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MEMORANDUM

Date: May 26, 2009
To: SWRPA Housing Committee
From: Benjamin Henson
Re: Housing Committee Meeting Summary – Wednesday, May 13, 2009

This is a summary of the May 13, 2009 Housing Committee meeting. Mr. Benjamin Henson called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM. Present were: co-Chairs Ms. Anna Duleep and Paul Settelmeyer, Mr. Bud Boucher, Mr. Thomas Failla, Mr. Nathan Snyder, Mr. Dudley Williams and Dr. Margaret Wirtenberg. Floyd Lapp and Benjamin Henson of SWRPA were also present.

Mr. Benjamin Henson opened discussion of the 2009 SWRPA Housing Summit and expressed that although he felt the event was stronger and better planned than the 2008 event, the attendance was disappointing. With a keynote speaker of Rep. Himes' caliber, a greatly expanded list of invitees and multiple notifications to media outlets, the event should have garnered more interest, but failed to do so, even locally by the Town of Darien. Mr. Failla pointed out that the media in Lower Fairfield County is dominated by Hearst and is not nearly as diverse or robust as it once was and there are certainly fewer reporters covering such stories. Ms. Duleep added that she feels the Stamford Advocate does not cover Norwalk nearly as much as it once did. Mr. Henson said he also felt that the presentations felt a bit unprepared. The first presentation went long and the slides for the last weren't in order. Mr. Settelmeyer agreed and said that it reinforces the idea that you really have to work with the speakers beforehand. He added that events such as these benefit from showcasing a "big picture issue" which this may have been lacking.

Mr. Henson presented the summary of survey responses (attached). Of the 80 attendees for the event, 13 completed and returned a survey. Mr. Lapp said that Ms. Leigh Grant made a good point that it helps to bring in "success stories" or people that have made things happen. Mr. Nate Snyder asked if receiving 13 out of 80 survey responses is a good or bad response rate. Mr. Lapp felt that it was low because the event was long and people generally head for the door. Mr. Settelmeyer said that that the response rate would be greatly increased if we offered something in return for completing the survey, such as a chance to win a gift via drawing. Mr. Failla agreed and pointed out that UConn generally hands out little gifts in return for completing similar surveys.

Mr. Henson opened discussion of the Housing Committee's Mission. The idea of moving beyond advocating for affordable/workforce housing had been brought up previously. Mr. Settelmeyer said that perhaps a broader example of how our municipalities are collectively utilizing available resources to create housing would be a relevant topic to study. Mr. Henson noted the housing studies, plans, reports he found that Connecticut's other Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) have prepared. The studies vary in scope and topic, but it appears that attempts to present housing

trends/analyses are common. SWRPA prepared the *Regional Housing Supply and Needs Assessment* in 2006 using Census 2000 data. A new study will not be possible until Census 2010 data becomes available. Mr. Lapp stated his preference to see the Committee explore emerging home construction technologies (green/LEED) and land use/development ideas, perhaps in conjunction with the Environment Committee. Mr. Failla asked if anyone in the Region makes market-rate rents data available. Mr. Settelmeyer thought that CB Richard Ellis, William Raveis or a similar group probably does. Mr. Failla added that SWRPA has access to income data and that analyzing this information against rents information would probably paint a basic picture of the market. Mr. Lapp added that Mr. Dan Wilder, who specializes in placing persons relocating to the Region would be a valuable resource.

Mr. Settelmeyer brought up Connecticut's energy conservation incentives and wondered if anyone has been able to determine the effectiveness of these programs. For instance, what are the credits being used for? Mr. Henson opined that he feels a natural convergence of the Housing and Environment Committees and that pursuing such matters jointly would be a great idea. Mr. Dudley Williams added that GE is in the process of getting out of its housing-market-related businesses such as appliance and lighting manufacturing indicating the company's awareness to the decline in home construction. He added that whatever study or report SWRPA prepares should attempt to paint a realistic picture of what is going on in the Region with regard to the housing market, both rental and sales, and should attempt to explain how people afford to live here with such high costs of living. Ms. Anna Duleep said that we first focused on the large cities in the Region and then the small towns and what each has done to create affordable/workforce housing. She added that now it might be time to find out what the private sector and businesses are doing. The Committee agreed that some type of regular (monthly, quarterly and/or annual) figures should be tracked and compiled into a similarly regular report and made available on SWRPA's Housing Clearinghouse webpage. Municipal data on affordable and below-market-rate (BMR) resident wait lists would also be informative.

The date and time of the next committee meeting was discussed. It will occur on June 23, 24 or 25 at 4:00 PM. Mr. Henson will communicate with the Committee and notify it once the date is finalized.

Ms. Duleep adjourned the meeting at 5:05 PM.