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Community Preservation Committee

MINUTES

24 January 2013

The meeting was held on Thursday 24 January 2013 at 7:05 pm in Newton City Hall, Room 222.

Community Preservation Committee (CPC) members present: Leslie Burg, Joel Feinberg, Thomas Turner, Jim Robertson, Don Fishman, Dan Green (left at 7:30 pm to attend another meeting).

Members absent: Michael Clarke, Nancy Grissom.

Program manager Alice Ingerson served as recorder. Also attending in addition to presenters listed below were Trisha Guditz and Rob Muollo from the housing program of the City of Newton Planning and Development Dept.

PROPOSALS & PROJECTS

Public hearing on Newton Homebuyer Assistance Program – request for further funding

The proposal was presented by Rieko Hayashi, Housing Planner. The full presentation is online from the project's page under 'Proposals & Projects' on www.newtonma.gov/cpa.

The requested \$475,000 would recapitalize this program. Three previous appropriations of CPA funds were made for this program. The new request includes \$450,000 for grants to homebuyers, \$15,000 for program management costs, and \$10,000 to bring previously subsidized units up to current housing standards when they come up for resale. The maximum subsidy per household would be increased from \$115,000 to \$150,000, but the actual grant offered to each household will depend on the size of the unit they need based on their household size, on their income and assets, and on the purchase price of the unit. The program guidelines will be revised to exclude applicants with more than \$75,000 in household assets.

The program has existed for 12 years, with CPA funding since 2004. 36 households have been assisted, at an average of 3 per year. The program currently has 6 pre-approved applicants and a remaining balance of \$66,000 from previously appropriated funds. To receive a grant, the homebuyer's household must have no more than 80 percent of the area-wide median income and be buying their first home. The homebuyers must qualify for a bank mortgage, as well as for assistance

website www.newtonma.gov/cpa

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through this program. In return for assistance through the program, the homebuyers must accept a deed restriction keeping the unit affordable to future buyers.

Housing prices in Newton have increased significantly since the program began, but area-wide incomes have actually declined. Over time, the current maximum subsidy has meant that in recent years the program has mostly served very small households, with fewer than 3 members.

Public Comments

Steve Partensky spoke about the need for the program. He and his wife have 2 children. He teaches in a private school in Newton, grew up in Newton, attended Newton North High School, and would like to move back to Newton, primarily for the schools. The improving economy means that the price of housing is going back up in Newton, and he would like to see the program continued.

Maryann O'Connor came to thank the CPC for supporting the program, which helped her buy a home a year ago. She is a single mother of 3 adopted children, 2 of whom have emotional problems. She has lived in Newton since 1998. It seemed impossible to find and afford an apartment where the children's noise would not bother the neighbors. Their new home payments are much less than they had previously been paying in rent, and the children now have a yard to play in. She supports the increase in the maximum subsidy.

Joseline Serret also benefited from the program. Her daughter had previously had to attend a private school, but now she attends Newton public schools, where she participates in the swim team and plays the flute in the school orchestra. She believed the program had changed not only her family's life but that of all the generations of her family to come.

Mr. Michael Lepie supported the program, which he considers a better use of CPA funds than housing proposals recently supported by the CPC from CAN-DO and the proposal submitted by Myrtle Village, LLC. He hoped that the CPC would act as quickly on this program as it had on previous proposals from CAN-DO, and before the Myrtle Village project requested any of the available CPA funds.

Oksana Zadorozhnyak spoke about her experience buying a house last September with help from this program. She is a single mother and was told on short notice that she was going to lose her apartment. Apartments are now very expensive, \$1600-1800 for a 2-bedroom. Her son is a junior at Newton North and she did not want to move him. She was grateful for the program's assistance. They have lived in Newton for 10 years.

Isabel Kodgis, a single working mother, spoke about her hope to own a home in Newton and provide stability for her son, who has been in Newton through kindergarten. She looks forward to her son being able to put down roots in the community.

Community Preservation Committee Questions and Comments

In response to Dan Green, Hayashi reiterated that the amount of new funding requested would allow the program to help about the current average of 3 households over the next year.

In response to Jim Robertson, Housing Planner Rob Muollo explained that the previous maximum subsidy was set at \$115,000 in 2008. Prior to that the maximum had been about \$90,000.

Leslie Burg supported the idea of creating the rehabilitation fund for units being resold.

