a place to live.

We owe it to our seniors who want to remain a vital part of our town. After all, many of us will one day be in their shoes. And many more of us know someone who already is.

Over the next several weeks there will be articles, meetings and opportunities to have ALL your questions answered about this project. Please watch our link on the town website which will answer questions, post articles and give factual information about the Affordable Senior Housing Project.

The Sherman Housing Commission will hold its second Housing Forum on Saturday, May 31, 10 am -1 pm in the Sherman School Cafeteria. We hope many of you will attend to ask questions and get answers from people who work in the affordable housing area and have decades of experience with similar projects in nearby towns. If you want to ask questions about the project via email, send your questions to the Sherman Senior Center email address: [shermanseniorcenter@gmail.com](mailto:shermanseniorcenter@gmail.com) and we will answer them.

The BOS has set Friday June 6th as the day for a Town Meeting and a town vote on whether to approve the lease for Affordable Senior Housing is scheduled on Saturday, June 14.

We look forward to an open and honest dialogue over the coming weeks. We should not allow unfounded prejudice to obscure the facts. We are better than this.

Steve Roffwarg  
Chairman, Sherman Housing Commission