



Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

Barney Heath
Director
Planning & Development

Gabriel Holbrow
Community Planner
Engagement Specialist
Planning & Development

Members

Peter Doeringer, Chair
Kelley Brown, Member
Sudha Maheshwari, Member
Jennifer Molinsky, Member
Sonia Parisca, Vice Chair
Chris Steele, Member
Barney Heath, *ex officio*
Kevin McCormick, Alternate
James Robertson, Alternate

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PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEETING MINUTES

February 3, 2020

Full Members Present:

Peter Doeringer, Chair
Sonia Parisca, Vice Chair
Kelley Brown, Member
Sudha Maheshwari, Member
Jennifer Molinsky, Member
Chris Steele, Member
Barney Heath, Ex-Officio

Alternate Members Present:

Kevin McCormick, Alternate
James Robertson, Alternate

Staff Present:

Eamon Bencivengo, Housing Development Planner
Amanda Berman, Director of Housing and Community Development
Gabriel Holbrow, Community Planner – Engagement Specialist, staff to the Board
Tiffany Leung, Community Development Planner
Malcolm Lucas, Housing Planner

Others Present:

Gwyneth Burns, Rob Caruso, Jini Fairley, Kathy Laufer, Josephine McNeil,
Girard A. Plante

Meeting held in Room 204, Newton City Hall

Chair Doeringer opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. Consideration of the minutes from January 6, 2020 was postponed.

1. Consolidated Plan and Citizen Participation Plan Public Hearing

Chair Doeringer opened the public hearing by asking Director Heath to introduce the staff members present. Director Heath introduced Mr. Bencivengo, Ms. Berman, Ms. Leung, and Mr. Lucas, who gave a brief presentation of the proposed five-year Consolidated Plan. The plan covers FY21-FY25 and outlines goals for the use of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME), and Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funds. Staff presented on the citizen participation process for the plan as well as the five goals addressed by the Consolidated Plan: affordable housing, fair housing, human services, supportive services for homeless and at-risk for homelessness, and architectural access.

Board members had a discussion with staff about the Consolidated Plan. Ms. Molinsky asked how the needs identified in this Consolidated Plan compare to the last five-year plan. Ms. Berman replied that Newton and the other cities and towns across the HOME consortium experience persistent and growing needs; this plan is not too dissimilar to the previous plan. Chair Doeringer asked how staff reached out to difficult-to-reach populations when developing the needs assessment, particularly

non-English speakers, people with disabilities, and older residents with limited ability to leave home. Ms. Berman replied that this is where City staff rely on direct service providers and qualitative data to understand the needs. In response to a question from Ms. Maheshwari about the relationship between the affordable housing needs identified in the Consolidated Plan and the 10% affordability threshold in state law chapter 40B for comprehensive permits, Ms. Berman emphasized that the local need for affordable housing is greater than 10%. Ms. Molinsky asked how certain national housing needs are addressed in the Consolidated Plan, specifically fairness in the housing search process, an increase in the proportion of older homeless individuals with geriatric health issues, and home retrofits for access and visitability. Ms. Berman explained that the Fair Housing Committee intends to work more on addressing fairness in housing search, that the aging homeless population is identified as a growing need, and that the housing rehab program can help with home retrofits. Ms. Molinsky suggested that requiring or encouraging visitability could be addressed in the City's Zoning Redesign. As one measure of the need for affordable housing, Ms. Berman noted that the typical time on the waitlist for family housing in Newton Housing Authority units is about 10 years.

Chair Doeringer invited members of the public to speak. Mr. Plante, a member of the City of Newton Commission on Disability and the Boston Center for Independent Living, emphasized that there is a great and growing need for affordable accessible housing for people with physical disabilities to live in the community. Mr. Plante asked about the status of the West Newton Armory as a potential site for affordable housing. Director Heath explained that the City has convened a Joint Advisory Planning Group (JAPG) to evaluate options for the West Newton Armory; the JAPG is currently pursuing a \$200,000 Housing Choice Grant to evaluate the feasibility of using the armory for affordable housing. Mr. Plante asked what the City is doing to keep pace with the need to construct affordable accessible housing, and has the City gone to state legislators in the hope that they can help the various communities in the consortium. Ms. Berman replied that the Consolidated Plan prioritizes deep levels of affordability and accessibility for that housing, but federal dollars are not enough to keep pace; we need to look at land use policies and other policies at the local and state level. Ms. Berman explained that for state legislators, the data and needs assessments in the Consolidated Plan are critical for highlighting the need for affordable accessible housing.

Mr. Caruso, a member of the City of Newton Commission on Disability, asked about the status of the City's Zoning Redesign. Director Heath explained that Zoning Redesign has been reintroduced to City Council and its Zoning and Planning Committee, where they are currently discussing a schedule and the best way to achieve adoption.

Ms. Fairley, ADA Coordinator for the City of Newton, highlighted some of the recent successes related to CDBG funds for accessibility, including making a fully accessible restroom on the first floor of City Hall, and installing more accessible pedestrian signals every year. Ms. Fairley emphasized the importance of CDBG for architectural accessibility, even though federal funds are only one of many funding sources, because of how the collaborative work with the Commission on Disability and many departments informs the projects. She mentioned that going forward the City has a policy to provide accessible features at all new signalized intersections.

