

NEWTON HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Newton Housing & Community Development Program
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June 11, 2008 MEETING MINUTES

Date: June 11, 2008
Time: 7:45 a.m.
Location: City Hall, Room 202

Members present: Phil Herr, Josephine McNeil, John Wilson, Dan Violi, Lynne Sweet, Peter Macero and Andrew Franklin

Members absent: Ellen Feingold, David Stein, Deb Crossley, Liz Kirsch, Bart Lloyd, Nancy Andersen, Henry Korman, Kay Kahn and Jeanne Strickland

Guest: Patrick Dober, Chairman, Newton Housing Authority

Staff: Trisha Kenyon Guditz

Minutes prepared for the Housing Partnership by Trisha Kenyon Guditz, Housing Programs Manager

1. Approved minutes from the May 14 meeting with the following caveat:

The meeting minutes need to reflect that the members approved the submittal of an application to the Community Preservation Committee for down payment assistance for first time homebuyers. The members did not approve a change to the homeownership program that would allow the following change: When the City's down payment assistance is used to further subsidize units that are already subject to a pre-existing resale restriction, the Housing Office would like the funding to be subject to a recapture-model restriction. Further information on this proposed change is included in Steve Gartrell's May 13, 2008 memo to the Newton Housing Partnership. The members want more information from Steve on the merits of this proposed change before they vote.

2. Submission of an application to CHAPA for consultant services and a request to MIT for an intern.

Phil Herr reported that he had met with Housing Office staff and Mike Kruse to discuss the submission of an application to CHAPA. Subsequent to those meetings, he submitted the application and made a request to MIT. He explained that the application (which was distributed to the members prior to the meeting) was a request for funds to hire a consultant to assist with various housing initiatives in the city.

Lynne Sweet expressed a concern that she had only seen the application the day before the meeting and hadn't been given the opportunity for input. She said that clearly a lot of time and effort had gone into the application but there was lack of clarity about the initiative—what it was, why it was needed, who were the parties involved, and who was leading the effort.

Phil responded by saying that CAN-DO volunteered to act as a “conduit” for the grant, if it was awarded, but the principle stakeholders, at least currently, were the Newton Housing Partnership, the City Planning Department and U-CHAN. He said that the Housing Partnership needed to raise its level of visibility as did the Planning and Development Board (staffed by the Planning Department). He said that he hoped that a sub-committee would be formed if the grant was awarded enabling various constituencies to become involved with the housing action strategies.

Lynne repeated that her concern that the application process should have involved input from the Housing Partnership.

Josephine McNeil said that she is frustrated when the City hamstring a group of people who want to go forward to do something. She said that U-CHAN will move forward with the CHAPA application and housing initiatives with or without the City and the Housing Office.

John Wilson stated that citizen volunteers play an important role in getting things done and moving projects forward. He said “We just can't be stopped by the existing political climate. We need to make the political (figures) see that it's in their best interest to move ahead in housing actions.”

Dan Violi said that a third party entity is needed to bring all the stakeholders together. He added that the members needed to have seen the application in advance but that he supports the submission of the application and what the funds will be able to accomplish. He suggested that the Housing Partnership discuss the formation of a sub-committee that is responsible for the implementation of the grant, if received.

Lynne asked the group “What is the next step?” She explained that in other communities Housing Partnerships receive CPA funds for studies and that the Newton Housing Partnership should consider making the same request. She also said that there are facilitators who are trained to bring stakeholder groups together.

Phil said that it is important to have Newton Housing Authority participation and that they are a stakeholder in this process.

Patrick Dober, a guest from the Newton Housing Authority, said that he was aware that the Housing Partnership has looked for more intersection with the Housing Authority. He said “We should be involved in specific incidences.”

Lynne said that Patrick offered that someone from the Housing Authority could come to Housing Partnership meetings to update the members on what they are doing and provide information on specific projects.

Patrick expressed two concerns relative to monthly attendance at Housing Partnership meetings by Housing Authority staff: 1. Heavy staff workload and 2. Possibly conflict of interest issues. However, he added that there should be no reason why the Housing Authority shouldn't have more intersection with the Housing Partnership.

Dan stated that the group had gone through a significant conflict of interest process and Patrick responded saying that he was aware of the process and had read the City's conflict of interest policy memo.

Josephine said that it was helpful for the Housing Authority to know what the Housing Partnership was doing and vice versa.

Patrick said that he will go back to the staff and discuss more involvement with the Housing Partnership in the future.

The members discussed forming a sub-committee to take the lead on housing action strategies. The following members at the table agreed to sub-committee members: Phil, Lynne, Dan, John and Josephine.

Review changes to the City's draft Rental Policy

The members continued the discussion on the draft rental policy recommending that staff reorganize the memo starting with general guidance on rents and percentages of income v. rent in cases where a subsidy source and/or program regulations aren't applicable to specific requirements under CDBG and HOME. Trisha Guditz said that she would make this change and asked that the members then return redlined versions to her so she could develop a final draft. Phil asked for further clarification on why 70% area median income was used to income qualify renter households. (Steve Gartrell to follow up.)

Update from the Nominating Committee

Lynne and Josephine explained that there have been no volunteers for the chair or vice chair positions. Phil has agreed to remain chairman for the next six months. Lynne asked for feedback on a co-chair model which would enable the chair's work to be distributed between two individuals. Phil stated that he couldn't see how a co-chair model could be effective.

Andy Franklin wondered if people who said no to being chair would instead agree to serve as vice chair (and move up to chair after being mentored).

Josephine asked who was interested in serving as vice chair.

Lynne asked “Why is attendance lagging?”

Josephine said that the Housing Partnership needs to know where it is going.

The members then discussed the idea of pulling back from a regular meeting format and reserving time to discuss the role of the Housing Partnership which has expanded from development project review and reviewing requests for federal housing development assistance. The current role also includes administrative and discussion of policy- related issues and tasks.

Dan said that 16 members is “unbelievably unworkable” and the Housing Partnership would be better served if there were fewer voting members. In response, Phil said that he was still waiting for feedback from the Law Department on whether the Housing Partnership can have advisory members.

Phil will ask the members if the July meeting should be reserved to discuss the role of the Housing Partnership in the future and how to establish a process to work on housing action items.

Meeting adjourned.