

NEWTON HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Newton Housing & Community Development Program
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MAY 2006 MEETING MINUTES

Date: May 10, 2006
Time: 7:45 a.m.
Location: Newton Community Services Center, 492 Waltham Street, West Newton

Members Present: Phil Herr, Josephine McNeil, David Stein, Bart Lloyd, Deb Crossley, Liz Kirsch, Ellen Feingold, and John Wilson

Members Absent: Nancy Andersen, Chris Dame, Andrew Franklin, Kay Khan, Henry Korman, Carol Ann Shea, Jeanne Strickland, Dan Violi, Lynne Sweet, Jeff D'Agostino, Steve MacDowell, Adam Shyevitch, and Maritzie Rudden

Staff: Steve Gartrell, Trisha Kenyon Guditz and Margaret Siciliano

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

1. Approval of the minutes from the April 12, 2006 meeting. Josephine McNeil moved to approve the minutes and the motion was seconded by Bart Lloyd. The Partnership unanimously approved the minutes.
2. Follow-up presentation on Covenant Residences on Commonwealth Avenue: Susan Gittelman and Alan Schlesinger

The Partnership did not have a quorum so could not vote on the Covenant Residences project but they had a discussion on the project. B'nai B'rith Housing New England has filed for comprehensive permit and the Zoning Board of Appeals will hold a public hearing on May 23, 2006. B'nai B'rith wanted to respond to the questions brought up by the Project Review Subcommittee and ask to the Partnership's support.

Susan Gittelman discussed the changes to the site plan that came out of the CPA process. The changes to the project include the following: 1) the total number of affordable units has increased from 14 to 15 units for eligible low- and moderate-income households as defined by HUD; 2) minor modifications to the building and refinement of unit layout; resulting in a slight change to unit mix so that one unit on each floor (or a total of four units) has become a 1-bedroom unit with den, (in lieu of a 2-bedroom unit as formerly proposed); and 3) added landscaping treatment and other site modifications to enhance access for emergency services which has reduced surface parking spaces. Overall, the number of parking spaces has been reduced from 101 to 94 spaces (a parking ratio of 1.65).

Susan Gittelman then discussed B'nai B'rith's response to the questions raised by the Project Review Subcommittee. Susan Gittelman summarized B'nai B'rith's letter, dated May 10, 2006, to the Newton Housing Partnership as follows: .

A). Condominium Associations. The two condominiums will operate independently, although there will be provision in the condominium documents providing for the allocation of costs associated with the management and maintenance of joint common areas, particularly the shared access roadway and certain parking spaces. B'nai B'rith anticipates that vendor service contracts would be coordinated for things like snow plowing to achieve cost advantage. B'nai B'rith does not anticipate any shared amenities.

B). Building Practices and Impact on Long-term Affordability/Quality. In terms of sustainability, the new building will generally be designed to try to meet Energy Star standards for use of materials and equipment. This provides guidance on design that results in energy savings and improved quality of life. Units will be individually metered for water use and employ low flow devices to encourage conservation by unit owners. Materials for the exterior of the building will be selected for durability and may include cement siding that does not utilize wood products and requires less frequent care and repainting. Where possible, landscape materials should be native species that will more climate and drought tolerant than non-native species. B'nai B'rith declined to make a commitment to meet Energy Star standards.

In response, Partnership members said they appreciated the statement of intent but some argued that a firm commitment to meet those standards should be provided in light of their consistency with City policy and their value for residents over time in terms of reduced energy costs. Other members were apprehensive regarding the impact on financial feasibility of such a commitment.

C). Local Preference. B'nai B'rith is proposing a relatively broad definition that applicants shall be deemed "local" if one household member (i) lives in Newton, (ii) works in Newton, (iii) has children in a Newton Public School (including METCO) or (iv) has an immediate family member living in Newton.

D). Work to Existing Building. The building will undergo minor renovations prior to condo conversion. B'nai B'rith is not proposing to temporarily relocate tenants and in terms of deleading, is not anticipating any family with children under the age of 6 purchasing a 1-bedroom unit. To the extent any statute or regulation requires deleading, B'nai B'rith will comply with the codes.

Some Partnership members argued that the potential health risks of lead paint in the existing building should be fully abated, if not everywhere then at a minimum for the affordable units, common areas, and exterior areas, as recommended by staff for the Newton Housing Rehabilitation Fund. Other members were apprehensive regarding impacts of such a requirement upon project costs and feasibility.

E). New Construction. B'nai B'rith has prepared a construction management plan which addresses hours of construction and mitigation and planning measures associated with noise, dust and blasting controls. Its purpose is to assist in mitigating disruption to abutters including the occupants of the existing building and the adjacent properties. In terms of

operational issues, during the period of redevelopment of the new building, the condo owners of the units in the existing building maintain a separate access drive and parking area.

F). Tandem parking spaces for existing building. The designation for these spaces will likely be for the benefit of owners in the existing building. B'nai B'rith is maintaining flexibility on the allocation of the tandem spaces.

Josephine McNeil asked, would owners be able to rent their condos?

Alan Schlesinger responded that B'nai B'rith is proposing a limit on the number of units that can be rented so that 80% are owner occupied.

Josephine McNeil stated that she is concerned about people renting their units to students.

Alan Schlesinger replied that like the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program, students would not be allowed to live there and B'nai B'rith will put the restriction in the master deed.

Lisle Baker stated the Board of Aldermen has in the past used a restriction to not allow students, similar to the accessory apartment program restrictions. He added that he believes this project is a wise use of public funds. It fits into the neighborhood and the community gets affordable units. He stated that the applicant has worked closely with city officials, staff, and neighborhood. He added that he thinks this is a good project and hopes the Partnership supports it.

The Partnership members agreed that the Chair would draft a letter of support for the project by those individuals attending while recognizing their concerns, particularly regarding Energy Star and lead paint, then prior to sending it to the ZBA would circulate it for review by those attending this meeting.

Meeting adjourned.