

In June, 1987, the Selectmen appointed a Housing Partnership Committee. The charter of this committee is to form a partnership with the state, local developers, and all our town committees (including the Board of Health, the Conservation Commission, the Planning Board, the Zoning Board of Appeals, the Finance Committee, the Highway Department, and the Board of Selectmen) to promote the development of affordable housing within the Town of Berlin. In the work of this committee, affordable housing refers to housing that is subsidized by the state or federal government so that it is available at below-market rates. This type of housing is reserved for lower-income groups such as the elderly, civil servants, young families, etc. Rental subsidies as well as subsidies for qualified first time home owners are available.

Berlin currently has 44 affordable housing units. Northbrook Village is comprised of 40 units of subsidized housing for the elderly. In addition, there are four units on Coulson Road and Jones Road that have government subsidies. Based on the 1980 census (wherein Berlin was found to have approximately 770 housing units in total), our current number of affordable units amounts to 5.7% of our total housing stock.

Unless and until Berlin has a total of 10% of its housing stock designated as affordable units, the Town remains liable to the Comprehensive Permit Process that permits prospective developers to obtain at the state level comprehensive permits to build affordable housing in the Town without being constrained by the Town's Zoning By-Laws. This permitting process is spelled out in detail in Chapter 774 of the Massachusetts General Laws, and is further outlined in Executive Order 215. The intent of the law is to prohibit towns from discriminating on the basis of "snobzoning," or zoning ordinances that inherently discriminate against lower-income groups. When a comprehensive permit is granted, the Town loses a substantial amount of control over how, when, and how many affordable units are built by a developer.

During the first six months of this committee's existence, the Berlin Housing Partnership Committee has accomplished the following:

- Dealt with a proposal by Cunningham Enterprises, Inc. to develop between 64 and 80 affordable housing units on a parcel on Barnes Road. (The developer ultimately opted to build market-rate homes instead of affordable units.)

- Applied for and received a \$5,000 mini-grant from the Executive Office of Community Development (E.O.C.D.) to undertake a housing needs assessment for the Town of Berlin.

- Negotiated a grant agreement with E.O.C.D. for our \$5,000 mini-grant.

- Interviewed and hired a consultant to do our housing needs assessment; this will include seeking input from all town residents through a mailed questionnaire.

- Presented the Town of Berlin's affordable housing problems as a case study at Professor William Lemire's graduate course in Creative Planning at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

In the next six months, the committee will have at least two major projects to pursue: (1) the implementation and completion of our housing needs assessment by June 30, 1988, and (2) significant reassessment of Berlin's Zoning By-Laws, including the preparation and proposal of new by-laws as they relate to supporting and facilitating the development of more affordable housing units in our town. Additionally we may face at any given moment new requests by developers to join in partnerships with the developer and the Commonwealth to build more affordable housing units.

The importance of Berlin having been designated as an official Housing Partnership Community is that we thereby become eligible to receive substantial funds from the Commonwealth to support the creation of additional units of affordable housing. A variety of state programs exist that make funds available to partnership communities where the town, developers, and the state all work together to develop affordable housing that meets the needs of the partnership community.

Had the Town of Berlin not become a Housing Partnership Community, we would not have been eligible to receive the \$5,000 mini-grant for planning purposes, nor would we have been eligible to participate in many of the other programs that provide funds and mechanisms to promote the creation of affordable housing units. The Town would also have remained more liable to the comprehensive permitting process wherein we would lose control of who develops affordable housing, where it is developed, and what type of units are built.

The Berlin Housing Partnership Committee meets in the Town Hall on the fourth Wednesday of each month from 7:30-9:30 p.m. We welcome guests at our meetings, and would like your input on how the Town should go about developing more affordable housing. We also would welcome one or two additional members on our committee. If you are interested in serving on our committee, please speak with any of our members and/or come to one of our regular meetings.

THOMAS ANDREW
BARBARA FOSTER, Assistant Chair.
KENNETH HARROLD
CHARLES PETERSON

Respectfully submitted,
ALEXANDER DAVIS, Chairman
FRANCES GILL, Clerk
WILLIAM LAVERTUE
WILLARD WHEELER