

# PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD

## MEETING MINUTES

March 11, 2019



Ruthanne Fuller  
Mayor

Barney Heath  
Director  
Planning & Development

Rachel Powers  
CD & HOME  
Program Manager  
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

1000 Commonwealth Ave.  
Newton, MA 02459  
T 617/796-1120  
F 617/796-1142

### Full Members Present:

Peter Doeringer, Chair  
Kelley Brown, Member  
Sonia Parisca, Vice Chair  
Barney Heath, *ex officio*  
James Robertson, Alternate  
Kevin McCormick, Alternate

### Staff Present:

Rachel Powers, Community Development & HOME Program Manager  
Amanda Berman, Director of Housing and Community Development  
Eamon Bencivengo, Housing Development Specialist  
Malcolm Lucas, Housing Planner  
Tiffany Leung, Community Development Planner

### 1. Minutes from the Planning and Development Board Meeting held on March 11, 2019

#### 2. Presentation/Vote: FY20 Annual Action Plan

#### 3. Northland Discussion

#### 1. Action Item: Approval of Minutes of March 11, 2019 meeting

Chair Doeringer opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m. The motion was made by Vice Chair Parisca and Mr. McCormick and passed unanimously 5-0-0, to approve the minutes of March 11, 2019, as amended by Chair Doeringer.

#### 2. Presentation/Vote:

##### a. FY20 Annual Action Plan

Dir. Heath opened the presentation of the FY20 Draft Annual Action Plan, introducing members of the Housing and Community Development Division. He noted that the plan is based on estimates, as the City still awaits HUD's notification of FY20 awards. Division Staff, including Amanda Berman, Rachel Powers, Malcolm Lucas, Eamon Bencivengo and Tiffany Leung presented and discussed proposed activities, goals and outcomes to be undertaken by the Housing and Community Development Division during the July 1, 2019-June 30, 2020 program year. The City is currently expecting to receive \$1.9M in CDBG, \$1.437M in HOME and \$161,000 in ESG. The draft plan is available online on the City website. The public comment period officially begins this evening, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, and will conclude on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Submission is anticipated within 60 days of HUD's official award notification.

Chair Doeringer thanked the Division for their thorough presentation and opened the forum for public comment and questions.

Vice Chair Parisca inquired if Newton has quantified the need for affordable housing and/or WestMetro HOME Consortium. Division staff and attendees indicated that affordable housing needs are outlined in the Consolidated Plan; further, each year's

Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) describes the Division's progress in meeting the goals set forth in the Consolidated Plan. A 5-yr analysis will be conducted as the Division's close out their fifth-year CAPER. The 2016 Housing Strategy is another indicator of affordable housing need.

Mr. Robertson wondered if the 20% set-aside for Program Administration was typical. Staff indicated that 20% was the standard and max for this line item.

#### Public Comments

*Dan Kunitz, Cousens Fund-* Mr. Kunitz, a trustee of the Cousens Fund, recognized the complexity of the Annual Action Planning process. He further noted that the Cousens Fund was allocated \$12,000, up from \$10,000 the previous year and wondered about the evaluation process by which awards were decided.

Ms. Powers and participants provided an overview of the Human Service subcommittee process, which evaluates each application against criteria outlined in the Brookings Institute's Benchmarks for Success. Further, it was stressed that requests always exceed available resources. The subcommittee will try to reward high performers and those programs most aligned with Newton goals through allocations of level funding when possible. Factors such as the number of residents served, and timeliness of grant expenditures are all considered.

*Kathy Laufer, Cousens Fund-* Ms. Laufer is grateful for the additional award and provided an explanation of how these funds will assist 3 additional individuals. She spent 100% of FY19 funding during the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter and has seen an uptick in applications. She outlined data quantifying the need for access to emergency assistance, driving home the point that the Cousens Fund is truly assisting individuals who are struggling to stay in Newton. Funds awarded are directly allocated to helping residents stay sheltered, safe and warm.

*Josephine McNeil, U-CHAN* – Ms. McNeil was impressed with the presentation. She spoke to the substantiation of housing needs and pointed to the 2016 Housing Strategy. The Consolidated Plan is outdated, and substantial amendments are necessary in order to remain current to truly capture income inequality and need. She spoke to the lack of housing being produced. No one is providing housing for households earning under 50% AMI, the population this funding is intended to assist. She urged the City to focus funds toward housing extremely low-income individuals and families. We need to impact those not being assisted by the developers. Further, she believes accessibility or curb cut improvements should be paid for out of general funds, not federal funds. Ms. McNeil also inquired as to whether the loss of a Newton CHDO would eliminate HOME funding.

Staff expressed the desire to continue to work with the remaining WestMetro HOME Consortium CHDO's and explained that the CHDO set-aside funding can support eligible projects located throughout all Consortium communities. Further, staff attempts to target federal dollars to assisting the lowest income spectrum and highlighted several ongoing projects. Vice Chair Parisca echoed the importance of what Ms. McNeil was speaking to and assisting those at the lowest end of the spectrum. Dir. Berman also noted that it takes time for an affordable housing project to become fundable and highlighted the many visioning processes that are currently ongoing. The City is consistently building upon existing partnerships and leveraging federal resources.

