



PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEETING MINUTES

April 5, 2021

Members Present:

Peter Doeringer, Chair
Sonia Parisca, Vice Chair
Jennifer Molinsky, Member
Chris Steele, Member
Kelley Brown, Member
Barney Heath, *ex officio*
James Robertson, Alternate (serving as voting member for this meeting)

Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

Barney Heath
Director
Planning & Development

Staff Present:

Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development
Amanda Berman, Director of Housing & Community Development
Eamon Bencivengo, Housing Development Planner
Tiffany Leung, Senior Community Development Planner
Malcolm Lucas, Housing Planner
Shaylyn Davis, Community Development Planner
Cat Kemmett, Planning Associate

Meeting held virtually by Zoom Meeting

Members

Peter Doeringer, Chair
Kelley Brown, Member
Sudha Maheshwari, Member
Jennifer Molinsky, Member
Sonia Parisca, Vice Chair
Chris Steele, Member
Barney Heath, *ex officio*
Kevin McCormick, Alternate
James Robertson, Alternate

1. FY22 Annual Action Plan Public Hearing

The meeting was opened at 7:01 p.m. Ms. Berman explained that the planning process for this action plan will take place in three overarching phases. FY22 is the second year in the FY21-25 consolidated plan, which was submitted to HUD last year around this time. That then breaks down into a 1-year annual action plan, which will be discussed tonight, and in the fall the annual CAPER will be discussed.

Ms. Berman explained that HUD publishes yearly updates to area AMI to determine income limits for the department's HUD programs. In the Boston metro region, AMI has increased in the past year, which shifts slightly the income eligibility for some programs.

She said that the public comment period for the annual action plan closes on May 4 and following this public hearing the plan will go before ZAP and then the full City Council on April 19. The plan will be submitted to HUD by May 14.

Ms. Berman explained that for FY22, fund allocation is up for CDBG and for HOME, but there will be less funding for ESG programs.

Ms. Berman presented the goals and ongoing initiatives underway which include the creation, preservation and rehabilitation of affordable housing (including Coleman House, West Newton Armory, and Haywood House, and Golda Meir House), a down payment assistance grant program, and furthering fair housing through continued partnership and education about fair housing.

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The Human Services component of the program includes providing financial support and stability to the low- and moderate-income population. The Human Service program is capped at 15% of annual allocation plus FY21 program income. Funds in FY21 were awarded for human service programs, emergency solutions, and architectural access to various local nonprofits.

Mr. Brown reflected on his experience serving on the review committee for the human services program. He said that because staff come into the review process with prior knowledge of how programs have performed in the past and have pertinent information Board members don't always know, in the future having Board members provide scores might not be the best way for them to be involved in the process. Perhaps Board members would be more useful by providing comments and suggestions to the scores and evaluations done by the review team.

Ms. Molinsky said that she also found her experience on the ESG review insightful, and agreed that it seemed appropriate for Board members to ask questions and participate in the conversation, but having Board members complete the scoring component might not be necessary.

Chair Doeringer then opened up the hearing for public comment.

India Arnold from the NCDF spoke. She shared that the CDBG program has contributed immensely to the community, especially during the pandemic. Having access to funding like CDBG is crucial to the NCDF being able to provide security and support to community members. Ms. Arnold thanked staff for enabling NCDF and other organizations to access and use this funding.

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Mr. Brown, the Board then voted to close the public hearing.

Ms. Parisca asked for clarification on architectural access, and whether it extended beyond access to apartment buildings and homes. Ms. Leung answered that those funds have been used for public facilities for things like installing curb cuts and accessible pedestrian signals, creating accessible paths, and making other updates to bring the city into ADA compliance. Ms. Parisca related that those changes were important, but that perhaps the city should pay for those upgrades out of their budget and use these funds instead for affordable housing.

Mr. Brown asked what the biggest impediment is to affordable housing in the city, and whether there is something the city is doing now that could make a big impact to unlock more opportunities for affordable housing. Ms. Berman said that in her view, zoning is the number one thing to focus on. Chair Doeringer also noted that the city is contemplating the creation of an affordable housing trust.

