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Barney S. Heath  
Director

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**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** June 26, 2020

**TO:** Councilor Crossley, Chair  
Members of the Zoning and Planning Committee

**FROM:** Barney S. Heath, Director of Planning and Development  
Amanda Berman, Director of Housing & Community Development  
Lara Kritzer, Community Preservation Program Manager

**RE:** **City of Newton COVID-19 Emergency Housing Relief Program Update**

**CC:** Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer  
Planning & Development Board  
Community Preservation Committee  
City Council

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This memo provides a brief update on the status of the Emergency Housing Relief Program.

The application deadline for inclusion in the lottery was Wednesday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>. By the close of the application deadline at midnight, Metro West Collaborative Development, who is administering the program on behalf of the City, had received the following:

- 240 applications
- 597 email inquiries and 219 phone inquiries (includes duplication)

All 240 applicants were entered into the lottery, which took place via Zoom at noon on Wednesday, June 10<sup>th</sup>. The lottery generated a wait list, identifying the order in which Metro West will process applications, determine eligibility, and award assistance. Priority will be given to households at or below 65% AMI. While the application deadline for inclusion in the lottery has closed, Metro West is still accepting applications for the program. These applications will be placed at the bottom of the wait list and will be processed if funding is available.

Of the 240 applicants included in the lottery, approximately 55% are people of color: 27% Hispanic/Latino, 15% Black/African American, 10% Asian, 4% Other Multi-Racial, 10% left the question blank, and 35% White. The majority of applications that have been processed thus far are for households at or below 65% AMI, and the majority of those applicants are at or below 30% AMI.

Since the lottery took place, Metro West has been diligently processing applications, reviewing income and program eligibility, collecting outstanding documents from applicants to complete their application files, and reaching out to landlords to execute the program participation agreement. This week, they also began issuing non-eligibility letters to those households who do not qualify for program assistance. Metro West continues to work closely with the case workers from Newton Public Schools' English Language Learning (ELL) Program to assist low-income non-English speaking households in completing their applications for the program; and they continue to communicate with those individuals and households who have inquired about the program, but have yet to complete an application for assistance.

Metro West estimates that of the 240 applicants on the lottery wait list, 150 will receive assistance in the month of July. From their review of applications thus far, the median rent across these households is \$2,000. Metro West expects to be able to process the first month of assistance for these 150 households in the month of July at an average assistance amount of \$1,400 (70% of the \$2,000 median rent), which comes to \$210,000 of direct financial assistance awarded in the first month. CDBG funds will be used to cover these July awards.

The full amount of assistance that will likely be awarded to these first 150 households is \$630,000 (\$210,000 at three months of assistance). This represents approximately 27% of the total program budget of \$2,312,500 for direct financial assistance. While applications are still being accepted and placed at the bottom of the lottery wait list, we estimate that by the end of July, approximately 50% of the program budget will still be available.

Given this, the Planning Department plans to conduct another round of robust outreach and marketing starting in mid-July to solicit additional applications for the program. We believe that this timing is appropriate given that the additional \$600 a week in federal unemployment benefits is set to end on July 31<sup>st</sup> and the Massachusetts eviction moratorium is set to end on August 18<sup>th</sup>.