

DRAFT

Newton Housing Partnership Meeting
Notes from January 18, 2022, Meeting
Conference Call Meeting
6:00-8:00 pm

Approved at 2/15/22 mtg.

Partnership Members in Attendance: Mark Caggiano, Eliza Datta, Chuck Eisenberg, Lizbeth Heyer, Ann Houston, Josephine McNeil, Marva Serotkin, Albert Simmons, Stephen Tise

Others in Attendance: Amanda Berman, Eamon Bencivengo, Barney Heath, Hattie Kerwin Derrick, City Counselors Bowman and Pam Wright, members of the community

The November 16, 2021 meeting summary was unanimously approved.

Policy Issues Related to Property Manager Tenant Selection Practices

Albert Simmons introduced Jennifer Gilbert from the Housing Navigator, an online search engine for locating affordable housing, and Nick Kelly from the Boston Housing Authority who is a researcher studying housing issues. Jennifer and Nick were invited to the meeting to enhance the discussion about the barriers to improving diversity in Newton through housing. The discussion focused on gaining an understanding about the relatively low number of Black and Brown individuals compared to those in the lottery who ultimately move into affordable housing in Newton. Impediments that were discussed included

- People apply to many lotteries and there is no tracking of the application and acceptance process
- Is Newton viewed as a welcoming community
- After entering the lottery, prescreeners find that applicants do not have the money for the rent
- Are developers obligated to provide the City about the lottery and acceptance data? There are privacy concerns about disclosing data.

The Partnership considered steps to obtain data and develop policies to increase diversity, equity and inclusion in Newton:

- Require data sharing from developers by ordinance or include requirement in contracts with the City
- Collaborate with network of communities on addressing impediments
- Find researchers who would analyze the problem. They mentioned the Thurman Center at NYU, as a possible resource. Jennifer and Nick agreed to assist in finding researchers interested in housing issues
- Staff follow up with DHD regarding data available
- Mark Development was identified as a developer who might be cooperative in assisting the City to understanding the impediments
- Invite a credit counseling organization to a meeting to discuss their services

The Partnership thanked Jennifer and Nick for attending the meeting and participating in the discussion.

Economic Self Sufficiency Proposal and Community Needs Assessment

Amanda Berman reported that the Department of Health and Human Services reported that the first draft of the needs assessment is due early February. Amanda will check if the draft will be public or an internal document. Question was asked about the response to the letter sent to the Mayor from the Partnership with recommendations for the use of ARPA funds that included funding for an economic self-sufficiency program in Newton. Staff will get back to the Partnership.

Zoning Redesign

There is a new State zoning requirement for MBTA communities such as Newton with numerous types of public transportation stations within its borders to establish “by right” zoning districts that allow for multi-units housing in proximity to those stops. There are no penalties for not meeting the multifamily housing zoning requirement by 2023, but failure to adopt by right zoning will result in the loss of access to certain state funding. Question raised about the interface with the Village zoning redesign currently underway. It was agreed that the staff will organize a primer on this new zoning requirement at the next meeting of the Partnership. It was agreed that the Partnership should comment following education at the next meeting.

Project Updates

West Newton Armory. Staff reported that Metro West Collaborative Development and Civico Development have been selected to design and construct the transformation of West Newton Armory into 100% affordable housing. The developers will hold a Meet the Developer Community Zoom on January 26th.

Steve Tise raised concerns about the design and questioned the role of the Partnership in addressing the issues he has identified. Eliza Datta reminded the members that the Partnership created project review criteria to guide consideration of all projects brought before the Partnership. Scale, Stability and Sustainability are topics for consideration. Eliza Datta was asked to redistribute the criteria to guide discussion with the developers of the West Newton Armory that will take place at the next meeting. Josephine McNeil remarked that the role of the NHP in reviewing projects should not be limited to affordability but also the living conditions for the residents.

Affordable Housing Trust. The Mayor is seeking nominations for the Board of Trustees for the Trust following approval of the creation of the Trust by the City Council.

Emergency Housing and Relief Program. Amanda Berman reported that since October 158 households have been assisted with 126 who received assistance previously. 67 households received assistance with utility payments,

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

Respectfully Submitted,

Marva Serotkin