

APPROVED

Newton Housing Partnership Meeting

Notes from March 16, 2021 Meeting

Zoom Meeting

6:00-8:00 pm

Partnership Members in Attendance: Eliza Datta, Chuck Eisenberg, Lizbeth Heyer, Kathi Marchi, Josephine McNeil, Marva Serotkin

Others in Attendance: Barney Heath, Amanda Berman, members of the community and City Council

The February 16, 2021 meeting summary was unanimously approved. Moved by Chuck Eisenberg and seconded by Josephine McNeil.

Local Preference Policy

Judi Barrett and Catherine Dennison presented their work to date for the City on the effectiveness of and need for the existing local preference policy and to assess the barriers that might be created by the policy.

There are three groups that are included in the local preference policy: those who live in Newton, those with children in the Newton Public Schools and those who work in Newton. The consultants reviewed the lottery and lease up data, spoke to developers and lottery agents if there are discrepancies and reviewed three projects each with greater than 10 affordable units. Of the 61 affordable units in the three developments (TRIO, Austin Street and Hancock), 29 tenants selected were white non-non-hispanic (48%) while 18% were Black and the remainder were hispanic and asian. There was a significant discrepancy between the number of Black applicants and the number of Blacks ultimately selected. It was suggested that the reason for this discrepancy is that those not selected did not meet the credit criteria with the underwriters and tax credit investors. The consultants continue to work on the data. Partnership members requested data on the number of disabled applicants and those selected and the age breakdown of applicants and those selected.

The Newton Fair Housing Commission is looking at the lottery and lease up process. Ultimately there is a need for affirmative fair housing marketing. The consultants recommended that the City determine what it wants from the policy. One town, Brookline, no longer has a local preference policy. There is a meeting on April 12th at ZAP and Chuck Eisenberg volunteered to attend on behalf of the Partnership.

Open Meeting Law and NHP working groups

Staff circulated the AG opinion regarding the Open Meeting Law. It was agreed that in order not to keep within the parameters of the law, if upon discussion of a particular matter it was determined by the body that the matter could benefit from further analysis, someone would volunteer to bring back to the group a report and others could volunteer to assist in that endeavor and bring back a report to the full Partnership.

Affordable Housing Trust for Newton

The Partnership discussed the advantages and concerns of an AFHT that included composition of the board, opportunity to streamline the process for creating affordable housing, risk of establishing a duplicative process, opportunity of capturing new funding sources and establishing predictable funding streams. A discussion ensued as to whether the Partnership should make recommendations to City Council at its upcoming meeting. Some members felt that the Partnership was not as knowledgeable as it should be about the legal requirements in the enabling legislation for the creation of a trust. After the discussion, it was decided that there should be no statement at the upcoming meeting. Lizbeth Heyer volunteered to draft a letter to the City Council on behalf of the Partnership to be reviewed at the next Partnership meeting prior to submission to the Council.

Newton Housing Partnership Initiatives

- Extremely low income housing strategy. Marva Serotkin reviewed the revision to the original proposal. Staff have reviewed the concept of establishing an economic self-sufficiency program with the Mayor who requested that Deb Youngblood, Commissioner of Health and Human Services, review the proposal. Staff will return to the Partnership with feedback and possible funding options.

- Zoning Redesign. Discussion with the City Council will start in April. The new Housing Choice Program will be included.
- DEI. Josephine McNeil stated that there is no diversity committee in Newton. It was suggested that an DEI educational program with the Fair Housing Commission would be a good starting point for discussion.

Riverside

The developer has submitted a revision to the original proposal with the result that the total number of units has been reduced. Following the IZ Ordinance, the number of units for those earning less than 80% would be reduced by 6 units and the number of units for those earning between 80-110% would increase. It was agreed to invite the developer to return to the Partnership to discuss the importance of maintaining the number of units under 80%.

Armory

The CPC has awarded the project funding for a Phase 2 environmental study. Staff are returning to the Mass Historical Society and are working with Affirmative Investments on an RFP.

COVID Emergency Housing Relief Program

An additional \$1.2 m has been allocated for housing rental assistance through June.

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

Respectfully Submitted,

Marva Serotkin