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**Community Preservation Committee**

MINUTES

January 12, 2021

The virtual meeting was held online on Tuesday, January 12, 2021 beginning at 7:00 pm. Community Preservation Committee (CPC) members present included Mark Armstrong, Dan Brody, Eliza Datta, Byron Dunker, Susan Lunin, Robert Maloney, Jennifer Molinsky, Martin Smargiassi, and Judy Weber. Community Preservation Program Manager Lara Kritzer were also present and served as recorder.

Present for the Planning Board were Peter Doeringer, Sonia Parisca, Kelley Brown, Barney Heath, Kevin McCormick, Jennifer Molinsky, Sudha Maheshwari, and James Robertson.

Mr. Doeringer asked for a motion to open the Planning and Development Board Public Hearing. Ms. Molinsky moved to open the public hearing. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote. Mr. Maloney then moved to open the Community Preservation Committee's public meeting which also passed by unanimous voice vote.

**PROPOSALS AND PROJECTS**

**Coleman House Senior Housing Preservation Proposal - Joint Public Hearing with the Planning and Development Board**

Mr. Armstrong stated that the Planning and Development Board and CPC were meeting jointly to review the proposal from 2Life Communities for funding of the Coleman House Senior Housing Preservation project. The project was introduced by Jeff Sacks, who explained that he was starting his three-year term as chair of 2Life Communities' Board of Directors. He noted that he was a former housing representative member of the CPC and was excited to see the Committee meeting jointly with the Planning Board on this project. He noted that both the Planning Board and CPC had previously supported 2Life Communities with the funding for the Golda Meir project. He appreciated their support for the Coleman House project, explaining that it provided housing for very low and extremely low-income senior households. For over fifty years, 2Life Communities (previously known as Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly) has provided a dynamic and supportive environment for the seniors living in its affordable housing. Mr. Sacks noted the challenges of the current proposal to completely rehabilitate and restore the property with its residents still living there and noted how their team had designed the project to improve accessibility and adaptability within each unit. He ended by noting that the proposal requested \$4.5 million in CPA funding and \$530,000 in CDBG and HOME funding.

Lizbeth Heyer, 2 Life's Chief of Real Estate and Innovation, next gave a presentation on the Coleman House Preservation proposal. She noted that this was an important affordable housing preservation

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opportunity. 2Life Communities is the long-term owner, operator, property manager and service provider for all of its properties and currently manages 1,300 apartments on five campuses. Their residents include 1,600 individuals from thirty different countries. As the owner and operator of the properties, 2Life remains closely involved with the condition of the buildings and needs of the residents. Ms. Heyer noted that 30% to 40% of their residents were nursing home eligible but that only 2% moved to nursing homes annually due to the support and benefits provided to their residents.

Ms. Heyer explained that the Coleman House is adjacent to the Jewish Community Center (JCC) and was built in two parts in the 1980s and 1990s. It was now time for a thirty-year preservation investment in these facilities. She noted that they had onsite resident services in all of their properties with the goal of 100 residents to each resident service coordinator. Ms. Heyer explained that many of the coordinators were bilingual and reviewed the cultural, social, physical, and educational services and benefits that they provided to their residents. Ms. Heyer explained that the buildings also had live-in staff and would continue to after the renovations.

The Coleman House buildings include 146 units available to very low and extremely low-income households, those with incomes well below 50% AMI. Ms. Heyer explained that they were able to supply this affordable housing through a mix of Section 8 and PRAC project-based contracts. The median income for their residents is \$12,000 and the median age is 82. Coleman House residents went between 62-105 in age and come from ten different countries. Ms. Heyer added that 53% of residents needed some level of assistance and that 40% of residents used a cane or walker to get around. Even with the Covid-19 situation, they had worked to engage their residents in the project plans. Residents had provided thoughtful reviews of finishes and were able to review all of the design elements. Ms. Heyer stated that they would pledge to keep the units affordable in perpetuity.

