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**Community Preservation Committee**

MINUTES

28 November 2017

The meeting was held on Tuesday, 28 November 2017 starting at 7:00 pm in Newton City Hall Room 204.

Community Preservation Committee (CPC below) members present: chair Jonathan Yeo, members Mark Armstrong, Dan Brody, Richard Kronish, Susan Lunin, and Beryl Gilfix (arr. 7:15 pm). Vice chair Peter Sargent was absent. Appointments are currently in progress for two vacation positions: by the Mayor for outdoor recreation and by the Parks & Recreation Commission.

Community Preservation Program Manager Alice Ingerson served as recorder.

[Blue, underlined phrases](#) below are links to additional information online.

**PROPOSALS & PROJECTS**

[Crescent Street](#) (Auburndale, affordable housing & playground) – update on design & feasibility, request to submit off-cycle proposal for \$2,575,000 in additional CPA funding for final design & construction

Councilor Leonard Gentile introduced the update. He chairs the Crescent Street working group that has been directing the work of the staff and consultants on this project. The goal of tonight's presentation was to explain briefly the work that has been done since the group last met with the CPC, and to ask the CPC to agree to consider an off-cycle full proposal for additional CPA funding for final design and construction.

The project includes 8 units of housing, 4 of which would be affordable at income levels that make them eligible for CPA funding. When the original estimated cost of the housing was \$4 million, the project team had hoped that CPA funds would cover \$2 million. However, the group heard in its initial discussions with the CPC that a CPA subsidy of \$500,000 per unit was too high. In response, the anticipated CPA housing request has been reduced to \$350,000 per unit, for a total \$1.4 million. The anticipated CPA request for the park remains at \$1.3 million.

The original project plan included two units each with 1 and 3 bedrooms, plus four 2-bedroom units. The bedroom count has now increased to four units with 2 bedrooms and four with 3 bedrooms. Also in its initial discussions with the CPC, the working group heard that the CPC wanted as much affordability as possible. The original plan with 4 market-rate units and 4 units affordable to households at 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) was revised to one 2-bedroom and one 3-bedroom unit in each of the following categories: affordable to households at 60% AMI, at 80% AMI, at 120% AMI (known as “workforce housing”), and market-rate (no income limits).

All units would be adaptable and visitable for persons with limited mobility, with wheelchair-usable doorways and stud spacing to support grab bars. One unit would be finished as fully accessible, with a roll-in shower, roll-under sinks, and other required features. All first-floor entrances would be directly accessible for wheelchairs. The working group has also endorsed adding an elevator to make the second-floor units accessible, so this

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City-developed project would be 100 percent visitable and adaptable for wheelchair users. The total cost of the elevator was estimated at \$470,000. The working group hoped the CPA share of this cost would be \$235,000, as an addition to the anticipated \$1.4 million for housing.

The expanded Reverend Ford Playground would be accessible from Crescent Street, via a main path south of the housing, from Auburn Street via a new path along the east side of the Eversource site, and from Curve Street via a pedestrian-designated route through the northeast portion of the Myrtle Baptist Church parking lot. Eversource has made a verbal commitment to the access path over their property, and the Newton Law Dept. is working with them on a license agreement to formalize this access. Public Buildings Commissioner Joshua Morse said indemnification was one of the remaining issues for that agreement.

The working group has been exploring ways to create an additional vehicular exit from the Myrtle Baptist Church parking lot, as well as a pedestrian access route to the playground from Curve Street that would not require pedestrians and vehicles to continue sharing the Church's only existing driveway, which is exactly one car wide. Two properties on Curve Street that have recently come up for sale might help with this. The current site plans also show a possible vehicular gate that would allow vehicles to leave the church parking lot via the driveway and parking area north of the new housing on special occasions, if safety can be ensured. The overall boundary between the parking lot and the park would have new plantings but would not be fenced.

Gentile said the project's total new CPA request would be \$2,575,000 [staff note: this amount was corrected following the meeting]. If this new request is funded, the project's total CPA funding would be \$2,935,000, including the \$360,000 already appropriated: \$100,000 for site assessment and \$260,000 for design and feasibility. If the CPC agreed to consider an off-cycle full proposal, that proposal would include the updated project numbers that were not available for tonight's meeting. Jonathan Yeo was pleased that project costs being cited tonight appeared to be lower than those in the written submission provided when this discussion was originally scheduled for November 16, but he noted that it might be challenging for the CPC to make decisions tonight without the new numbers in front of them.

David Eisen of Abacus Architects presented a [series of slides illustrating the overall site plan](#), the basic layout of the playground and park, the floor plan, elevations and some interior views of the housing. These images were updated slightly from those submitted in advance for the originally scheduled November 16 meeting.

