

Newton Housing Partnership

Approved Minutes from June 25, 2024 Meeting Zoom Meeting 5:00pm-7:00pm

*D Rockwell
6/28/24*

Partnership Members in Attendance:

- Lizbeth Heyer, Ann Houston, David Rockwell, Marva Serotkin, Bryan Decker, Nicole Stewart

Others in Attendance:

- City of Newton Staff: Barney Heath, Lara Kritzer, Shaylyn Davis-Iannaco, Allison McIntyre
- City Councilors: none
- Former NHP member: Josephine McNeil
- Members of the community

Decisions taken, and follow-up items assigned, are shown in bold.

1. Minutes of the May 28, 2024 Meeting

Approved unanimously (David motion, Ann second), Bryan abstaining (though he noted he had attended the meeting as a guest and found the minutes accurate).

2. Election of Chair and Secretary

The two elections were handled separately.

Election of Chair: Still in her role as chair, Lizbeth noted that Marva has indicated interest in succeeding Lizbeth as chair. Lizbeth asked board and staff if other board members were interested in serving, and there were none. Lizbeth asked Marva if she was prepared to accept being nominated, and Marva indicated she was. **Marva was elected unanimously (6-0) by all Board members**, upon nomination by Ann and a second by David. Following the election, several Board members expressed their gratitude for Lizbeth's service as chair and appreciation that she is remaining on the NHP Board.

Election of Secretary: Lizbeth turned this item over to Marva as the newly elected chair. Marva indicated that David had indicated an interest in serving as Secretary. Marva asked if there were other board members interested in the position, and there were none. **David was elected unanimously by all members (6-0)** upon nomination by Lizbeth and second by Ann.

3. Introduction of New Members

Bryan Decker indicated he'd moved to Newton in 2018 after many years in Brookline, that he has been a lawyer specializing in labor and employment since the early 1990s, and still is, having founded his own Newton-based law firm upon his move to Newton. He said that in his legal work, he focuses on the labor side and frequently represents and advises public sector employees and unions. He added that he was a bicycle

advocate when he lived in Brookline. He got particularly interested in housing in Newton when the referendum regarding the Northland project on Needham Street arose. He added that he is not an expert in housing but looks forward to learning.

Nicole Stewart said she's been a Newton resident since 2006, having moved here when her son was in the first grade. She mentioned that former Newton school superintendent Irwin Blumer, now chair of the Boston College Graduate Department of School Administration and Higher Education at Boston College, was a mentor of hers when she was earning her master's in educational leadership at BC. She indicated she is executive director of Boston CASA Inc., which recruits and trains volunteers to work and advocate for children and youth involved in the court system, and that she earlier served as a turn-around CEO for Homes For Families Inc. She spoke of her passion for working with individuals and households in need, and added that she doesn't have direct background in housing, but has seen housing issues at close hand in her career.

At this point, Lizbeth noted that she had to leave for a Board meeting, and welcomed Bryan and Nicole to the Board.

David added his welcome, noting the value of Bryan's and Nicole's knowledge of populations on the receiving end of housing programs and challenges.

4. Newton Housing Priorities Task Force Update

Ann gave a brief update on the activities of the Task Force, whose members consist of representative from each of NHP, the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, the Newton Fair Housing Committee, and the Newton Housing Authority. She indicated that the group's purpose is to analyze and recommend Newton priorities in affordable housing reflecting the factors of tenure (rental vs homeownership), household type (age-restricted, non-age-restricted, and special needs), levels of affordability, use of City subsidy funding, and preservation of existing units vs production of new units. David added that Ann's leadership has been to assure that the Task Force's work is strongly data-based, and that, along with members of the Planning Department, the Task Force has been working hard to collect accurate and consistent data. Ann said the data collection has taken longer than expected, but the work is proving justified by the assemblage of valuable information for policy making and community understanding. Marva asked if the Task Force's report will be ready in September when the NHP will be focusing on goal-setting, and Ann said not quite, but **she said there will be information that the Task Force can share at that time.**

5. Newton THRIVE update

Marva asked Barney if there is further information beyond what he had presented at the May 25 meeting, and Barney indicated there was, and turned it over to Lara, who screen-shared a 5-page interim summary. She indicated that the program is under the City's Economic Mobility Initiative announced in February 2023 to serve low-income household and residents in Newton negatively impacted by COVID, and has reached its first-year anniversary. A full report is in process and not yet ready, but she offered these highlights:

- Eligibility limited to Newton residents at 50% AMI household income or lower, with adult member being between 18 and 60 years of age with children of 18 years or below, who are willing to meet regularly with a program mentor on achieving identified goals in employment, training, education, savings and the like. The program provides a \$250 monthly stipend to enrollees as long as they continue to meet with their mentors.