Ms. Heyer went on to describe the work on the units, explained that they would all be adaptable while a certain number would be fully accessible. Adaptable units were based on resident needs to remain in their units over time and included better turning radiuses for walkers and wheelchairs, installing blocking for future grab bars in different locations, and easily removeable cabinets in the kitchen. The project would also include a full life cycle investment for the building envelope and infrastructure as well. They were working to get as close as possible to full electric systems to reach Enterprise Green Community standards. Ms. Heyer noted that it was also important to them that their systems be efficient as they paid for all of the utilities in the buildings. The project also included renovating their village center areas, including redesigning and modernizing their program spaces. Lastly, Ms. Heyer noted how the project met the City's Consolidated Plan goals for affordable housing.

Ms. Heyer stated that they were requesting that local support cover 18% of the project using CDBG, HOME, and CPA funding. The project also anticipated using some Consortium HOME funds as well. The largest share of the costs, approximately \$25 million, would come from 2Life Communities itself as they reinvested equity back into the building. The project costs included \$25 million in construction and \$4 million in soft costs. Because they were using fewer funding sources, their transaction costs were lower, and they planned to have only a modest developer fee. The CPA funding would be dedicated to costs involved with repairs and replacement work on the building envelope and infrastructure. Ms. Heyer estimated that the project included \$10 million in project

costs for building envelope and infrastructure elements. The project proposed to use the HOME funding for construction, and to use the requested CDBG funding to assist with relocation costs for their residents. Ms. Heyer added that this was 2Life's fourth project in an occupied building and that they had a good sense of how to do these now. Their approach was to empty a stack of units, renovate them, and to then relocate the residents from the next stack of to be developed units into the finished units so that residents remained in the same building throughout the process.

Ms. Heyer reviewed the project schedule, explaining that they were ready to proceed and hoped to have the completed construction documents in February. The relocation work was anticipated to begin in March with construction underway in April. Project completion was estimated to be by April 2023. Ms. Heyer also noted that Phase I vaccinations for Covid-19 would begin in the coming week which would help the process. They hoped to finish the first round of shots in January and the second round in February. At present, they were still following all necessary safety protocols.

Mr. Armstrong found it interesting that the CPA funding was considered to be for preservation here, noting that the building and work to be done was very different from the CPC's usual preservation projects. Mr. Doeringer asked what level of Enterprise Green status they were aiming for. Elise Salinger, 2Life's Real Estate Innovation Manager, explained that the status would be equivalent to a silver or gold LEED certification. Mr. Doeringer asked if all of the non-HOME funded units would be affordable in perpetuity. Ms. Salinger answered that all of the units were permanently affordable. Additionally, the HOME units would have restrictions on them which went beyond the minimum requirements for that funding.

Ms. Datta stated that she was a member of the Newton Housing Partnership as well as the CPC and was very supportive of the project. She noted that the Housing Partnership recognized that it is hard to develop and preserve deeply affordable units like the ones at Coleman house. The Partnership had also discussed the adaptability and accessibility of the rehabilitated units and Ms. Datta thought that it was great that 2Life was investing in these improvements. Ms. Datta also appreciated the simplicity of the financial structure of the project and its more predictable schedule.

Ms. Molinsky stated that she worked in aging in housing and noted that 2Life Communities was a national leader in the field. She stated that she was very supportive of the project and thought that the ability to adapt the units should not be underestimated as it would provide a tremendous benefit to residents.

Housing Development Planner Eamon Bencivengo then gave a presentation on the use of the CDBG and HOME funding for the project. He explained that 2Life's request for \$530,000 equaled 1.7% of the project with \$411,898 coming from CDBG funding and \$118,102 from HOME funds. He explained that there was also a small change in the funding since the Planning and Development Board's memo. The HOME funds had been lowered with a placeholder added for May/June when the City would know more about the status of FY22 federal funds. The lower HOME funding amount has been paired with additional CDBG funds. Mr. Bencivengo explained that the results would be the same but that this provided a more conservative approach to using the HOME funds. He added that the project had previously been awarded West Metro HOME Consortium funds and explained that these came from pooled funds from all of the Consortium member communities and were released in regular funding rounds. Mr. Bencivengo stated that the current project met all of the eligibility requirements for this

funding and was highly leveraged. The project addressed many of the City's housing goals with its deeply affordable units for seniors and would be more sustainable, which was a long-term goal of the City. He added that the Housing Partnership had voted last week to recommend full funding to the project and that staff also recommended approval.