Moving from north to south, the site plan showed: plantings and bioswales for stormwater management partly on the land owned by the Turnpike Authority; a driveway and parking for the housing; the apartment building itself; and outdoor spaces for the apartment residents, separated by a fence and additional bioswales from the expanded playground and park. Looking north from the park, all parking for the apartment building would be out of view, tucked behind the building itself.

The apartment building roof included some pop-ups to provide relief from the flat roof and to allow additional light into the interior of the building. All mechanical equipment was on one side of the roof, to allow for solar panel installation. The solar panels were not currently included in the project budgets because the project team anticipated these would be installed by a third party. However, the team believed the project could reach "net zero energy," by producing as much electricity as it used. The building would have heat pumps.

A major design goal for the housing was to achieve the economies of scale of an apartment building, while providing many of the amenities enjoyed by the residents of single-family homes. All first-floor units were shown with outdoor terraces, and all second-floor units with balconies. All units had allocated garden space, and a stair directly to grade, providing access to the garden areas and serving as a second means of egress.

In response to Rick Kronish, Eisen said the 2-bedroom units had about 1,000 square feet and the 3-bedroom units about 1,250 square feet. The apartments might get a little bigger or smaller as design work proceeded. In response to a question from Alice Ingerson, Yeo and Mark Armstrong noted that the previously submitted information showed all 60% and 80% AMI units on the first floor, and all higher-income units on the second floor. Public Buildings Commissioner Joshua Morse confirmed that income levels would in fact be distributed

randomly between the building's two floors. Eisen emphasized that there would be no differences in square footage and finishes among the units at the different income levels.

All units were designed to face south, to maximize sunlight and views of the park. All units would have small, probably non-operable windows in their kitchens, bathrooms, and other low-use areas on the north side, to minimize noise from the Turnpike. There would be more generous windows in the dining, living and bedrooms on the south side, from which light should reach well back into each unit. Residents should not have to turn their lights on in any room in the middle of the day.

Morse noted that the Board of Aldermen order guiding the reuse of this public property required adding at least 20,000 square feet to the park/playground. Eisen estimated that the current plan added about 21,000 square feet to the playground, on the southern side of the area previously used for Parks & Recreation Department equipment and vehicles.

In conclusion, Councilor Gentile thanked the CPC for setting up this special additional meeting so both he and the City's Chief of Staff and Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux could attend, in lieu of the originally scheduled November 16 discussion they could not have attended.

#### CPC COMMENTS & QUESTIONS

Armstrong commented that the project had been improved through the design review process. He felt the current site plan, including the building orientation and parking, made sense. He was glad to see that the boundary between the abutting Myrtle Baptist Church parking lot and the public site had been clarified. Though he knew that additional design decisions remain to be made, he felt the conceptual design as presented looked out of context with the surrounding neighborhood. He hoped the design team would look for ways to establish connections with the project's surroundings through detailing, scale, or in other ways, to help the residents of this development feel they are part of the neighborhood.

In response to Dan Brody, Eisen explained that the land between the Turnpike sound wall and the apartment parking lot would include planted depressions, also known as bioswales or rain gardens, to filter stormwater sheeting from the parking lot as it percolates back into the ground. The Turnpike Authority would allow this feature to be installed on their property. The existing trees along the sound wall might need to be replaced.

In response to Kronish, Eisen and Planning and Development Director Barney Heath explained that the current construction budget was based on estimates from Tim Brown of North Bay Construction Consultants, a professional cost estimator. The project must be publicly bid and must pay prevailing wages. Gentile, Heath and Housing Development Planner Amanda Berman explained that the City would also be issuing a competitive Request for Proposals from property managers on December 7.

Kronish asked how the proposed division of funding between CPA and non-CPA City funding had been arrived at. Gentile reiterated that the working group had reduced the anticipated CPA share of housing costs from the originally proposed 50% of the total, in response to earlier feedback from the CPC, but hoped the CPC would recommend funding for 50% of the elevator costs, or \$235,000. Ingerson noted that this proportion of CPA funding for the elevator would be the same as the 50% proportion of the project's total 8 housing units that would be CPA-eligible.

Gentile acknowledged that the project's projected construction cost had increased since previous discussions with the CPC, partly because, though the number of units had remained the same, the number of bedrooms had increased. In combination with the reduced total CPA request for the housing, this meant that the City would need to commit more City non-CPA funds than had been shown in previous funding source summaries. Gentile and Lemieux said the City planned to bond \$2.2 million for project costs not covered by CPA funding. Planning and Development Director Barney Heath said the current budget also anticipated approximately \$1.2 million of City non-CPA funding from sources other than bonding.