Ms. McNeil, a member of the City of Newton Fair Housing Committee, emphasized that CDBG, HOME, and Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds are the only funds in Newton dedicated to housing for low, very low, and extremely low-income people (with household incomes below 50% of Area Median Income). Ms. McNeil provided a copy of a survey of people in these low-income categories that she helped to conduct. The survey highlighted that City meetings are often held at inconvenient times for low-income households, especially families such as single mothers. The survey also identified needs that are not included in the plan, such as a need for job search assistance. She asked that the survey be included as a comment to the Consolidated Plan. Chair

Doeringer received the copy of the survey to enter it into the record of the public hearing. Ms. McNeil asked what “diversity” means in the staff presentation. Mr. Lucas replied that “diversity” means everybody should be included, all the legally protected classes. Director Heath added that diversity includes socioeconomic, racial, age, and ability diversity; and in terms of diversity of housing units, diversity includes number of bedrooms, accessibility, size, price, etc. Ms. McNeil commented that the Consolidated Plan should emphasize the needs of low-income and below, since the City is already addressing the needs of moderate-income in other ways, such as through inclusionary zoning. Ms. McNeil stated that there is no longer a Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) in Newton that is solely focused on using HOME funds to create affordable housing in Newton. Ms. McNeil requested that a copy of the draft Consolidated Plan be made available at the library. Director Heath replied that staff would definitely do that.

Mr. Brown commented that the City has a moral and legal obligation to provide accessible infrastructure and should not be solely relying on federal funds for architectural access. Ms. Plante and Ms. Fairley responded that the City has contributed its own funds toward accessibility improvement projects, including fully funding some projects such as the War Memorial Building accessibility plan under Mayor Warren. In addition, Ms. Fairley noted that existing infrastructure is not legally required to be made accessible until it is modified or replaced.

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Ms. Molinsky and unanimously approved, the Board closed the public hearing at 8:06 p.m.

Ms. Berman reminded the Board that staff is seeking volunteers from the Board to review grant applications to the City’s ESG and Human Services programs. Ms. Berman noted that Chair Doeringer and Ms. Molinsky have volunteered to review Human Services grant applications, and Mr. Steele has volunteered to review ESG applications. Ms. Maheshwari volunteered to join Mr. Steele in reviewing the ESG applications.

2. Proposed West Newton Landmarks Comment

In January, a City Councilor nominated seven properties in West Newton for local landmark designation. Director Heath explained that this issue is on the Board’s agenda because according to the City’s current Historical Ordinance, section 22-63 requires the Newton Historical Commission, prior to holding a public hearing on landmark designation, to “transmit copies of the agenda to the planning board for its consideration and recommendation.” Director Heath provided a brief background on the seven nominated properties. The Board discussed these nominations, the landmarking process, the significance of landmark status, and the Board’s role in the process. Board members noted that a group of City Councilors and staff is working on updating and amending the Historical Ordinance, and that the City Council is considering a suspension on landmark nominations while the group is working. A landmarking suspension, if passed by City Council, could affect these seven nominations in West Newton.

Board members agreed that they would need more information on these properties in order to make an informed recommendation. Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Vice Chair Parisca, the Board voted 6-0-1 (Director Heath abstaining) to hold this item and to ask Director Heath to invite Katy Hax Holmes, Chief Preservation Planner, to present information on the nominations at the Board’s next regularly scheduled meeting on March 2.

3. Newton Housing Authority Proposal Update

Director Heath distributed a packet containing a memo and supporting materials related to the Newton Housing Authority’s proposal to use CDBG and Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds to support the acquisition and preservation of the CAN-DO portfolio of 33 affordable housing units.

The Board will be holding a joint public hearing with the Community Preservation Committee on the proposal on February 11 at the Newton Senior Center.

4. Zoning Ordinance Brief

Mr. Holbrow provided a brief update on the Zoning Redesign effort. The effort was put on hold in spring 2019 but started up again in January 2020 with meetings before the Zoning and Planning (ZAP) Committee of City Council. The Planning Department is currently discussing the process with ZAP, recommending an Article-by-Article approach toward full adoption by December 2021. The Planning Department would like to devote time to discuss Zoning Redesign at every Board meeting going forward, including holding workshops with the Board to address key issues along the way.

Board members expressed an interest in the Board taking an active role with ZAP in addressing Zoning Redesign, including joining in joint workshops where members of the Board and ZAP Councilors could participate together.

Ms. Molinsky commented that there are a lot of needs in the City that Zoning Redesign can address. She noted that Community Development and Long Range Planning seem separate; there is a need to integrate those conversations. Zoning Redesign may be a way to introduce more housing density in some areas to address housing needs.

Mr. Steele and Chair Doeringer cautioned that it may be a challenge to decide where to draw boundaries that define the context for context-based zoning.

5. Planning Department Updates

Director Heath noted that the Riverside project returns to the Land Use Committee of City Council on February 4. The Riverdale 40B project has a public hearing at the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) on February 5. The Dunstan East 40B project will return to the ZBA in March.

Director Heath stated that Lara Kritzer will be joining the staff as the CPA Program Manager, taking over from Alice Ingerson. Chair Doeringer asked Director Heath to invite Devra Bailin, the new Director of Economic Development, to a Board meeting for an introduction.

6. Adjournment

Upon a motion by Ms. Molinsky, seconded by Ms. Maheshwari and unanimously approved, the meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Gabriel Holbrow, staff to the Board. Minutes approved by the Board on March 2, 2020.

Attachment:

- A. Presentation from staff on the FY21-FY25 Consolidated Plan and Citizen Participation Plan