Mr. McCormick asked if there was already a permanent affordability restriction on the property. Ms. Heyer answered no, that the affordability was instead guaranteed by their HUD and other housing contracts. Rose White, 2Life Communities' Housing Finance Specialist, stated that the permanent affordability of the property will be tied to the financing and that the property would not have a separate restriction. Mr. Doeringer questioned tying the affordability to the financing, asking whether the affordability would be compromised if the HUD financing ever ended. Ms. White stated that that any affordability restrictions would most likely be renewed with any refinancing of the project. Ms. Berman added that there were restrictions tied in with the city funding including a 20 year or longer restriction for the HOME funded units. Ms. Weber asked how long their contracts were for and Ms. Heyer answered that they had both annual and fifteen-year contracts. Ms. Weber added that the federal government had continued to show support for senior housing and did not show any signs of walking away from it. Ms. Heyer noted that 2Life Communities had been providing affordable senior housing for 55 years and was a stable and well capitalized company that was expanding.

Mr. Maloney noted that the property had been recently refinanced and that the project had long term financing in place that represented a high percentage of the property value. He thought that the proposed funding request was for a good cause.

Mr. Brown asked the applicants how they had determined the appropriate project scope and what had imposed discipline on the project. Ms. Heyer stated that they had begun with a capital needs assessment of the building that evaluated the condition of the building envelope and systems. They had developed the core of the project around a thirty-year usable life scope, then had brought in a contractor to start testing their assumptions by looking into the walls. They then looked at any additional goals which would meet the desired programmatic outcomes. Ms. Heyer stated that their goal at Coleman House was that no one should ever have to leave their units for a nursing home and that 2Life Communities had a passionate commitment to sustainability. They had then set their budget and scope around these goals. Mr. Brown asked about the Consortium HOME funding. It was noted that there had been no other applicants for that funding this round. Mr. Brown asked if there were any other projects that were not being funded due to this project. Ms. Berman answered that there were other projects but that it was hard to qualify for these funds. She noted that the HOME funds required that a project already be pretty far along with the rest of its funding in place. It just happened that this was ready when those other projects were not. She noted that for the HOME Consortium funds, not all applicants wanted to deal with the restrictions and complications that came along with the fund. Mr. Brown asked if there was anyone waiting to use the Newton funds. Ms. Berman answered no, that the only other potential use for the Newton funds was the Armory, adding that this project was a very appropriate and strong use of this funding.

Ms. Parisca stated that this is a wonderful project. She asked if all of the units were assigned or if there was a waiting list for units. Ms. Heyer explained that they were currently holding some units open for relocations but that the buildings were otherwise fully occupied with a 500 person waiting

list. Mr. Armstrong asked if 2Life Communities had any plans for adding new units. Ms. Heyer answered that they were working on a new development for the site, Opus, which would provide middle income housing to those who wished to age in community. 2Life was getting ready to submit their special permit application for the project this spring. Ms. Heyer explained that the construction on Opus was still a few years away and noted the challenges of bringing in services to middle income households which currently only exist in high-end facilities. The project had been difficult to design, but 2Life thought that it would be an overall enhancement to the Coleman House facilities.

Discussion was opened to the public at this time.

Diana Murphy, Chair of the Council on Aging, expressed her support for the project. She noted that Newton was in desperate need of senior housing and that many seniors were remaining in their homes longer than they should because they had no other option. She stated that 2 Life Communities is innovative and had a fantastic track record, and that the Council strongly endorsed this project.

Robin Nasson assisted Constance, an 18 year resident of the community, in voicing her support for the project and organization. Constance stated that 2Life took wonderful care of its residents and offered many programs and services. She did not know where she would be without 2Life and looked forward to the renovations, which she thought had fantastic plans with everything that she could think of to keep residents in their units.

Peter Barrer of Green Newton stated that he was a retired engineer and was very concerned with sustainability. He noted the City's goal of being carbon free by 2050 and was concerned with the proposed project scope. Ms. Selinger clarified and expanded on the project's sustainability plans, explaining that this work would put the property on a clear path to zero carbon in 2050. She discussed with Mr. Barrer their plans for air sealing as well as upgrading systems and insulating the building cavities, adding that the plans had evolved since their original submission and that she was happy to provide additional guidance on their sustainability approach.

