

## **Fair Housing Committee**

July 1, 2009 meeting minutes Approved August 5, 2009

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Attendance: Sheila Mondshein, Chairman, Phil Herr, Esther Schlorholtz, Josephine McNeil, Sandi Fromm, and Henry Korman

Staff: Trisha Kenyon Guditz, Robert Muollo, Bev Droz, and Kathleen Cahill (part of meeting)

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Sheila updated the FHC about her conversation with Barbara Lischinsky regarding funding transportation to meetings through CDBG, which is allowable. However, at this time Ms. Lischinsky is still uncertain about joining the FHC due to prevailing health issues. Sheila will contact her again later this summer.

### **1. Review/approval of June 3, 2009 meeting minutes**

Sandra raised a concern that “Center,” in the context of Newton geography, should be spelled as “Centre.” Phil said that the minutes should reflect that he was authorized to tell the City Clerk on behalf of the FHC that accommodating language should be included in the notice of public hearings. Phil also said that on page four, the word “suggested” was used although it was more of a statement than a suggestion and should be noted as one. The minutes were then approved as amended.

### **2. Status on the reverse mortgage program for seniors**

Sheila described the purpose and background of setting up a reverse mortgage workshop on the tentative date of September 10, 2009 from 10:00AM to noon at the Newton Senior Center. Robert spoke regarding both potential speakers for the workshop; a housing counselor from Quincy Community Action Program and an attorney referred by the Lawyers Clearinghouse of Boston. Sheila raised a question regarding the \$75 application fee that is associated with the services provided by the Lawyers Clearinghouse and wondered if it was necessary given that the workshop is meant to be an informational session, not a legal service. Trisha said that the CDBG funds allocated to the FHC are available for use to pay the fee, if needed.

Josephine found merit in having both speakers present and believes QCAP may be in a better position to interact with people and answer certain questions they may have. Esther added that she looked for other potential speakers but could not find anyone

without a conflict of interest with exception of the Lawyers Clearinghouse. Esther reminded the City Staff to ask the Mass. Division of Banks to provide materials as hand outs at the workshop and to also go online to look up information on their website.

The FHC agreed to pay for the application fee of \$75 using the CDBG funding allocated to the FHC.

### **3. Input for Mayoral candidates forum on housing issues (August 13, 2009)**

Sheila indicated the candidate forum date of August the 13<sup>th</sup> and confirmed with Josephine that she and U-CHAN members are working on a “white paper” for the candidates. It was noted that at the July 16<sup>th</sup> U-CHAN meeting, a representative from each participating group will frame between 2 and 3 questions each for the candidates to be asked at the forum.

Sheila asked the FHC if they are comfortable with cosponsoring the forum, which was agreed upon. Sheila also noted that as Trisha had stated in earlier conversations, the FHC, as an arm of the City, cannot provide any financial assistance for the event.

The FHC then discussed what the white paper will cover, including results of the fair housing audit, data on housing needs, Chapter 40B, and other issues.

It was decided that Sheila will send a draft of the fair housing questions for the forum to FHC members by July 16 for review and revision.

### **4. Review of the draft Affirmative Marketing Plan for the Newton First time Home buyer Program**

Steve Gartrell, Associate Director of Community Development for the City, presented an overview and background on Newton’s Homebuyer Programs to the FHC, including the Newton Connection and First Time Homebuyer Program and the differences/similarities between the two. He then described DHCD’s LIP – LAU process and Newton’s position in relation to this program, which includes submitting an application and Affirmative Marketing Plan.

Steve explained Newton’s Homebuyer Program’s Affirmative Marketing Plan to the FHC, and also noted that unlike most homebuyer programs under the LIP, Newton’s does not utilize a housing lottery.

Esther wanted to know what the demographic of the Program has been to date. Steve noted that through CPA Funding, the Newton Homebuyer Program had assisted two (2) homebuyers describing themselves as Black/African American, two (2) describing themselves as Asian, two (2) as White, and one (1) describing himself as Hispanic/Latino. Henry asked how many of those assisted were prior Newton residents. Five (5) out of six (6) have been previous residents of Newton.

Steve asked for FHC's insights and eventual support for the Affirmative Marketing Plan.

Esther suggested meeting with DHCD to explain the demand-side focus of the program and to highlight its performance. She encouraged enhancing marketing and outreach beyond newspaper advertisements, including working with the Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston, CHAPA, local banks, and other organizations.

Esther also wanted the plan to focus on accessibility in its procedures. Any limitations to program accessibility should be identified and remediated, and the methods whereby people can access the program should be communicated to DHCD in the application.