- Newton Thrive is being implemented in partnership with Economic Mobility Pathways (EMPath) and by January 2024 had achieved its enrollment goal of 50 enrolled households.
- Enrollees are all at incomes of 50% AMI or less and are ethnically- and language-diverse, and include some single parent households.

Nicole inquired about the metrics to be used to assess impact, and Lara indicated her team is working on developing these in concert with EMPATH. **Marva encouraged Lara to consult with Nicole on ideas for metrics.**

Josephine indicated her concern that the program is not providing a neutral place for in-person meetings with mentors, which she said is part of the EMPATH model; Josephine indicated City Hall is not in her opinion such a place. Nicole asked about hours being made available for the meetings, and Lara indicated City Hall opening hours extend longer than staff is present. She also noted that many participants prefer virtual meetings, and that the program is offering that choice. Ann suggested that the Library could be a good meeting place. **Marva asked staff to inquire about choices for meeting places and report back to NHP in the future.**

Josephine asked for a copy of the Year 1 report when it is ready, and Shaylyn indicated she would provide her with one, and that the report will be publicly available on line.

David asked what happens to program participants after the 2-year program period has expired. Barney said that EMPATH, who has done this program for a while, commonly offers participants to remain connected to EMPATH's services after the 2-year program period is completed.

Marva encouraged staff to consider planning for the continuation of the program beyond its 2-year term, but said the next step is to receive the Year 1 report.

6. Mitigation Fees Update

Shaylyn and David summarized the mitigation fees project, begun several months ago when an NHP member wondered about the efficiency of charging fees to projects that the City is also subsidizing, and the possibility that these fees impose costs on projects that might be inhibiting the number of units produced. Shaylyn explained that she is gathering information from the affordable and mixed-income projects which have gone into service over the last several years, as to the imposition of both ordinance-required and discretionary fees. Shaylyn noted that staff work on this data collection effort had to be deferred in favor of the data work on the Housing Priorities Task Force, but that she has returned to this project recently. David noted that the project is not premised on any assumption that the fees charged by the City are or are not appropriate or onerous, but simply on the premise that having this information available to the City would be useful in policy-setting on fees. Shaylyn indicated she expects a preliminary report of findings will be ready for the July NHP meeting.

7. Real Estate Transfer Fee

With last week's decision by the State Senate, and earlier by the State House, to eliminate the Real Estate Transfer from the Governor's housing bond bill, this policy issue has become moot, and there was no discussion. It will be removed from the agenda.

