

City of Newton



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**Newton Affordable Housing Trust
Meeting Minutes
September 21, 2023**

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Barney S. Heath
Director

The hybrid meeting was held on Thursday, Sept. 21, 2023, beginning at 4:05 PM. Newton Affordable Housing Trust (NAHT) members Tamirirashe Gambiza, Ann Houston, Councilor Alicia Bowman, Judy Weber, and Jason Korb were present in-person at City Hall in Room 204. Peter Sargent attended virtually.

Members of the public present included Alice Ingerson, Kathy Lauffer, Josephine McNeil, Councilor Julia Malakie and Boston College student reporter Theresa Marcucci.

Staff present in Room 204 included Director of Planning and Development Barney Heath and Director of Housing & Community Development Lara Kritzer.

Approval to issue Inclusionary Zoning payment to Newton Housing Authority for 1114 Beacon Street Special Permit Project

Ms. Kritzer explained that the City had received a portion of the Inclusionary Zoning payment due for 1114 Beacon Street. Half of the amount received, \$150,647, is due to the Newton Housing Authority (NHA) under the ordinance. Mr. Heath stated that a formal vote from the Trust is needed for the Comptroller to issue a check.

Mr. Gambiza moved to issue the check and send the funds to the NHA. Councilor Bowman seconded the motion and described her excitement at the project's forward momentum. She noted that it is more difficult to finance condominiums and easier to fund apartments. There are 34 total units, including 6 inclusionary zoning units. The members unanimously voted in favor of releasing the funds due to the NHA from the 1114 Beacon Street Special Permit project. Mr. Heath stated that this project had done a lot of good work with the neighborhood on the design.

Update on Process for Establishing Funding Priorities

Ms. Houston kicked off this update on the Priorities Task Force Work. During the last meeting, she had offered to send a PowerPoint to members regarding the list of variables to be updated from the Newton 2040 study. She noted that the Trust had agreed that there should be a task force that included people from the Newton Housing Partnership (NHP) and from the Fair Housing Committee (FHC). The NHP discussed it at its last meeting and assigned NHP members David Rockwell and Chuck Eisenberg. The FHC had assigned Josephine McNeil, who is also a Partnership member, to this task force. The objective, Ms. Houston explained, is to determine the housing priorities for the City in the near future. She asked for a volunteer from the Trust to join the group and Councilor Bowman

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assented. Ms. Houston stated that they were trying to develop the data within the NAHT. Ms. Kritzer had reached out to Barrett Planning, and they had affirmed that they could do it this fall. Ms. Houston estimated that it will take less than six months to complete the task force process, depending on staff capacity. Mr. Heath also noted that Barrett Planning is very familiar with Newton and its housing programs. He explained that Judi Barrett had been involved in a comprehensive update for the Consortium and has a great team. Ms. McNeil noted that the census data came out last week and hoped that the consultants would be encouraged to use that in their analysis. All agreed that it is important that residents who are impacted by this work look also be familiar with the proposed priorities.

Ms. McNeil stated that it was important that the voices of marginalized and low-income people be heard because many groups make decisions about what is good for these households without asking anyone what they need. She explained that a movement began five years ago to incorporate members of these communities into the decision-making process and that she was seeing it expressed across many venues both in the corporate world and elsewhere. Ms. Houston thought that was well expressed and noted that the Partnership had a few additional elements for the program as well.

Ms. Houston noted the enormous attention paid to those residents who might be impacted by the Village Center Zoning changes and asserted that the City needed to continue that tradition. She asked if there were further questions. Councilor Bowman asked when we can expect this work to begin. Ms. Kritzer stated that the work would begin as soon as they could confirm that the consultants were ready to start.

Mr. Gambiza asked if these priorities will be guided by the Trust or the combined stakeholders and commented that they would want to keep fair housing issues in mind as well. Councilor Bowman stated that they had identified family housing and very low-income housing as high needs based on the current analysis and were hoping to hear from the public on what other needs were out there. Ms. Houston commented that the Trust has talked about how to market availability, and that this conversation could provide direction on this.

Update on Existing and potential funding proposals & and a status update on the City's Existing Housing Projects and Initiatives

Ms. Kritzer reminded the membership that 2Life Communities had received over \$4 million in Community Preservation Act funding for the preservation and restoration of the Coleman House in recent years. Combined with 2Life Communities' own funds, over \$28 million dollars have gone into the project. Due to setbacks and unanticipated costs, 2Life needed additional funding. They are looking for other resources and were expected to apply for NAHT funds at the November meeting.