Henry asked if the selection preferences are consistent with the FHC's selection preference recommendations. Steve explained that the program will be adjusted to conform to the FHC's recommendations for selection preference. Henry was also concerned about DHCD's reaction to the program's demand-side approach and suggested that banks serving the underserved can be identified and relationships with realtors be established outside Newton. It was also suggested that application forms be made available off-site such as at banks and realtor offices with the purpose of enabling the homebuyer to receive assistance with the application. An additional suggestion was that alternative format applications be made available to those with visual impairments and in languages other than English.

Josephine asked what realtors are available to work with in minority areas. Sandi was concerned that reaching out to brokers is difficult due to the limited housing availability in Newton. Sheila reinforced the points made about accessibility of the program for applicants with limited English skills and the disabled. Henry believed that all program documents should include "reasonable accommodation" in the language.

Trisha told the FHC about the ongoing communication the City has had with DHCD regarding the LIP Program and asked the FHC if the draft plan should be circulated through the FHC first before the plan is given to DHCD. This was agreed on.

Henry believed that the draft plan should state the fact that the program is demand-based to address DHCD's policy piece. Henry also said that it is ultimately for the City to figure out what the most effective way is for the FHC to back the plan up. The FHC then agreed that someone, most likely Esther, should join the City in future meeting(s) with DHCD.

## **5. Discussion of fair housing needs for FY11-15 Consolidated Plan**

Kathleen Cahill, from the Newton Planning Department, presented an overview of the consolidated planning process for FY11-15 including the citizen participation plan, needs assessment, 5 year strategic plan, annual action plan, and CAPER.

Sheila asked Kathleen what input will be needed from the FHC for the draft, which is due<sup>in</sup> August. Sheila asked when the FHC will receive the housing section from Newton's

CAPER for review. Trisha said she plans on receiving the draft by the end of July for FHC review before and at its August 5 meeting.

Henry asked if the FHC will be tasked with developing another Analysis of Impediments. This was confirmed by Trisha. An update will be needed in 10-12 months.

Trisha explained that she is using comments from focus groups and the FHC to develop a needs assessment plan. Sheila asked for the timeline of the needs assessment. Kathleen believes it will be through the Planning and Development Board sometime in August.

## **6. Discussion of Newton Housing Authority disability access issue and other matters**

Sheila updated the FHC on the disability access issue at the Newton Housing Authority's Lincoln Street development office, advising that progress had been made on fixing the bell, as reported by Kathleen, and that CDBG funds may be used to pay for Braille signage. (Following the June 3 meeting, Sheila communicated further with NHA staff regarding the bell, signage, and possibility of an audio recording. NHA staff stated that they would work closely with Kathleen on the signage and related needs, and that they would consider the use of non-CDBG funds as well.)

Josephine asked about fair housing training for the Newton Housing Authority and suggested that they should use their own funds for staff training on fair housing.

Sheila circulated to FHC members an excerpt from a 2008 report received from NHA, which contains some information on disability access. Henry wanted to know if the NHA has a transition plan, self evaluation, and needs assessment, as required for purposes of Section 504 and ADA (in the early 1990s). Sheila has a request pending at the NHA to obtain those documents.

It was noted that issues such as these need to be addressed carefully because of possible political implications and that there are some systemic issues and concerns that will need further strategizing to address. More time is needed to establish a bigger role for the FHC to play in these issues, especially if applicable guidelines have not been entirely met by the NHA. Sheila agreed to put this discussion matter at the top of the agenda for the next meeting.

Sheila has submitted a FOIA request to HUD for any compliance reviews of the NHA over the past five years under Section 504, Section 109, or Title VI. She has also made a FOIA request for information on the number of Title VIII (Fair Housing) complaints filed with HUD over the last five years within the City of Newton. She is awaiting responses to these requests.

In a separate matter, Sheila advised the FHC that an NHA client reported that her Social Security number was given to vendors by the NHA for income recertification purposes. FHC members felt that such a practice raises the possibility of Privacy Act violations.

In other business, Sheila asked Phil for an update on reasonable accommodation issues concerning the City Clerk. Phil reported that Alderman Hess-Mahan is following up on the Clerk's position that he is complying with applicable legal requirements concerning the language to be used for notice of public hearings. Phil said that there is a larger issue of transparency involved here.

Sheila asked Rob to disseminate the DHCD Affirmative Fair Housing Policy document to members for their information.

The meeting was adjourned.