Mr. Maloney moved to close the CPC's public hearing on the Coleman House project proposal. Ms. Lunin seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote. Ms. Molinsky then moved to close the Planning and Development Board's public hearing on the Coleman House project funding. Ms. Parisca seconded the motion which also passed by unanimous voice vote.

Ms. Lunin moved to recommend \$4,214,622 in CPA Community Housing funds to the Coleman House Senior Housing Preservation project. Mr. Maloney seconded the motion which passed by a unanimous roll call vote.

Mr. Doeringer moved that the Planning and Development Board recommend approval of the proposed substantial amendment and pre-Commitment of the HOME funds to the Coleman House project. Mr. Brown seconded the motion which also passed by unanimous vote.

**Covid-19 Emergency Housing Relief Program Additional Funding Proposal Public Hearing**

Ms. Berman presented the City's request for an additional \$1.2 million in Community Housing funds for the Covid-19 Emergency Housing Relief Program. She explained that the additional funding would extend the program through June 2021 and would support both new and existing participants. To date, the program had assisted 221 households, including 6 affordable housing restricted homeowners who needed assistance with their mortgages. The program had started assisting households in July 2020 and 154 of those households, which represented 70% of program participants, still needed assistance at this time as their economic situations had still not improved. Ms. Berman reviewed the number of anticipated participants and funding needed to extend the program for one full year.

At this time, 191 of the 221 program participants have re-enrolled for additional funding, or 86% of all program participants. Ms. Berman stated that this shows there is a continued need for assistance beyond the originally anticipated three months for the majority of its participating households. The program has spent \$1.6 million of the \$2.5 million originally allocated from CPA and CDBG funding sources. The average monthly expense per household was \$1,410, which was significantly less than the City had originally estimated when the program was designed. As a result, there has been additional funding available to extend assistance for a longer period of time with first an extension to six months and then to eight months.

Ms. Berman next presented information on the participating households. While the program is open to any household with an income below 80% AMI, 90% of the participating households had incomes that were below 65% AMI. Over half of the program households, 55%, had incomes below 30% AMI and were considered to be extremely low-income households. Only five participating households lived in Housing Authority units. Ms. Berman reviewed the information on race and ethnicity, noting that the majority of participants were people of color.

Ms. Berman noted that they had come before the CPC several times in the past to make changes to the program. In September, staff had come before the CPC for the first time to request extending the program from three to six months after realizing that households were not seeing any economic improvement. In December, staff came in again to request to extend the program through eight months of assistance. The program was considered to be a housing stabilization program and has been a lifeline to many households who did not otherwise have the means to remain in their Newton units. Ms. Berman explained that the program was currently expected to run out of funding in February 2021. The CDC's eviction moratorium is currently scheduled to end on Jan. 31, and the program expected that many of its participating households would be in danger of homelessness at that time. While this deadline had changed in the past, the City could not expect this to change again.

Ms. Berman stated that the City was requesting additional funding to extend the program through June 2021 to continue to assist economically threatened households. The additional funding would also allow the program to continue to take in new applications through April 2021. Ms. Berman anticipated that this would expand the number of participating households to approximately 285. Metro West Development Corporation (MWDC) will continue to administer the program and to recertify participating households every three months to confirm that they still meet program

requirements. Ms. Berman then reviewed those requirements as well as the landlord agreements that were currently in use.

Lastly, Ms. Berman reviewed the programs outreach and marketing. She noted that there had been a big push to get the word out to households over the summer and that they continued to market the program through the Mayor's newsletters and other sources. With the new funds, they planned to initiate a full force marketing campaign for new households. Ms. Berman reviewed how this would be done and explained the ongoing efforts and marketing partners.

Mr. Armstrong asked if this was a request for more funding or to extend the use of the existing funds. Ms. Berman answered that the \$1.2 million requested would be an addition to the existing program. Ms. Molinsky stated that she thought the additional funding made sense and wondered whether there were federal or other funds that could also be made available to the program. Ms. Berman explained that the program was originally funded with \$500,000 from CDBG federal CARES Act funds in addition to the \$2 million in CPA funding. These federal funds needed to be used specifically for programs and services responding to the Covid-19 crisis and included more restrictions and time constraints in comparison to the CPA funds. In response, this program was started using only the CDBG funds which were gone by early September. Ms. Berman went on to explain that there were other resources such as the Emergency Services Grant and Homelessness Prevention programs but that they all had their own nuances. Some programs, such as those run by Second Step and the Brookline Community Health Center, cannot be accessed until the renter has received a notice to quit. The Boston based RAFT and ERMA statewide programs are currently overwhelmed and do not go far enough for households that are in need. Ms. Berman noted that this program was certainly not the only option for assistance but was one of the most robust and easily accessible to Newton residents.