In response to Joel Feinberg, Hayashi confirmed CDBG and HOME funds had been used for the program in the beginning, that CPA funds were then added, and that CPA is now the program's sole funding source.

VOTE Dan Green moved and Joel Feinberg seconded that the CPC support the request as submitted.

The motion was adopted unanimously 6-0, with 2 current CPC members absent.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Approval of CPC Minutes for 14 and 29 November 2012

No members had corrections to these draft minutes as distributed. After Dan Green's motion, seconded by Don Fishman, both sets of minutes were approved unanimously, 6-0.

Dan Green left the meeting at this point.

Staff updates on currently funded projects

Ingerson explained that she tracked projects through the City's financial software and by calling the managers of current projects for brief updates. She then posts the updated report approximately every 4-6 weeks and posted on the 'Reports' page of the program website, www.newtonma.gov/cpa.

Burg asked Ingerson to summarize the status of the Civil War Monument, on which the CPC had voted off-cycle with the goal of getting the work done before winter 2012-13. Unfortunately, processing delays in the Dept. of Public Works had delayed the signing of the engineering and design contract with Structures North, so construction had not been bid and completed by this winter. However, project manager Frank Nichols had followed Structures North's recommendations for winterizing the monument to prevent any further freeze-thaw damage, and he had assured Ingerson that bidding would be done winter 2013 and construction would be completed before another winter.

Feinberg asked about the current status of the Myrtle Village proposal. Ingerson explained that the Newton Law Dept. was working on some additional possible conflict-of-interest issues involving Jeanne Strickland of the Newton Community Development Foundation, which was acting as the project's development consultant. Ingerson also noted that at her request, Tom Turner had spoken with both Ouida Young and Marie Lawlor of the Law Dept. to find out whether he needed to do more than recuse himself from all CPC discussions and votes about this project, as he had based on previous Law Dept. advice. Turner said he had spoken with Marie Lawlor of the Law Dept. and was still waiting for her response. At Burg's request, Ingerson said she would remind Lawlor to return Turner's call. At this point, Ingerson believed that barring any further delays related to conflicts of interest, at its July 2013 meeting the CPC should be able either to re-vote its recommendation, if the delay had changed the budget or funding request, or confirm that recommendation so it could then be forwarded to the Board of Aldermen.

Discussion of Newton's 2013 Membership in the Community Preservation Coalition

Burg asked if members had read the information in the packet about the Coalition, including its 2012 annual report and Newton's 2013 dues, which remain as in the past at \$7,500 a year. She wondered if the Committee might want to suggest a different way of setting dues, as the state matching funds and therefore the total annual funding available to Newton's program decrease. Turner and Robertson thought this conversation would be worthwhile.

There was a brief discussion of the services provided by the Coalition to member communities. Since Ingerson now has several years of experience in her job, Newton probably makes less use of the Coalition's technical assistance than it once did, or than smaller communities without staff or with new staff. Ingerson pointed out that attendance at the Coalition's regional CPA conferences was free for all member communities, and that these conferences rotated around the state. Ingerson also noted that one Coalition service largely invisible but nevertheless valuable to Newton was its legislative tracking, responding to the many undesirable amendments to the CPA that the Coalition reported were proposed each year in the state legislature.

After further discussion, Turner, Robertson, Feinberg and Fishman all supported Burg's suggestion to invite Coalition Executive Director Stuart Saginor to update Newton's CPC about the Coalition's finances and its current work, now that the 2012 amendments to the Community Preservation Act have been passed.

Potential February Agenda Items and Fy14 Program Budget

Ingerson briefly summarized some items potentially on the February agenda, including a discussion with the Parks and Recreation Department about their list of CPA-eligible priority projects; a request from Historic Newton to allocate the remaining unspent funds for the Historic Burying Grounds to a modified project scope; and the fy14 budget.

Ingerson briefly discussed her budget assumptions about fy14 revenue, including a 2.5% increase in local revenue and no decline (but also no increase) in the state match. Burg and Robertson supported Ingerson's suggestion that it might be time to use administrative funds to replace the program's 2007 desktop computer with a laptop. In response to Robertson's question, Ingerson explained that the Committee usually allocated as much of its administrative budget as possible to its "consultants" line, to preserve flexibility and allow unspent funds to be returned easily to Newton's Community Preservation Fund at the end of each year.

After Don Fishman's motion, seconded by Jim Robertson, the meeting was adjourned by consensus at 8:20 pm.