



MANCHESTER-BY-THE-SEA

AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST • TOWN HALL
Manchester-by-the-Sea, Massachusetts 01944-1399
Telephone (978) 526-6405 FAX (978) 526-2001

Minutes of the Affordable Housing Trust

February 17, 2026

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Sarah Mellish, Chris Olney, Gretchen Wood, Muffin Driscoll, Rosemary Costello and Joan McDonald

STAFF PRESENT: Gail Hunter, Administrative Assistant, Marc Resnick, Director of Land Management

Call to Order

Ms. Mellish called the meeting to order at 6:36 PM.

Future Project Possibilities

The Trustees discussed the status of the Moses Hill property, which had been under consideration as a potential Affordable Housing site. Mr. Resnick confirmed that the property was moved to Conservation control by an Annual Town Meeting vote in 2006, making development unlikely.

The Trustees debated whether to formally approach the Conservation Commission to request consideration of removing the property from Conservation status. Mr. Resnick explained that the key question is whether the property constitutes Article 97 property requiring Legislative action to undo, or if Town Meeting approval given the Conservation status was voted locally rather than having a State approved Conservation Restriction. Mr. Resnick agreed to research this distinction to determine what process would be required.

The Trustees agreed it is important to demonstrate due diligence in exploring all available properties, even if chances of success were slim. They agreed this would demonstrate to the community they are working on all avenues and looking at all available options.

Discussion also touched on other potential properties, with members noting the challenge of finding suitable developable land in Town. The 115 Pine Street property was mentioned as having various ideas but being unlikely to work for Affordable Housing purposes.

The Trustees acknowledged the recent final loss of the SLV Appeal, with the Housing Appeals Court decision being particularly unfavorable to the Town's position. This loss means the Town no longer has Safe Harbor protection from additional 40B projects, as construction wasn't started within two years of the original ZBA Decision.

Community Outreach

Ms. Costello reported on her meeting with Ms. Marletta, the Town's Communications Director, who expressed willingness to help the Trust with outreach efforts. Ms. Costello explained that few Town offices handle their own communications, with most relying on centralized support.

The Trust agreed to develop a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document that could be formatted for social media and other communications. Ms. Costello volunteered to compile a FAQ list using materials from other Towns as templates, tailoring them to Manchester-by-the-Sea's specific situation.

The Trustees discussed the timing of the outreach campaign, agreeing it should begin soon to inform residents prior to Annual Town Meeting. The FAQ would introduce the Trust, explain what Affordable Housing means, describe the Trust's history and capabilities, and clarify common misconceptions.

Ms. Costello suggested potentially creating a "Manchester Minute" video as well, following the format of other Town Departments. The Trustees emphasized wanting to focus on basic education rather than promoting specific projects at this time.

Town Meeting – CPC Appropriation Support, Finance Committee Vote 3/5/26

Ms. Mellish reported testing the waters at the recent Finance Committee meeting regarding reducing the Trust's Community Preservation Committee (CPC) funding request from \$200K to \$100K, with the understanding that the difference would support the Rotunda Project. The Finance Committee had previously asked for a reduction to just \$60K, which the Trustees felt was inadequate.

Discussion revealed mixed concerns among Trustees about this compromise. Mr. Olney expressed strong reservations about the Trust acting as a "Rotunda Trust" rather than focusing on their Affordable Housing mission. Others felt it was a necessary political compromise to maintain community support and secure reasonable funding.

The Trustees were informed that the Rotunda Project had lost expected grants and needed immediate funding to avoid permit expiration. The project is expected to begin in October 2026 with completion by May 2027.

Ms. Wood moved to reduce the Affordable Housing Trust CPC request to \$100K. Ms. McDonald seconded the motion. The motion passed 5-1, with Chris Olney opposing.

The Trustees acknowledged this would be a one-time concession and planned to emphasize this in communication leading up to Annual Town Meeting.

Treasurer's Report

Ms. McDonald reported the Trust's total funds of \$1,745,907.96 as of the meeting date. She noted that a 9-month CD worth approximately \$300K at 3.5% interest would mature in April 2026, and rates would be reassessed at that time.

Public Comment – There was no public comment this evening.

Other Business not anticipated by the Chair – Discussion Only

➤ Housing Authority Update

Ms. Wood reported that she would not be running to represent the Housing Authority. She also stated that the Beverly Housing Authority had been working in the Manchester-by-the-Sea office for a month and would officially take over management through a Regionalization Agreement being signed the following day. This arrangement provides Manchester-by-the-Sea access to Beverly's larger staff and specialized expertise while maintaining local control.

The Trustees agreed to wait until June before reaching out to discuss potential collaboration with the Beverly Housing Authority, allowing time for the transition to settle.

➤ Strategic Planning Discussion

The Trustees consider hiring a consultant to develop a Strategic Plan for more comprehensive Property Evaluation and Program Development. The Trustees agreed to place this item on the March agenda for fuller discussion, though some members expressed skepticism about consultants based on previous experiences.

➤ Town-Owned Properties

The discussion turned to potentially revisiting Town-owned properties that might be suitable for Affordable Housing. Members recalled previous attempts to develop a lot on Pleasant Street near Powder House Hill that had faced significant resident opposition due to parking concerns. The Trust agreed this could be worth reconsidering, as it remains a buildable lot owned by the Town.

Approve Meeting Minutes

Ms. Driscoll moved to approve the meeting minutes from January 20, 2026. Ms. Wood seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Next Meeting March 17, 2026

The Trustees confirmed their next meeting for March 17, 2026.

Adjourn

At 7:50 p.m. Ms. Driscoll moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Wood seconded the motion was seconded and passed unanimously.