Mr. Brown wondered why Newton's TBRA program ended, while Waltham's program has seen success. Division staff spoke to implementation challenges, which included the program design and marketing becoming defunct following the closure of the State's Motel Voucher Program for the homeless and the difficulty Newton TBRA participants experienced identifying housing in the community. Two Newton participants moved to Waltham during their tenure in the program. Staff is deeply interested in continuing dialogue and evaluating the feasibility of this program in the future.

*Jayne Colino, Newton Senior Center-* Ms. Colino is thankful for continued support of the Newton Senior Fitness Program, which assists individuals to age-in-place. CDBG and Newton contributions to support efforts to make Newton an age-friendly community. The Center collaborates with provides like the Cousens Fund, 2Life Communities, Riverside Community Care, and NCDF to help residents.

*Sara Bellemore, EMPATH-* Ms. Bellemore expressed her gratitude for continued CDBG funding to support their work with low-income families. She spoke to their support of 8 NHA residents as part of Newton's CFO program. They work with individuals and families over a five-year timespan. The extra support has benefited clients. She shared the success of current client in overcoming crisis and the impact of the CFO program in assisting. Ms. Bellemore welcomed questions and feedback.

*India Arnold, Newton Community Development Foundation (NCDF)-* Ms. Arnold is the Youth Program & Resident Service Coordinator with NCDF. She thanked staff for continued CDBG assistance and described the impact those funds make. She grew up in the NCDF community, went to school and came back to support NCDF efforts. CDBG provided kids an opportunity to participate in extracurriculars they otherwise would not have had the ability to participate in. The impacts have been amazing to see in a family, mixed-income setting. She spoke to the resources and partnerships NCDF leverages. Ms. Arnold also noted the benefit of their senior programming in helping residents age-in-place and remain engaged.

The Planning and Development Board thanked the community for their support, partnership and coming out to the presentation of the FY20 Annual Action Plan.

Upon a motion to close by Mr. McCormick, seconded by Vice Chair Parisca, and passed 6-0-0, the public hearing was closed.

Mr. Brown asked if the funds allocated to Neighborhood Improvements and Architectural Access could be reallocated to other priorities. He wants to ensure that we're addressing the greatest needs. Ms. Powers explained that the project presented is an older project from previously allocated funds. The Housing and Community Development Division does prioritize affordable housing, and while the City is beholden to accessibility requirements, CDBG enables the acceleration of accessibility improvements. Chair Doeringer also noted that there are not a lot of opportunities to spend funding on infrastructure; CDBG provides another outlet.

Mr. McCormick asked how the WestMetro HOME Consortium worked and funds allocated. Ms. Powers described HUD's distribution of funds and the 12-month exclusive-use period allowed to each member community. Any remaining, uncommitted funds are consolidated into a competitive pool to be used for any eligible project within the 13-Consortium communities. Dir. Heath spoke to the regional benefits of the Consortium.

Mr. Robertson asked if federal funds could be used to buy down units in projects like Northland to expand affordability for lower-income households? This could present additional compliance requirements. Mr. Brown also spoke to difficulties in housing voucher holders.

Upon a motion by Chair Doeringer, seconded by Mr. Brown, and passed 5-0-1, with Director Heath abstaining, the Board voted to adopt the FY20 Annual Action Plan as presented, within a 25% contingency based on HUD's notification of allocations.

### 3. Northland Continuation

Chair Doeringer introduced discussion of Northland, expressing his interest in the Board's perspectives and ongoing questions relative to the zoning change. This conversation is critical to the Board's final recommendations.

Vice Chair Parisca referred to the huge effort made by the City to develop the Needham Street Vision Plan, explaining that she does not see a full integration of both processes. The plans seem to be in competition. **The Board would like to see a better system of open spaces, that integrates Needham Street.** The Northland design is insular and inward facing, and really omits the Needham Street perspective. Retailers have difficulty being open on both sides and would generally open to the side facing parking. The newer Nexus development on Needham Street was cited as an example of being inviting to pedestrians; it is unclear if Northland will do this. **Is it possible for the Northland design to be opened up to Needham Street? Can the Board see additional design perspectives?** If the Board is faced with the prospect of 800 more units, they would like to ensure these design questions are addressed. That said, Mr. Brown was impressed with Northland's second pass and how the design evolved.

