

NEWTON HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Newton Housing & Community Development Program
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October 14, 2009 Meeting Minutes Approved 11/12/09

Members present: Phil Herr, Chairman, Nancy Anderson, Jeanne Strickland, Deb Crossley, David Stein, John Wilson, Josephine McNeil, Peter Macero, and Andrew Franklin

Visitors: Michael Lepie (resident)

Staff: Trisha Guditz, Robert Muollo, Jr.

Draft minutes prepared for the Housing Partnership by Robert Muollo, Jr., Housing Development Planner

1. Review and approval of August 12 meeting minutes

The August 12th meeting minutes were approved.

2. Project review: CAN – DO project at 2148 – 50 Commonwealth Ave.

Phil asked if a formal action is needed by the NHP. Josephine asked that the project be endorsed by the NHP as part of CAN – DO's application to the Community Preservation Committee for CPA funds.

Josephine removed herself as a member of the Partnership for the purpose of the agenda item.

Robert and Trisha gave a summary of the project at 2148 – 2150 Commonwealth Avenue, and explained that CAN - DO has received approval under the City's Purchase/Rehabilitation Program for a commitment of \$300,000 in CDBG funds to acquire the property for the purpose of providing affordable rental opportunities to homeless veterans and their families eligible for HUD – VASH section 8 vouchers.

Robert stated that the proposed project would benefit from the support of the NHP for the proposal's application for Community Preservation Act funding, but an approval by the NHP is

not required to receive CDBG funds under the City's Purchase/Rehab Program.

Questions from the Partnership:

- Peter asked if the HUD – VASH is project based. Josephine said that the voucher is not project based and that if a qualified tenant is lost, then another veteran eligible for the voucher will be able to move into a unit. The voucher holder must also be receiving supportive services to qualify under the HUD – VASH program.
- Nancy asked for the location of the project. Josephine explained that it is in an excellent location, close to transportation, shops, and other amenities.
- Nancy asked about the accessibility of the units. Josephine said that is not an issue because it is an existing property.
- Peter asked if the price of the property is comparable to other properties. Josephine said it was, and she has received data from the Newton Assessor's Office that confirms that the price is in the range with comparable properties in the area.
- Peter asked if it was a three or four bedroom property. Josephine said that it technically has four bedrooms but she will use it as a three bedroom. This may change to four depending on who is available in the program. Josephine felt from communications with the HUD/VASH program that not many families need four bedrooms.
- David asked how \$200,000 a bedroom compares with similar types of housing in the Boston area. Josephine did not know the answer to this, but said that rents range from \$1,600 for two bedrooms and \$2,000 - \$2,500/\$2,600 for a three bedroom. Jeanne pointed out that a rent comparability study showed that a three bedroom rent in Newton can be up to \$3,200.

Mr. Michael Lepie, resident of Newton, asked if the project was going to be for disabled veterans and if it was handicapped accessible, or if not, is going to be. Trisha responded that the understanding is that the disability that most of the veterans participating in the program have is not a physical disability and that staff has spoken to CAN - DO about what needs to be provided in the units.

Mr. Lepie said he assumed a disabled veteran could be a person in a wheelchair or using crutches, so it would have to be handicapped acceptable. Trisha explained that under federal regulations, a two-unit rental development does not have to be handicapped accessible.

Mr. Lepie believed that due to the site's physical location, he does not know how a wheelchair or a person with a disability will be able to get there in the good or bad weather, as it is quite steep.

Peter noted that this was already addressed earlier in the discussion. Phil said that there are many forms of disabilities, not just mobility impairments. Phil believed that the point Mr. Lepie raised, that for persons with a mobility disability this site is apparently unsuitable, should be considered.

Mr. Lepie also expressed concern about preference of selecting female veterans over a male veteran, referring to the project's application. Josephine acknowledged that a distinction will not be made between male and female for the project. The units will be open to veterans eligible to participate in the program.

Mr. Lepie submitted two documents to the Partnership; a letter that stated he was against the project and a copy of a Newton Tab article dated August 11, 2009, entitled "CAN-DO can't do it alone." Mr. Lepie ended by stating that the developer had a good idea and good intentions but questioned the business expertise of the developer and that the project did not meet accessibility requirements.

Deb commented that this proposal is the first of its type that has been proposed in Newton since the Elm Park Project. Deb acknowledged that the site is very steep, but suggested that there must be an enormous number of veterans with mental disabilities in need- and offering other physically accessible units should be included in Newton's future.

Peter believed that this is an appropriate step for CAN - DO because they are targeting existing housing stock.

Phil asked what the timing is for something from the NHP. Trisha said that the public hearing for the CPC is November 18th.

Deb requested a copy of the scope of work when available to ensure that the rehabilitation will help protect the long term affordability of the project.

Phil motioned to approve the request that the Partnership draw a letter indicating the support and reasons for support of the proposed project. The motion was seconded and the vote passed unanimously.

Josephine wanted the records to reflect that she moved back to the table.

3. Program matters:

a. Project review materials for developers seeking NHP approval

Phil introduced the memorandum, "Materials for Housing Partnership Development Reviews," and discussed its context as it applied to the history of the NHP project review process. Phil believed that before a large project come before the Partnership, that the project review process is clear. Phil asked if members felt that any of the required and optional information outlined in the memo is not necessary.

The Partnership concluded that the first step is to phase the information in the memo into the appropriate stages of the pre-development process, which may lead to the development of a checklist in the future.

b. FY11-15 Consolidated Plan Needs Strategy draft materials

Trisha explained the context of the Draft Housing Strategies and Needs Assessment sections of

the Consolidated Plan as it applies to HUD's format. Trisha said that to compensate for the lack of a more in-depth analysis of needs and strategies, narrative will be added clarity and substance in a future draft.

Josephine made the point that more resources are needed for affordable housing in Newton and stakeholders in the community need to advocate on behalf of securing more funding towards this cause.

The Partnership discussed the applicability of the Consolidated Plan in terms of being a "live document" and a plan that is static in nature. Deb believed that a more comprehensive strategy – separate from the Consolidated Plan – be considered that contains quantitative and quality information to help educate interested parties in advocating affordable housing.

As part of the Citizens Participation process, the document will come back to the Partnership more formalized later in the process.

4. Updates:

a. HAPI

This discussion was tabled due to time constraints.

b. Streamlining Affordable Housing Funding Subcommittee

The Chair of the Streamlining Affordable Housing Funding Subcommittee was absent. Phil stated that it has been meeting regularly and making progress.

c. Westchester County & Newton

This discussion was tabled due to time constraints.

5. New initiatives:

a. New ideas from Partnership members

Ideas will be sent to Phil individually.

b. Applying the "Stretch" Energy Code in Newton

Deb gave an update to the Partnership on the Stretch Energy Code including a description as it applies to affordable housing. Deb made the point that it guarantees long-term affordability because of the level of performance testing it requires.

Phil reiterated that the additional initial cost to a developer to meet these standards does not seem to be a deterrent, as these costs are recouped over time. Phil went on to say that past projects have chosen to meet this level of energy efficiency on their own will, showing its practicality.

Because a quorum was lost at this point in the meeting, Phil asked that at the upcoming Public Hearing that testimony is entered by the Partnership stating that those present at this Partnership meeting were in concurrence of supporting the Stretch Energy Code in Newton.

Andrew reiterated that the for the purpose of the Housing Partnership, that the letter of testimony speak in the context of the Stretch Energy Code that speaks to helping assure long-term affordability for housing.

A letter will be drafted and entered as testimony at the Public Hearing.

The meeting was adjourned.