8. Project Updates

- a. **78 Crafts St** (295 rental units, 59 affordable at 50% AMI). Replacement of industrial buildings with four 4- to 6-story residential buildings and a 2-story parking structure. In process with the ZBA, next public hearing July 16.
- b. **528 Boylston St** (184 rental units, 46 affordable – 37u at 80% AMI, and 9u @ 50% AMI). New construction on site of landscaping company. ZBA approved Comp Permit 5/8/24, filed by City Clerk 5/28/24.
 - (1) Shaylyn reported that an abutter lawsuit was filed 6/17/24 by the Daniel Hill Law Firm on behalf of nine nearby residents, seeking to have the ZBA approval annulled.
- c. **41 Washington St** (16 ownership units – 4u @ 80@ AMI). Replacement of Victorian home with a new-construction 16-unit condominium (revised from prior plan for preservation and expansion of home). Next public hearing scheduled for July 11.
- d. **West Newton Armory** (43 rental units – 100% @ 60@ AMI and lower). Re-use of surplus Armory building at 1135 Washington St.
 - (1) Shaylyn reported that the project is on track to close on its finances in January or February 2025 and for construction to begin during the spring of 2025. This ends the year-long delay caused by oversubscription for tax-exempt bond closings, which caused many projects including this one to delay construction loan closings for one year.
- e. **West Newton Family Navigation Center (Family Aid project)**. (42 transitional housing units for families in crisis, in former nursing home at 1650 Washington St.)
 - (1) Shaylyn reported that closing is underway; Family Aid Center is being assisted by non-profit developer Planning Office for Urban Affairs; Barney indicated demolition has begun ahead of closing.
 - (2) Marva asked about plans for welcoming these families, and Ann noted that recent conversations she has had with Family Aid Director Larry Seamans indicated that the opening will be modest in the interests of the new residents.
- f. **136 Hancock St and 169 Grove St (City Project)**. (Proposal to build up to an informally estimated 5-11 affordable rental units within three single-family homes, on part of site of former conference center.)
 - (1) Shaylyn reported that this site, consisting of two non-contiguous parcels (separated by a separate 10,000sf parcel retained by the City for future educational use for the neighboring Williams School), was determined by the Council's Real Property ReUse Committee, at its last meeting on June 12, to be made available for sale or lease through the formation of a 9-member citizens' Joint Advisory Planning Group (JAPG), of whom five are appointed by the Chair of the City Council and four by the Mayor.
- g. **144 Hancock Street (Civico Project)**. (Proposed 16-unit mixed-income condominium development, including 2 inclusionary zoning units at 80% AMI; combination of new construction and adaptive reuse of conference center buildings.)
 - (1) Shaylyn noted that the developer, who'd obtained a Special Permit for the project with two IZ units but then returned to request a waiver of the onsite unit requirement, has withdrawn the waiver request and is proceeding under the Special Permit on two fronts: (1) with the City Building Department and Planning to determine if its newly revised plans represent a substantial or insubstantial change from the project as approved under the Special Permit (a substantial change would require a new approval through the Land Use Committee by the City Council), and (2) with the Planning Department to ensure compliance with the IZ bylaw.
- h. **Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance Update.**

- (1) Shaylyn explained that the IZ Ordinance requires a review every five years, and that the City is to be signing a contract soon with RKG Associates, a planning consulting firm, and that RKG would be seeking input on the IZ ordinance from several sources in the City including the NHP.
- (2) In response to a query from David, Barney indicated that the Planning staff would welcome input from NHP Board members.
- (3) Marva noted that NHP has expressed concerns about the IZ ordinance over the past year, and asked for a volunteer to research NHP minutes to retrieve what our concerns have been. **David offered to do this research.**
- (4) Marva noted that the ordinance doesn't fit assisted living projects well.
- (5) Marva wondered about getting resident services provisions added into the IZ ordinance, which generated an extensive discussion.
 - Ann suggested the resident services issue applies to more than IZ projects, but to 40B and other projects as well.
 - Nicole suggested seeking advice on the subject from EMPATH.
 - Marva noted that many developers do provide resident services, which Ann confirmed, and **Marva asked staff to identify developers whom NHP can consult. Shaylyn said she can do that.**
 - Marva also wondered about getting input from residents on the subject and asked Josephine about reaching out to residents.
 - Josephine said her organization U-CHAN (United Citizens for Housing Affordability in Newton) is currently working on getting this input, partly in the context of the Housing Priorities Task Force policy activities, and added that renters lack a voice in housing policy discussions in Newton.
 - Ann added that she can get advice also from The Neighborhood Developers, a Chelsea-based non-profit housing developer of which she formerly was ExDir.
 - Nicole added that she was at one time a resident services coordinator for the housing developers Trinity Financial and Madison Park Development Corporation.
 - Marva asked Lara if she could get feedback from Newton Thrives clients, and Lara said she could. Ann suggested preparing a consistent set of questions for consistency of data, and Josephine cautioned about making the data collection process too prescriptive.

9. Upcoming Meetings

- a. Next meeting: July 23, 2024, 5-7pm via Zoom
- b. Cancel August meeting: David asked that we not decide to cancel this meeting until we know our agenda more clearly after the July meeting. **The members agreed.**

Meeting concluded at 7:15pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

David Rockwell
6/28/24