The Newton Community Development Foundation's Warren House was also looking for additional project funds. They were not able to commit 51% of the building's units to be permanently affordable housing, which takes CDBG funds off the table. NCDF is looking at the scope of the project and investigating historic tax credits as another funding source for the historic structure. Mr. Heath suggested that we need to take a piecemeal approach and noted that NCDF will likely be back in the future with a different proposal.

Ms. Houston asked about other prospective projects. Mr. Heath reported that Riverside is one such project, and that there are conversations going on with MBTA and EOHLC that indicate it might be revived with a housing focus, minus the commercial piece. A new development team is looking at the financing and may come back at some point in the future. Councilor Bowman asked if the zoning for the parcel would need to be updated, and Mr. Heath stated that they are not sure yet. Ms. Houston thought that it could be an interesting project and wondered if it would be developed under Inclusionary Zoning and whether it could be developed with more intensive affordability.

Mr. Korb joined the meeting in Room 204 at this time.

Mr. Heath announced that the West Newton Armory team is in the process of refining their approach and had proposed a few changes to the site and building design. Ms. Kritzer noted that there is no change in the number of units, but that one additional unit would now be accessible. She added that there was a slight redesign of the entry way, and that the patio was now a little smaller. The lobby would also be smaller and the courtyard had been redesigned to provide additional space. Ms. Houston asked if the project had gone out to bid and if there was a date for the groundbreaking. Mr. Heath speculated that they might be ready later in 2024.

Mr. Heath continued the updates with a conversation about the public meeting and administrative site plan review meeting for the Family Aid project on Washington Street. He noted that there was a sixteen-day review period. Mr. Sargent reported that he and Ms. Houston had attended the public meeting. He thought that Family Aid had done a polished presentation that was very well supported with evidence. Ms. Houston agreed. Councilor Bowman also praised the presentation and commented that it was nice to hear the history of the organization and to learn that Family Aid had started as a Newton organization. Ms. Houston had since talked with Larry Seamans of Family Aid and believed that they could possibly come to the Trust for funding and were also likely to ask for CDGB funds.

Councilor Bowman noted that Ms. McNeil had asked if there would be a Haitian Creole speaker there, and who would be prioritized to be housed in those spaces. Councilor Bowman believed that anyone living in Newton or close to Newton should be prioritized in order to allow them to stay close to family and friends. Ms. Houston cited the importance of these questions surrounding cultural sensitivity. She noted that the NHA had surveyed their tenants on how they felt about living in NHA properties and had received information on the tenants' experiences in the schools. Ms. Houston hoped that lessons from that survey would be shared.

Ms. Weber stated that the NHA had made very specific efforts to have service staff who spoke the different languages used by their tenants. She stated the NHA now had staff who spoke Russian, Spanish, and Mandarin, which were the top three languages used in NHA buildings. Ms. Houston expressed hope that the NHA would share their survey findings with the Trust. Ms. Weber replied that she had encouraged this and noted that NHA staff were working on collateral materials that she thought should be released this fall.

Councilor Bowman commented that Family Aid's constituents would be living in a congregate living situation and assumed that they had supported families in that type of setting before. She described being impressed by a speaker at the public meeting who had spoken about how the children would be welcomed into Newton schools. Mr. Heath asserted that the School Department worked with

these families entering Newton public schools and that they did a great job. Ms. Houston also thought that the School Department's presentation had been very impressive.

Moving on to the Walker Center Feasibility Study, Ms. Kritzer explained that the Planning Department was working with a consultant and other City Departments to understand what land should be set aside for housing and what should be held for future educational needs. The consultant was looking at how to add additional units to the buildings and at the potential parking placement. In the next few weeks, the consultants planned to have a better understanding of the possibilities at the site. Mr. Korb asked if the property next door was still for sale and whether the City should consider using Trust funds to acquire it. Ms. Kritzer responded that it was currently for sale at a price greater than the Trust's available funds. Councilor Bowman asked if it just one of the houses was for sale and Mr. Heath clarified that it was the whole parcel.

Councilor Bowman stated that there had been questions as to why there were so few units to be developed at the former Walker Center. She explained that in the public meetings around the site's future development, it had been noted that the future Riverside development would be large, and that as a result the Walker Center would not need as many units. Ms. Houston noted that the problem with the City's portion of the parcel was that it was pretty small to accomplish that much. She thought that home ownership was an option here but that it would need substantial subsidies from the City to work as the project was too small to qualify for State funds. She noted that scale makes all the difference and wondered if there was an opportunity to step back and look at whether the City wanted to consider a project on the entire parcel in order to do something more in line with what could be fundable.