Ms. Weber noted that virtually none of the households have been able to leave the program yet and asked if there would be programs available to them in July when the assistance ended. She also noted that this program provided only rent relief and not assistance with re-employment or other concerns and asked if there was something that the CPC or City should be thinking about doing in March or April for this group. Ms. Berman noted that the rental assistance program was the only one run through the Planning Department, but that CDBG funding did go to other Human Services programs throughout Newton. She added that the City was currently working through its second round of Covid-19 funding which is designated for service providers.

Ms. Weber asked whether the length of the program should be reconsidered. Mr. Heath stated that this program had originally been developed to step into the breach and had already been extended far beyond the original timeframe. He was not sure where the City and community would be in four months and agreed that the program and City staff would continue to regularly meet and evaluate the program. Ms. Weber agreed that the program had been extended for longer than originally planned and explained that her concerns were with what might happen next. Ms. Berman noted that from day one, the program has been assisting those households that were most impacted by the pandemic and those who continue to be negatively impacted. She also noted that the program would continue to evaluate the needs of its participants and would continue to work to keep everyone housed. She added that this is a housing stabilization and preservation program with a goal of keeping everyone in their homes.

The public hearing was opened to public comment at this time.

Mr. Doeringer thought that the question of what Newton has to offer was a good one. He noted that the Planning and Development Board was working to find agencies to work on training and retraining out of work residents prior to the pandemic.

Mr. Armstrong noted that the program had originally planned to assist 300 residents, but that it had planned to assist for a much shorter time frame. Mr. Maloney stated that he thought it was an appropriate use of CPA funding.

Mr. Maloney moved to approve the proposal for \$1.2 million in additional CPA community housing funds to be used in the Covid-19 Emergency Housing Relief Program as requested. Mr. Smargiassi seconded the motion which passed by a unanimous roll call vote.

### **Discussion of potential plans to establish an Affordable Housing Trust in Newton**

Ms. Kritzer explained that several City Council members had docketed an item to consider the creation of an Affordable Housing Trust in Newton. She explained that the City was beginning to look at what this would mean to the project funding and review process, and that she wanted the CPC to be aware of the possibility because CPA funds were often the primary source of funding for Housing Trust projects.

Members briefly discussed the uses of a Housing Trust and raised questions as to how it would impact the CPC funding process. Ms. Lunin expressed concern that giving a set amount of CPA funds reserved for community housing funds to the Trust might preclude large future projects that would otherwise come to the CPC for a portion of the undesignated funds. Ms. Molinsky stated that she had worked with housing trusts in other communities and explained her experiences with them. Ms. Datta noted that this idea had also been raised at the Housing Partnership's recent meeting and that there were a lot of issues and hurdles to be dealt with before a Trust was created. She thought that there was still a lot to learn but that it could be good for Newton if it helped to streamline the process.

Members raised questions about how a Trust would work with the CPA's regular process and the expertise that would be necessary for its success. Ms. Weber wondered if there were any exemplary examples from other communities that the CPC should review. Ms. Kritzer stated that the Massachusetts Housing Partnership had recently held a webinar on this subject and agreed to share the presentation with members after the meeting. Ms. Datta stated that she had attended the webinar and that Trusts were noted to be particularly useful in towns, where it could provide an easier process for developing town land. Members agreed to consider this issue further at a later meeting.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Members briefly reviewed the existing financial information and Ms. Kritzer explained the updates to current projects since the last report.



Members next reviewed the draft minutes of the November 10 and December 8 meetings. Ms. Lunin moved to approve both sets of minutes as revised prior to the meeting. Ms. Weber seconded the motion which passed unanimously by voice vote.

Ms. Lunin moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Armstrong seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 9:04 P.M.