Ms. Molinsky agreed with Ms. Parisca and expressed a wish to see architectural access funds used in service of creating accessible affordable units, which the city needs. She also asked for clarification on the administration funds and Newton's role in staffing the consortium. Ms. Berman explained that 20% of CDBG funds goes toward CDBG admin. The city also receives HOME entitlement funds, of which a portion goes to cover the admin costs related to Newton staffing the HOME consortium.

Chair Doeringer asked if there was more funding provided for administration along with the CARES Act funding the city received. Ms. Berman said that the city took a percentage of those funds for admin.

Chair Doeringer asked whether members of staff had a sense for whether funding for these programs is likely to be higher in the next fiscal year. Mr. Heath explained that that is not yet clear, but that appropriations are likely to be different under the new presidential administration. Though nothing is certain, it is likely that CDBG and HOME funding is likely to be on par or greater than this year. Ms.

Leung added that in past years, allocation amounts are not usually provided to municipalities this early and being able to be ahead of schedule is a reason to be optimistic.

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele and seconded by Ms. Molinsky, the Board voted to recommend the approval of the FY22 Annual Action Plan.

2. Zoning Redesign

Mr. Heath said that ZAP will shortly be taking up conversation about village centers in the Zoning Redesign process. Ms. Kemmett added that staff has been revisiting past planning documents related to village centers including the comprehensive plan, Climate Action Plan, vision plans, and others to pull out the recommendations and lessons from those processes to incorporate those ideas in the village center discussions.

Chair Doeringer asked if community engagement would be part of this next stage in zoning redesign. Mr. Heath confirmed that it would be, and that Nevena Pilipovic-Wengler has been working on crafting that engagement plan and will be joining Board members for the regular May meeting to discuss it in greater detail.

3. Zoning Amendments Updates

Mr. Heath said that the proposed amendments to Riverside are coming back before City Council on April 13 for its first hearing, which the Board will need to be present for. The zoning and special permit are tied together for Riverside, but the zoning changes should be fairly straightforward.

Local preference, which is in the Inclusionary Zoning ordinance, is also up for discussion. Mr. Heath explained that Newton, like many nearby towns, has the highest allowed threshold for local preference in affordable housing lotteries, which is 70%. Judi Barrett, the consultant who has worked with the city on the analysis of impediments to fair housing, has been looking at the results of recent lotteries in the city to analyze what those numbers can tell us about who is being served by our current process, and what the potential impact of making changes to that threshold might be.

Ms. Molinsky said that the results of that analysis will be interesting because determining the right number for local preference is tricky. An argument can be made in favor of keeping a high amount of local preference, especially for senior housing which can enable older folks to age in their community, yet having a local preference threshold that is very high can also potentially serve as a barrier to greater diversity. It is a complex and nuanced issue.

Ms. Kemmett added that the long-range team has been working with current planning and ISD on some zoning cleanup items separate from zoning redesign. Most of those items do not include substantial policy changes, but rather fixes to clarify vague language in the ordinance and typos.

4. City updates

Mr. Heath explained that April is Fair Housing Month, and there are several trainings and events that Board members have been invited to.

The conversation about housing trusts is still ongoing, and the Newton Housing Partnership and staff will continue to analyze the pros and cons of such a trust in Newton.

5. Minutes

Ms. Kemmett followed up on a question from a past meeting regarding marijuana courier licenses, confirming that established marijuana retailers do not need an additional separate license to contract out to marijuana couriers.

Mr. Steele requested one minor change to clarify something in the minutes for March 1. Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Ms. Molinsky and unanimously approved, the minutes from March 1 were accepted as amended.

Upon a motion by Mr. Brown, seconded by Mr. Steele and unanimously approved, the minutes for March 8 were accepted.

6. Adjournment

Upon a motion by Mr. Steele, seconded by Mr. Brown and unanimously approved, the meeting was adjourned at 8:23 p.m.