

FAIR HOUSING COMMITTEE

August 5, 2009 Meeting Minutes Approved October 7, 2009

Fair Housing Committee members in attendance: Sheila Mondshein (chair), Henry Korman, Phil Herr, Esther Schlorholtz, Doug Sweet

Staff: Robert Muollo, Amy Yuhasz, Kathleen Cahill, Bev Droz (HHS staff)

1) Review and approval of July minutes

All necessary revisions were made to the July 1st 2009 minutes. A motion to approve the minutes as amended was seconded, and approved.

2) Status of reverse mortgage program and of Mayoral candidate housing forum

Robert described the progress of the reverse mortgage program, which is currently in its marketing phase. The Fair Housing Committee was asked for suggestions on flyers that would be distributed to various locations for program publicity. It was noted that premise accessibility language and the Lawyers Clearinghouse logo should be included on the flyer before it is released. The flyer was then approved for use.

Committee members were reminded of the upcoming Mayoral Forum on August 13. Two fair housing questions will be included among the questions posed to the candidates. A copy of the housing “white paper,” which was sent to the candidates, will be shared with the committee.

3) Review of CAPER draft housing section

The FHC reviewed and continued to discuss the Draft CAPER Overview. The committee suggested that including other FHC activities such as FHIP activities, co-sponsored activities, and city forums held in FY09 should be included in both priority needs # 1 and # 6 of the CAPER.

A member expressed that bullet point number 5, page 3 of the Draft CAPER Overview may need to be reworded, as it implies that less funding may be available on a per unit basis. The committee would also like to see more explanation regarding rehab accomplishments and stated its concern regarding eligible uses of loans and a lack of explanation of uses of each in the CAPER. Amy suggested that adding “housing rehabilitation” to the 3 active project program descriptions under rehab could resolve this.

Clarity was asked for priority need # 3, which stated that “No federal funds were committed or expended in FY09 to create new affordable rental units.” It was asked if this was true and if priority need # 3 and the CAPER in general can include committed or expended local, state, and/or other funding beyond federal funds. Additionally, it was believed that the ArborPoint Development may have opened in FY09, and if so, this project should be included in the CAPER under priority need # 3.

The FHC also suggested that needs priority # 6 should include language that the Fair Housing Plan was approved by the Mayor and that the Fair Housing Committee was created with the approval by the BOA and the Mayor. Needs priority # 6 should also include “training” next to “education” and that in the last paragraph, “...commercial and residential developments...” be replaced with “...in residential developments and public accommodations...”

City staff took note of the FHC comments on the CAPER and will look into the items further and elaborate where they can.

4) Review and continued discussion on fair housing needs assessment

Sheila began by adding background to the agenda item, which included her ongoing research pertaining to the Newton Housing Authority and accessibility. Under the FOIA Act and communications with HUD, Sheila received and passed out to the committee HUD Fair Housing complaint statistics for the City of Newton over the last five years. Sheila also explained that HUD has not done a compliance review on NHA in the last five years, and that there is a need for training for NHA staff, especially for reasonable accommodations. She also distributed a full copy of the NHA’s most current Fair Housing Plan, which is evidently its own Analysis of Impediments in addition to the City’s. Both Sheila and Phil crafted draft fair housing needs assessments, which were disseminated to the committee.

Discussions amongst the FHC about both draft needs assessments included the disconnect between the evidence of discrimination as demonstrated by the test audits and subsequent enforcement efforts. Fair Housing Committee members felt that the enforcement system is not addressing this discrimination adequately and that it has limitations.

It was noted that previous concerns of the FHC regarding access issues have not yet been addressed by the City and that the development of another need in the Housing Needs Assessment, named “Fair and equal access to housing and municipal services” should be included for this purpose. In addition to this, the committee would like to see a connection made between the Housing Needs and the Access Needs components of the Consolidated Plan.

A request was made to circulate Newton’s Consolidated Plan as a whole in the next couple of weeks, or whenever the final document is available prior to the public meeting. Amy asked the FHC for suggestions on how to get the word out for Newton’s Consolidated Plan public meeting before the Planning and Development Board.

It was agreed that the FHC will receive the HOME Consortium Consolidated Plan, as the committee is interested in what the Consortium is doing as a whole as well. The Staff will send out a .pdf of this document to the members when available. It was also agreed that Sheila and Phil’s draft fair housing needs assessments be merged and incorporated and sent out to committee members and City staff.

5) Question regarding City water and sewer discount program

Sheila gave an overview of the City’s Water/Sewer discount program, where eligible homeowners can apply for water and sewer bill abatements, but renters are not eligible. Sheila presented the question to the FHC of whether this is a fair housing issue. Sheila then discussed potential arguments and possible lines

of analysis that may be applicable in this situation, but feels it requires further thinking and research through a subcommittee and brainstorming session in the future. Members will be sent information regarding the ordinance before the next meeting.

6) Other matters

FHC would like to have the new City Inspector who is in part responsible for access requirements attend their October meeting, if possible.

Henry also raised a question of whether the City should update its ADA/ Section 504 documents for the future.

The meeting was adjourned.