Danby Town Board
Minutes of Special Meeting
February 24, 2020, 7pm, Danby Town Hall

Present:

Councilpersons:	Leslie Connors, Joel Gagnon (Supervisor), Jim Holahan (arrived at 7:55pm), Matt Ulinski
Absent:	Sarah Schnabel

Others Present:

Town Clerk	Alexandra Pfeifer
Planner	Jason Haremza
Consultant/Presenter	Jim Thatcher, C.T Male Associates
Public	Raymond Mayo, Ted Crane, Kim Nitchman, Ronda Roaring, Marnie Kirchgessner, Kevin Feeney, Annette Feeney, Pat Woodworth, Mary Woodsen

Meeting Opened at 7:04 pm

Presentation on Town of Danby Housing Conditions Survey and Housing Market Analysis

Jim Thatcher introduced himself as a consultant from C.T Male Associates. He was hired in September/October 2019 to do the Housing Needs Assessment for the town. He mentioned that the presentation was a summary of findings, and that a more detailed copy was given to the Supervisor.

Thatcher's presentation included results from his "windshield survey," which was conducted from November 2019-January 2020, consisted of looking at houses from the road for exterior characteristics such as collapsing porches, sagging steps, or roofs in need of repair. For more details and statistics, see report attached.

He noted that the ratings (substandard, severe, etc.) were set by the NYS Office of Community Renewal. The data was also collected from the 2010 census, most notably the American Community Survey, and ESRI* (founded as the Environmental Systems Research Institute, now known as Esri), a subscription-based data collection service. The results were then cross-referenced with the county tax assessment records.

The second part of the assessment was the Housing Market Analysis which was subcontracted to Elizabeth Kormos of Kormos and Company LLC. This analysis included recent market trends, affordability issues, and the demand for senior housing.

Thatcher's suggestions for the future would be to get a grant for $300-400k to rehab 13-16 homes. The average cost to rehab each house would be $15-20k, which is a modest investment to preserve a home and would immediately impact quality of life. Another possibility was a home buyer assistance program for first-time home buyers.

Public Hearing began at 7:52 pm

Ronda Roaring was concerned that short-term rentals (such as AirBnB's) in Ithaca would lead to the need to put up more houses in Danby. She would like to see the houses that were unoccupied fixed up so then they could be occupied.

Ray Mayo referred to a picture of a red house (from the slideshow) that is on the corner of Ridgecrest and Nelson road, and also to the two abandoned houses right across the street from it. He said

that no one would invest money in their house with two abandoned houses across the street. He also was concerned with the car repair/junkyard across from his house.

Ted Crane questioned the number of 1530 housing units and also had questions about the ESRI (purchased data set). Crane also wondered how many of the substandard units are currently vacant. Thatcher replied that this was a visual survey of a snapshot in time and that dilapidated houses should be uninhabitable. He also noted that the census data is a poor source of vacancy data (since the data is 9-10 years old).

Marnie Kirchgessner was pleased that the town is making an effort on this issue.

Matt Ulinksi followed up with saying that it was a great presentation. He noted that this issue was important to Ric Dietrich and hoped that the town could carry on with the next steps.

Ronda Roaring added that she talked to Sarah Schnabel about how people in their 20's have trouble buying houses and the need for more rental properties. Roaring advocated for the possibility of selling the houses to younger people and having them put in "sweat equity."

Ted Crane noted that the need for senior housing was not huge and that there was a lack of public transportation for seniors. This led to a discussion between other members of the public, Thatcher, and the TB regarding the issues that seniors have with lack of transportation (both cars and busses). Haremza added that with ride services such as Lyft and Uber (and technology), transportation options are more flexible than in the past.

Gagnon then steered the discussion to dilapidated housing, citing the volunteer agency that did repairs on 14 houses a couple of years ago. He added that there was more need than volunteers. Connors added that the red house (on the corner of Ridgecrest and Nelson) has been vacant since 2003 and that the town unsuccessfully addressed the issue of dilapidated housing, noting that it is a lengthy process to tear down a house and that the town could not afford it. Gagnon also addressed the process—that there is a lien against the property, that the county could pay it and have a tax sale, and when the improvement (i.e. house) is taken away, the land isn't worth very much.

Haremza asked about land banks in Tompkins County, and Crane replied to talk to Betsy Keokosky about it. Roaring wondered if organizations (such as Significant Elements) could take down the houses. A discussion followed about whether or not it was more expensive to have Significant Elements take down the houses versus a simple demolition. Ulinski remarked about the chemical hazards such as asbestos.

Crane asked Thatcher if there were remediation funds for vacant houses. Thatcher replied that there were rehab programs if there were people lined up to live in them. Thatcher added that it was better for the community to rehab houses rather than start from scratch. He also remarked that Danby had something for everyone and that it is a beautiful town.

Public Hearing closed at 8:45 pm.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm.

*Please note that in the supporting documents provided by C.T Male Associates, the acronym for ESRI is incorrect.

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Alexandra Pfeifer, Town Clerk