

Nancy Grissom reminded the Committee that they had hired Chandler as a consultant to review accessibility requirements for the Veteran House proposal (2148-55 Commonwealth Avenue). All members agreed that this outside review had been valuable.

Discussion then focused on

- ◆ training & technical assistance
- ◆ balancing policy goals with costs in funding decisions
- ◆ setting policy goals for accessibility

Members noted that, because of the way slots on the CPC are defined, the Committee always has some members knowledgeable about housing, construction, and real estate. Dan Green was the only current member who felt he understood regulatory and legal requirements for accessibility well. Most members felt they had little or no relevant training, but felt they knew when they needed to use the CPC's administrative budget to hire additional specialized consultants.

Chandler asked whether the CPC had access to adequate technical assistance, and how it worked with other City committees and departments. Wally Bernheimer felt the Committee had received very useful technical assistance from former Housing Office rehab specialist Mike Duff, but was less confident that such assistance was still available. Other members felt that most projects were vetted appropriately by other groups before they came to the CPC, but also that the CPC could and did ask for input from others as needed. Ingerson noted that the recent CPC funding recommendation for the Angino Farm barn made review by many other City committees, including the Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities, a prerequisite for the release of CP funds.

Chandler asked CPC members about their recent funding decision for Veteran House. Members felt accessibility had become a particular focus for that project partly because one critic felt the project should receive no funding because it was not fully wheelchair-accessible. The CPC decided the project was still worth doing, because not all needs can be met in a 2-unit project.

Several members felt that accessibility came up as an issue with almost all funding proposals. Members pointed out that the CPC does not make policy, but can only respond to the proposals submitted, and must therefore analyze each proposal individually. A blanket policy requiring every unit of housing supported with CP funds to be fully wheelchair-accessible might not be workable.

Members noted that for the CPC as a funding committee, cost was always an issue. Current CPC guidelines favor the use of existing housing stock for affordable housing. Given the age and styles of Newton's housing stock and its high land prices, the Committee was not sure it would often recommend additional rehabilitation funding, beyond the cost required to satisfy current regulations or building codes. In contrast, the Committee might support more than required levels of accessibility in new construction, where any additional cost would be minimal.

Grissom suggested that wheelchair accessibility was not the only kind to consider. Chandler agreed that meeting the needs of all people with disabilities requires looking at more than architecture. For example, seniors-only developments may provide full physical accessibility but foster social isolation; and people with mental illness may need supportive services.

Members asked Chandler to suggest a reasonable accessibility target for their funding decisions. Chandler explained that the answer depended both on what was technologically possible and on the extent of the community's unmet needs. Some fairly clear targets are set by federal codes or state law, but others – especially for reasonable accommodation/modification of existing housing – are more nebulous. It is also difficult to measure unmet needs. A Newton Planning Dept survey of all affordable housing in the City found that private, nonprofit, and public landlords seldom knew how many accessible units they actually had.

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PROGRAM OPERATING PHILOSOPHY

Nancy Grissom summarized recommendations that she and Wally Bernheimer had developed in discussion with Alice Ingerson:

- ◆ The CPC and its staff should focus less on assisting proposal sponsors and project managers, and more on critical review of both proposals and funded projects.
- ◆ However, the CPC should also screen and strengthen potential projects by accepting and discussing pre-proposals (“one-pagers”) with sponsors through the year, while still basing its funding recommendations only on full proposals submitted by an annual deadline.

Feinberg felt that if the CPC went through the effort of reviewing and endorsing a proposal, the CPC and its staff should be prepared to assist and coach the sponsor through the process of review by the Board of Aldermen. Turner felt the onus should be on the proposal sponsors. Under the current system, the Committee tended not to look at proposals as hard as it might, because it assumed that its own staff had already made sure every proposal was solid. Grissom suggested that if the Committee’s own due diligence was more rigorous, that would help proposal sponsors be better prepared for meetings with the Board of Aldermen.

The Committee directed Ingerson to write up the new approach so the Committee as a whole could review and vote on it at their November meeting.

PROGRAM PLANNING & OUTREACH

The Committee postponed to future meetings further planning for the program’s 10th anniversary in 2011-13.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

By a unanimous voice vote of 5-0, the Committee unanimously approved docket item 299-10, submitted to the Board of Aldermen, reducing budgeted fy11 revenue, and the budgeted fy11 general reserve, by the difference between the \$681,605 of state funding in the original budget and the \$618,181 confirmed by the Dept. of Revenue.

Dan Green moved, and Wally Bernheimer seconded, approval of the 15 September 2010 minutes, with one correction noted. The minutes were approved as corrected by a vote of 5-0.

The Committee also directed Alice Ingerson to make future minutes shorter by summarizing discussions rather than identifying individual members’ comments and questions.

DISTRIBUTION OF Fy11 NEW PROPOSALS

Alice Ingerson distributed packets with the five new proposals to all members present, along with her analysis of the relative completeness of each proposal. The Committee will review this material and set a schedule of working sessions for these proposals at the end of its 17 November 2010 public hearing on the new proposals. As in prior years, all new proposals will be posted online from www.newtonma.gov/cpa/projects.htm

Chair Nancy Grissom adjourned the meeting at 9:30 pm.

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PRE-MEETING PACKET & MEETING HANDOUTS

- ◆ **program finances:** fy11 available funds & YTD budget for program administration; docket item adjusting fy11 program budget; past funding by source for fy 02-10; forecast of future funding for fy12-17
- ◆ **accessibility:** backgrd for discussion with B. Chandler of her assessment of City policies & resources, new City of Newton guidelines for accessibility in affordable housing
- ◆ **Charles River Lower Falls Bridge/Approaches proposal:** staff memo summarizing recent proposal updates & correspondence, updated project schedule, Law Dept. advisory memo on eligibility and requiring a permanent restriction in return for funding
- ◆ **program management:** February 2010 memo to the CPC summarizing their standing instructions on the roles played by their staff in proposal review & project management

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