In response to questions from Beryl Gilfix and Brody, Newton ADA coordinator Jini Fairly listed four accessibility standards the project must meet as a City-owned building, including but not limited to those of

the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board and the Americans with Disabilities Act. She clarified that one of the housing units would be finished as fully accessible, with grab bars, low counters, a roll-in shower, etc., but all units would have the required door widths and clearances, close stud spacing for grab bars, and other features required to accommodate visiting wheelchair users, and to allow future remodeling to accommodate residents with limited mobility. Susan Lunin said though none of initial applicants for these apartments might need full accessibility, having a single fully accessible unit and the ability to make other units fully accessible later at minimal cost seemed to make sense. Ingerson explained that the CPC's housing proposal requirements including submitting the project owner's reasonable accommodation/reasonable modification policy, with including procedures for submitting modification requests and for appealing any requests initially denied.

In response to Armstrong, Fairley said the proposed elevator is not required by law, but the working group felt strongly that this City-built and -owned building should be a model of accessibility for the elevator-served, small-scale residential developments the City would like more private developers to build.

In response to Yeo, Eisen said the design for the expanded playground and park had been a collaborative effort by the project team, the working group, and residents who commented on design ideas at community meetings. The overall goal was to make the park as green and open as possible. Morse said the pathways would be permeable. The perimeter path would be exactly 1/8 mile, for walkers or riders who wish to measure distances. The exercise stations would be designed for seniors but would also be usable by others. The play equipment at the southern side of the park would be much like the equipment being installed at Newton's new elementary schools. There would be new plantings and trees. Carol Schein of the Parks & Recreation Department was also at the meeting to answer any other questions about the park.

Also in response to Yeo, Morse and Gentile said the City would build the stone dust public access pathway from Auburn Street, shown along the east side of the Eversource power substation in the site plan images. Yeo thought this additional access would make the park more visible and increase its use.

Kronish felt that if actual bids came in higher than the construction estimates, the CPC would not welcome a supplemental funding request. Gentile said that the bids received by the City for most recent projects had been in line with construction estimates. When the bids for Fire Station 3 came in higher, the City had to find more money. The City would expect to do the same if bids for Crescent Street exceeded the original estimates, whether by borrowing more or by deferring other projects so the cash designated for those projects could be used at Crescent Street. Armstrong noted that the Crescent Street site did not really include many unknowns.

Yeo noted that the project team and working group had responded to the CPC's previously expressed interest in increased affordability by revising the previous unit mix from a combination of 80% AMI and market-rate to include units at 60% AMI and 120% AMI, and by eliminating 1-bedroom units in favor of all 2- and 3-bedroom units. He commented that, although the new plan reduced the previous anticipated CPA request per unit of housing, the total development cost per unit, and therefore the total per-unit cost from all Newton funding sources, was still very high. The CPC had suggested considering additional units to reduce this cost, but the number of units had not changed. To some extent the project's high costs reflected public construction requirements, such as the payment of prevailing wages.

Yeo explained that the City's request at tonight's meeting was for a CPC vote on whether to consider an off-cycle full proposal submitted by the CPC's normal 30-day deadline, December 11, for a public hearing and potential CPC funding recommendation vote on January 11. The CPC could also decide it needed additional information to make this decision, and therefore to continue tonight's discussion to a future meeting. He noted that the discussion tonight had not reflected any concerns that might have been raised by CPC vice chair Peter Sargent, whose professional work is in affordable housing finance but who was unable to attend.

Yeo emphasized that CPC agreement to consider a full proposal did not imply a commitment to support funding for that proposal. Gentile said the project team fully understood this and would try to make the project less expensive if they could. Morse said any full proposal the CPC agreed to consider would be submitted ahead of the December 11 deadline.

Kronish and Yeo both supported agreeing to consider an off-cycle proposal based on the information presented at tonight's meeting.

VOTE Kronish moved to consider an off-cycle proposal consistent with the information presented at this meeting, if the proposal is submitted by 11 December 2017 for a CPC public hearing on 11 January 2018. Armstrong seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously, 6-0.

After the vote, Ingerson offered a comment not as the CPC's staff person but based on personal experience. She thought parents living in the Crescent Street apartments would probably encourage their children to play outdoors mostly in the apartments' ground-level green spaces or in the park. She also thought that for many households now, kitchens were often the center of family life during daylight hours, whereas living rooms were more often used at night. She understood why the current floor plans for Crescent Street showed all kitchens facing the parking lot and all living rooms facing the park, but she wondered if the reverse could be considered, so parents could see children playing in the park from their kitchens.

Brody's motion to adjourn was seconded by Lunin and approved 6-0. The Committee adjourned at 8 pm.