

NEWTON HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Newton Housing & Community Development Program
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AUGUST 2006 MEETING MINUTES

Date: August 9, 2006
Time: 7:45 a.m.
Location: City Hall, Room 202

Members Present: Phil Herr, Josephine McNeil, Deb Crossley, John Wilson, Maritzie Rudden, Henry Korman, Dan Violi, Steve MacDowell, Jeanne Strickland, Bart Lloyd, Liz Kirsch, Bart Lloyd

Members Absent: Nancy Andersen, Kay Khan, David Stein, Carol Ann Shea, Lynne Sweet, Ellen Feingold, Andrew Franklin

Staff: Mike Kruse, Trisha Kenyon Guditiz and Margaret Siciliano

Minutes prepared for the Housing Partnership by Margaret Siciliano, AICP, Housing Development Planner.

1. Minutes from the July 12, 2006 Housing Partnership meeting were approved with the corrections suggested by Bart Lloyd.
2. Discussion on the Housing Partnership's role relative to project review. See August 1, 2006 memo to Housing Partnership Project Review Committee from Phil Herr.

Phil Herr began the discussion by providing background on the changing role of the Newton Housing Partnership due to the changes in membership and recent review of affordable housing projects.

Josephine McNeil pointed out that the Partnership's review of a project happens at very early stage in the development process and is only given that one chance to see it.

Phil Herr added that Mike Kruse has been asked to this meeting to get his feedback on the role of the Partnership.

Mike Kruse began by explaining that there isn't a clear set of rules. The Partnership came about when the state had funding for them and the main focus then was on reviewing project financing. The Partnership has changed over the years and is now looking at other things. There is no clear entry point for affordable housing development proposals because there aren't a clear set of rules in

place. Mike Kruse explained that he does not want to define the Partnership's role for them instead it's important the Partnership figures out what it wants to do. Mike Kruse doesn't see this group giving recommendations to the Board of Aldermen but to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Phil Herr referred to the unique approval process the Covenant Residences went through. In this project, staff and residents had different views on parking and landscaping. The city staff did not provide a basis for its request for more landscaping and less parking. The city should provide more guidance to developers.

Mike Kruse responded that this would be wonderful but this is not how things work in Newton. We look at projects on a case-by-case basis. The Board of Aldermen has resisted guidance materials. We can't even agree on process. Some people really like it this way.

Josephine McNeil said she would like to get to the point where the planning staff and the Partnership were on the same page. Can't we agree between us on guidance to offer? For example, with the Avalon Bay project there was a disagreement between staff and the Partnership on day care. There was never an opportunity for the staff and the Partnership to discuss the matter so the day care issue never got recognized.

Mike Kruse responded that this gets back to, what are the Partnership's issues? It wasn't whether there should be a day care center at Avalon Bay, the concern was about the proposed location.

Henry Korman summarized that there are no clear set of rules or procedures and not a lot of will to change this process on all levels. It almost makes sense to do things on a case-by-case basis. It would be great to clean it up but this is unlikely to happen. We are the voice for affordability but we also look at other social goals like lead paint and sustainability. There are people here who care about overarching policies as well as site design. Then we also have a role in the 40B process. There is a failure in the overall system when a project leaves here and by the time it is executed, it has become a very different project.

Bart Lloyd added that the Partnership wants to see things early to look at its feasibility. But, then we don't see the project again. After a project goes through the review process the project has changed and undermined our intentions. There's a bleeding into aesthetics but this impacts the financial feasibility.

Deb Crossley commented that she is uncomfortable how the Partnership is using the terms design and aesthetics. We should talk about projects in terms of livability and sustainability as these affect the cost and affordability of a project for its residents. Livability and sustainability came up on several times early on when we reviewed the Covenant Residences project. Our concerns were never addressed. We talked about sustainability but by the time we were able to raise these concerns it had gone through the process.

Phil Herr stated that the Partnership needs to come up with a set of guidelines and be advocates for those who will be living in the proposed housing development.

John Wilson suggested the Partnership go back to its mission statement. We're missing the advocate role of the Partnership. We can't let the affordable housing take away from the neighborhood. We can't afford to approve projects that have a negative impact and undermine future projects.

Maritzie Rudden pointed out that there is a broad range of opinions here. For example, “I come from a social justice background. Let’s be clear about where we agree and disagree and where we go from here.”

Phil Herr responded that he doesn’t think we disagree but we have different emphasis.

Maritzie Rudden agreed.

Mike Kruse commented there are so many meetings and he wants to be careful about requesting developers to attend more meetings. He thought it was unfair to bring up issues at the end of a process. He urged the Partnership to be clear about what issues they care about.

Dan Violi commented that he did not have a strong sense of what the other conversations were related to the Covenant Residences.

Josephine McNeil added that the Partnership was empowered and also used. The Zoning Board of Appeals also had several meetings as well. When it got to the ZBA they depended on the Planning Department’s report. The Partnership’s concerns were not adequately discussed in the report.

Mike Kruse clarified that his point is to make your concerns known early in the process than at the end.

Phil Herr commented that if we work more closely with staff then the report might have more weight and meaning to other public bodies. We need to focus on the concerns of the people who will be living there.

Trisha Guditz raised the issue that there seems to still be a problem with points of intersection where the Partnership comes into play.

Mike Kruse responded that the Partnership should think about what it wants to do and offer a recommendation.

Henry Korman commented that there is not a point where all the heads of boards and major players come together to discuss a project.

Josephine McNeil responded this occasionally happens. This happened with Millhouse and if the mayor didn’t bring everyone together the project would have never happened.

Phil Herr asked the Project Review Committee to meet and come up with the first draft of the things the Partnership is looking for in new housing development.

3. Other business.

- The Project Review Committee needs to meet to discuss the suggested changes to the Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance.
- The Fair Housing Task Force needs to discuss local preference issues at its next regularly scheduled meeting (September).

- CAN-DO will be holding a lottery for the affordable homeownership units at Linden Green and Millhouse Commons this fall. The deadline for application is September 30, 2006.

Meeting adjourned.