

Newton Housing Partnership Meeting
Meeting Summary from August 18, 2020 Meeting

Zoom Meeting

6:00-8:00 pm

Partnership Members in Attendance: Mark Caggiano, Chuck Eisenberg, Kathleen Marchi, Eliza Datta, Stephen Tise, Josephine McNeil, Lisbeth Heyer, John Hennessey

Others in Attendance: Amanda Berman, Eamon Bencivengo, Councilor Julia Malakie, and members of the community.

Approval of July 21, 2020 Meeting Summary

It was moved and seconded to approve the meeting notes

Mayor Fuller's Appointment

Mayor Fuller appointed Eliza Datta as the Community Preservation Committee's Affordable Housing Representative.

OPUS Newton Middle-Income Housing Project

The presentation was given by 2Life Communities on a new project called OPUS Newton. This would be a community developed for middle income older adults to improve their quality of life. Studies by Federal DHHS and Harvard School of Public Health found that individuals live longer, and rates of dementia diminish by one half when people are surrounded by a community. Loneliness is now defined as the biggest public health threat, even before COVID-19.

Goal is to make sure everyone can age in a community in order to combat loneliness. Currently, individuals of middle income do not have the option to age

in community because they do not qualify for lower income housing and cannot afford many of the other communities for seniors.

Because the population this community will serve would not typically receive government funds or philanthropic funds, 2Life Communities came up with another way to serve the older middle-income population in Newton. First, to create this community, 2Life Communities is going to capitalize on what seniors have to offer their communities by having residents volunteer for the community. This will then help reduce overhead costs. Second, they will not self-contain because it is assumed that the residents will have the ability to receive services outside of the community. Third, by sharing overhead on homecare through partnerships, people will be able to extend their own dollar to receive the help they need. Fourth, all the funds received from the community will go to services and care.

Campus would be located at the intersection of Winchester and Nahanton St. OPUS Newton would be connected to the existing Coleman House by a connector. The connector will add shared spaces for individuals within the two communities. This will also make it an income-inclusive campus.

OPUS would be comprised of 175 apartments where 39% would be one-bedroom apartments and 61% would be two-bedroom apartments. The size of each apartment would range from 650-1350 square feet. 2Life Communities is working to make OPUS Newton as sustainable as possible, complete with solar panels, low-emission materials, energy-efficient systems, and completely non-smoking.

All of OPUS Newton will be income affordable and will be designed to be diverse and inclusive to community residents. OPUS will have staff but will mainly rely on resident volunteers. Community and monthly fees will be lower than communities in surrounding areas because of this volunteer model.

Fall '20, 2Life Communities will begin meeting with different community members. In January '21, 2Life Communities will begin applying for permits.

Newton Housing Partnership Initiatives

- Extremely low-income housing strategy- subcommittee update:

Services will stay focused on very low and extremely low-income individuals and families, which covers seniors as well. The idea of the community foundation was taken out of the discussion – the committee looked at what are the primary existing sources for funding this. A primary source of funding could include a community foundation, but at this time, the focus has shifted.

Services need to particularly be available to individuals and families of color. This would in time create a thriving and diverse population within Newton.

Subcommittee ultimately wants to broaden the list of services available for targeted communities and wants city to take the initiative to establish the capacity to generate these services.

It was moved and seconded to support the statement presented by the subcommittee.

- Zoning redesign – subcommittee update

There has been a presentation, comments, and second draft done on Article 3. Deals primarily with single and two family residents units.

Subcommittee is supporting Article 3 because it has the potential to create more affordable housing and lower the cost of housing in Newton. It will also reduce the size of the units themselves.

Recommendations include:

- Update the rules for detached accessory units as the current regulations are quite restrictive.
- Is there a minimum unit size or an average unit size? Subcommittee will work with drafters of Article 3 to make this distinction clearer.
- Divide the larger houses in Newton into four units rather than just two units.

There was a point raised to ensure that the language within the draft of Article 3 specifically states what ‘affordable housing’ means. Committee will review and update the language as necessary.

It was moved and seconded to adopt the language in the subcommittee's letter with the caveat that it can be updated. The vote by the Partnership was unanimous.

- Housing's role in diversity, equity, and inclusion -

MAPC has launched a grant opportunity called the Racial Equity Municipal Action Plan, REMAP. In short, they've partnered with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) and the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. This program will look at race and equity in identified municipalities as well as barriers that prevent equity, and identify strategies and solutions to create equity. MAPC will identify three to five communities within the one hundred plus that fall within the region. Municipalities will engage with one another as well with GARE in order to identify problems and create a more equitable municipality.

It was moved and seconded to support this application. The vote by the Partnership included one abstention and the rest in favor of supporting the application.

Newton COVID-19 Emergency Housing Relief Program

In August 2020, the program has already enrolled sixteen new cases, with the potential to support an estimated additional fifteen households with need for housing assistance. Using the current estimates, where households receive housing assistance for a maximum of three months, it is estimated that the program would be able to continue taking on new households through May 2021.

The other scenario would take the program to a six-month maximum housing relief for current and new households. This is helpful in one way because the households already in the program are the most vulnerable in the city and the program could help them for a longer period. On the flipside, however, the program itself would not be able to take on as many cases, if it sticks to a max of three months of assistance per household.

Ultimately, no vote was taken on this. Just a discussion on what resources exist and how to creatively use the funds available to help the most vulnerable and greatest amount of people, particularly given how many unknown variables there are with the election, potential change of government, and the effect of COVID-19.

Project Updates

Project updates will occur at the next NHP meeting.

Upcoming Meetings

NHP meetings will be held on the 3rd Tuesday of every month from 6-8 pm.