

West Newton Armory JAPG
Notes from April 16, 2020 Meeting
Zoom Meeting
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

JAPG Members in Attendance: Kelley Brown, Jonathan Katz, Anita Lichtblau, Ted Hess-Mahan, Sue Parsons, David Koven, Mitchell Fischman, and Barry Abramson

Others in Attendance: Amanda Berman, Director of Housing and Community Development, Eamon Bencivengo, Housing Development Planner

Approval of April 2, 2020 Meeting Notes

The minutes of the JAPG meeting of April 2nd will be discussed and voted on at the next meeting on May 14th given that the group needed more time to review.

Appointment of Rotating Secretary

Jonathan Katz volunteered to serve as Secretary for the meeting.

Criteria Matrix

Barry Abramson suggested that the matrix include other types of potential private mixed-use residential uses.

He also would like to address the issues of public benefit, the physical requirements to convert to affordable housing, and financial feasibility.

Ted Hess-Mahan stated that we don't have to speculate about possible uses by a private developer as it is out of the JAPG purview, as they will have to go through a City process including the consistency with the Washington Street Vision. He added that given the City's lack of interest in pursuing the site for municipal use, the JAPG has only two choices-recommend the site for 100% affordable residential or that the City not purchase the site.

Mitch Fishman pointed out that we really only have affordable housing in the chart

Ted Hess-Mahan indicated that the City's decision not to pursue a municipal use, will be covered in a narrative that he has volunteered to draft. The narrative will provide the background context for the City's space needs, the capital planning process, and priorities.

After a discussion of the items that might be included in the matrix and the role of the consultant's report in terms of input, Ted Hess-Mahan suggested that we table the matrix for now and work on drafting the parts of the narrative that would go into a final report. We can decide later whether to include a matrix or capture all the information in a narrative. He pointed out that a matrix might be helpful in terms of providing a platform for some type of scoring index.

The following members of the group volunteered to draft these sections for the next meeting-

- Sue Parsons-History
- Anita Lichtblau-Neighborhood Context
- David Koven-Armory site and building information
- Ted Hess-Mahan-Exploration of City Uses

Project Timing and Potential Funding

David Koven provided an overview of the potential funding of a 100% affordable project. The State will want to see a significant local match estimated at .5 to \$1M. The State is not concerned where the match comes from, as it could be CDBG or CRA funds. The financing would also include a combination of soft loans and Mass Housing programs. A key to a financing package will be gaining approval from DHCD for the 9% tax credits (he pointed out that early conversations with DCHD would provide some insight into the likelihood of securing the tax credits). David added that it would be part of the consultant's charge to talk to potential public funding sources.

In terms of timing he projected 2 years from the closing with DCAM for a developer in coordination with the City to put the project financing together, an additional year to close and 1.5 to 2 years to construct the project.

In terms of cost per unit Barry Abramson stated that there is a hard cap of \$500,000 per unit.

Amanda Berman stated that the City had adjusted this to \$550,000 to develop an affordable unit.

Ted Hess Mahan stated that it would be up to the developer to request funding from the City and the State. He pointed out that City funding could come from CDBG or CRA. The City Council has to approve CRA funding and the scope is narrow. The Mayor decides on the allocation of CDBG and Home Funding.

Selection and comments relating to Project Consultant

Eamon indicated that they hoped to select the project consultant in the next 2 weeks and have them up and running in 3 weeks.

David Koven said that the consultant will be a practitioner and will likely be supported with design and engineering capabilities. He also noted that in terms of scope we are not asking the consultant to address traffic, compatibility with surrounding uses, or city service requirements.

Armory Comps

There was a discussion about the comparability of other armories in terms of use and vintage.

Ted Hess-Mahan pointed out that the two periods of Armory construction were late 1800's to early 1900's and the 1950-60's. Our interest is in the earlier buildings in terms of comparability with a specific focus on those that have been converted to housing or are in the process of pursuing the an affordable residential conversion. (David Coven super impressed the attendees by using the term "crenellation")

Eamon is going to reach out to the Lynn people to try and set up a Zoom call and Jonathan is attempting to get additional information about the WATCH CDC progress on the Waltham Armory.

Affordable Housing in Newton

Sue Parsons said that she would like to have some discussion to provide some background and context on where Newton stands on affordable housing

Anita Lichtblau added that she would like to know the status in terms of percentages and some baseline in terms of the need.

Ted Hess-Mahan stated that the City has housing goals in terms of types and number of units that are set out in 1 and 5 year plans. It was pointed out that the Fair Housing Committee would like to see more affordability

Amanda Berman said that they are 90% complete on a new consolidated 5 year plan from FY 21-25. She related that they are in the 30 day comment period as it has just been presented to the Planning and Development Board and the Zoning and Planning Committee. The plan is part of a regional consortium of 13 West Suburban communities with Newton taking the lead. She indicated that the plan is dense and not particularly user friendly which was confirmed by Ted. In addition to sending links to the studies she will also send on a memo that is more of an executive summary.

Amanda also pointed to a Housing Strategy study done for the City in 2016 by RKG, which she and Ted indicated, was more user-friendly.

Anita asked if this study could be updated to include units developed since the report came out.

Ted added that it would be helpful to also show the pipeline of projects/units approved or in the approval process.

Amanda indicated that she could update the study, but would need 4 weeks given the current work associated with an increase of \$1.7m from HUD in addition to the 3.4M already allocated to the City.

Extension

Ted said that they have started to work with the City on an extension for the JAPG' work which is clearly going to be required. He reported that there was a Zoom call last week with the Legal Department to review the steps associated with an extension, which will require both DCAM and the City Council approval.

Next Meeting

The next JAPG meeting is scheduled for May 14th at 7:00 PM.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:43 PM