Conversation shifted to parking, which the Board believes **parking belongs underground.** It's a massive amount of open space (22.2 acres). Mr. Robertson conveyed complaints overheard that related to the number of units, but not heights. Shadows don't appear to be a large concern and height has been scaled down. Besides Oak Street, there are not many residential neighbors. **Complaints have been noted along the Oak Street side about entrance and could be an issue from a traffic perspective if it is closed off.**

Mr. McCormick expressed concerned about the transportation issues. **Northland needs to reconfigure proposed transportation proposals to reduce routes and increase efficiency.** Dir. Heath indicated that Planning has spent time considering the issue behind the number of shuttle trips. Northland believes they that can ensure that 30% of trips are by means other than vehicles; but this will be extremely challenging. By the second year, Northland would need to comply with Planning recommendations to reduce the number of trips, otherwise they would need to amend their Special Permit. Giving tenants a T-pass has been suggested as an alternative to shuttle service.

Vice Chair Parisca inquired about an ongoing MassDOT Transportation Plan; there is currently a plan in place that will involve road improvements on Christina Street in Newton and addition of a bike path. This will be helpful but is not anticipated to reduce traffic volume. As part of the Northland project, the City will request upwards of \$4M in mitigation funds to accomplish a variety of projects within the area to address infrastructure needs.

The Board recognized that the real complaints are related to traffic and the number of units, but there are many complicated trade-offs. Chair Doeringer liked the Transportation Plan as an experiment, emphasizing its agility and flexibility to make adjustments through various means, such as surveying people. But he disliked that nothing runs often enough. Upon reviewing and comparing the proposed trips to existing vehicle trips, there is a tiny peak period (morning and evening) with a gain of about 120 trips. This is not a major concern and should ease neighbors' worries, however the City may want to increase its request of mitigation funds.

Members of the Board thought that the proponents may want to consider going to each councilor for feedback with a willingness to improve parks and islands. The Planning team have been really focused on reducing vehicle trips; failure to do this may prompt an amendment to the Special Permit and substantial penalty fees. Mr. Brown noted the trickiness of obtaining residential metrics. Northland would be responsible for funding surveys and peer reviews. Vice Chair Parisca was interested in the concept of a trolley being part of the equation. Several members shared concerns whether there was

enough room to implement this. The Greenway is little over a mile. Planning requested funding to support a study of increased transportation options.

Mr. McCormick would like to see more affordable housing in the proposal. Northland has made a big deal about the proposed number of new affordable units to be added, but the planned set-aside is exactly compliant with the existing ordinance. If the proposed Inclusionary Zoning ordinance was enacted before Northland received their permit, they would be subject to the increased level of affordability. Mr. Robertson would like to defer to the proponents on the proposed split of commercial and residential. It was noted that the Washington Place development exceeded the Inclusionary Zoning threshold, and the Austin Street development saw an increased percentage of 33% of affordable units. **The Board believes there's room to increase the public benefit.**

There has been a reduction in proposed retail, which was a market driven decision based on consultant feedback. Northland reduced parking and reconfigured buildings, which ultimately present a better configuration. Costs associated with criteria required of buildings exceeding 70 feet must be considered. Buildings will be approximately 100 feet.

There was disappointment in Northland's sustainability plans, as they only seek to achieve silver-level LEED Certification. **The project should involve green roofs, and solar and/or wind energy; it doesn't need to be net zero but should be as sustainable as possible.** Improved sustainability would increase the return on cash flow. **The Board may want to prioritize sustainability and transportation.** Vice Chair Parisca believes transportation to be the most important issue.

**It was recommended that permit penalties could be earmarked for neighborhood improvements in the event of increased traffic. There should also be a bullet-proof permit parking plan, especially for spill over parking.** Mr. Brown asked how common permit parking was in Newton, but there is difficulty in enforcing this. Overnight parking is the easiest to enforce. Mr. Robertson noted that the most successful commercial areas are those with parking in the middle; many do not like structured parking. Structured parking could be tougher for retail versus residential. Conversation shifted to concerns regarding the low projection of parking spots as many couples may have more than a single car. But at 1,550, down from 1,884 spaces, there may be enough shared-parking to provide up to 2 spaces per unit. Parking will be charged for separately, so that may dis-incentivize parking. It is uncertain whether there can continue to be a further reduction in parking.

Chair Doeringer asked if other projects in the pipeline would emulate the Northland Process and if it will set the norm in terms of scale, level of scrutiny and quality. Dir. Heath believed that this has set the standard in terms of review. It will either be held up as an example of what to do versus what not to do. The Board recommended dedicating time at each regular meeting to discuss Northland and its complexities. Mr. Brown would like to begin drafting a letter to influence voting and recommendations. Chair Doeringer would like to establish the same partnership with LUC as the Board has with ZAP. It was clarified that the Board's role in this project was related to specifically, not the special permit. As a project dedicated zoning change, the Board feels that they should have a voice related to special permit related conditions; perhaps this is addressed through a vote with conditions. The Board liked idea of prioritizing conditions. It might be beneficial to begin communicating with LUC. The Board invite the proponents and directly address concerns related to the project. Staff are recommending the summer to deliberate, with a potential vote in the fall. Northland would prefer a June vote, but this is not likely.

#### **4. Action Item: Adjournment**

Upon a motion by Mr. Robertson and seconded by Mr. McCormick, and unanimously passed 6-0-0, the meeting was adjourned at 9:45 p.m.