Mr. Korb asked about the possibility of using eminent domain to acquire the property as affordable housing was a public purpose. Councilor Bowman explained how the City had originally made the decision to buy a portion of the site. Ms. Houston asked if the City had paid the same rate that the developer had paid, and Mr. Heath answered that he was not familiar with the details of both sales. Members discussed whether owning the full site would make it easier to develop and how that might happen. Councilor Bowman said a larger site might also attract a developer. Mr. Gambiza observed that the Trust needed more money for that project and Mr. Korb thought it would probably cost as much as the developer had originally paid for it. He added that there are a lot of ways to structure this payment and pointed out that both the adjacent housing and school property were already owned by the City. Mr. Korb asked if Civico, the developer, planned to build affordable housing on the site and Mr. Heath confirmed that it would include Inclusionary Zoning units.

Mr. Heath stated that he also had an update on the Village Center Rezoning in regard to the continuation of the public hearing and public testimony to be held on Tuesday evening. Councilor Bowman asked if the plans had been updated and Mr. Heath answered yes, that they would be releasing version 3.0 tomorrow. He noted that over the summer, City Councilors and the Zoning and Planning Committee (ZAP) had participated in proposing amendments to fine-tune the ordinance. They had also trimmed the maps and some selective rezonings in a couple places. The new version reflects these changes and is the version now in front of ZAP. Mr. Heath stated that it would be presented on Tuesday for public comment.

Ms. Houston stated that she could not attend this meeting and asked if someone from the Trust could cover it. Mr. Korb asked about the date, time, and duration of the meeting. Mr. Heath

answered that it would be held on October 26 at 7pm. Ms. Houston asked if this would be the last public hearing and Mr. Heath replied that he did not know but could confirm that people could attend either in-person or online. Mr. Sargent asked for the Zoom link and Ms. Kritzer volunteered to send it out to all members. Councilor Bowman asked if there would be enough capacity in the Zoom room, and Mr. Heath stated that the Planning Department was planning to accommodate up to one thousand people. Mr. Korb noted that Cambridge public meetings used a webinar format.

Ms. Houston noted how much was happening in the City and thought that these new developments spoke to why the Trust wanted to be clear about its priorities. She asked if there were any further projects or initiatives to discuss and Ms. Kritzer stated that she had sent out a list of other housing activities prior to the meeting. Councilor Bowman asked what opportunities there might be for the Trust in the event of a resale such as providing funds to make downpayments. Ms. Kritzer explained that the City had other resources including CDBG and CPA funds set aside for that purpose. Ms. Kritzer also explained how additional funding was sometimes needed to preserve the affordability of existing homebuyer units due to the outdated formulas found in some of the older restrictions. Mr. Gambiza asks if the units would be affordable in perpetuity once this error was corrected and Ms. Kritzer confirmed that they would be.

Mr. Korb asked what the annual cap was on appreciation. Ms. Kritzer explained that the City used the Universal Deed Rider which based future sale prices on the AMI when the unit was ready to be sold. Mr. Korb remarked that it was a challenge to balance the needs to cap future sale prices with the goal of allowing a homebuyer to build equity. Ms. Weber did not think that it was a good way to engage homeowners. Ms. Houston agreed that this has long been a difficult issue.

Review and Approval of Draft Minutes for July 11, 2023 and July 20, 2023

Ms. Houston asked if members had read the meeting the draft July 11, 2023 and July 20, 2023 meeting minutes. Members had reviewed them prior to the meeting. Ms. Weber noted that she had not arrived at the meetings until after the Warren House discussions and that this was not in those minutes. It was agreed that those minutes would be updated. Members unanimously voted to approve the minutes with the exception of Ms. Weber who abstained from the vote.

Ms. Houston called on Ms. McNeil who had two questions: 1) where the minutes could be found and Ms. Kritzer confirmed that they were posted on the Trust's webpage once they were approved, and 2) if the Trustees wanted to be involved in any way with legislative advocacy. Ms. Houston stated that this was not a goal of the Trust at this time and was not necessarily in the Trust's scope of work. Mr. Korb stated that he would be interested in looking at the Trust's documents on this issue.

Mr. Sargent noted that the next meeting was scheduled for November 16, 2023. Ms. Houston asked staff to send out the next six months of meeting schedules before the November meeting for members to review. Ms. Houston moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Sargent seconded the motion and all voted in favor.