Approved on 4/19/22

Newton Housing Partnership Meeting

Notes from March 15, 2022 Meeting

Conference Call Meeting

6:00-8:00 pm

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: City Councilor Bowman, Barney Heath, Eamon Bencivengo, members of the community

The February 15, 2022 meeting summary was unanimously approved.

Policy Issues Related to Property Manager Tenant Selection Practices

Lizbeth Heyer introduced Chris Norris, Executive Director, Metro Housing Boston and Cheyenne Engel. Chris Norris presented an overview of the mission and services provided by Metro Housing Boston. The mission is to provide resources that help families and individuals to achieve housing stability including assisting people to move from homelessness to self-sufficiency. Services include management of 10,000 federal housing vouchers and development of mobility programs. Newton receives 61 of these vouchers, less than 1% of the total.

In response to suggestions for ‘marketing’ Newton to prospective low-income renters, Chris and Cheyenne recommended the following:

* Create awareness of Newton through marketing to renters and owners
* Organize a bus tour of Newton
* Develop a presence on Facebook and other social media sites
* Avoid what is said publicly about Newton that could be misinterpreted
* Mirror for profit and commercial property marketing
* Distribute community bio with key information about Newton
* Experiment with different marketing approaches to create a welcoming message about Newton
* Prepare for IZ units that will be coming online (reference made to missed opportunity with TRIO)

Cheyenne presented an overview of the relatively new SMOWMASS program

whereby households that receive a section 8 voucher from Metro could opt to seek housing in communities of opportunity such as Newton. Metro identifies landlords who would be willing to rent to the voucher holder by providing incentives. They work with the landlord as part of the rent-up process and are available to support renters in their tenancy. They also provide a $500 cash payment at the start of the tenancy and an additional $500 at the end of the first year.

Finally, the discussion focused on Housing Choice Vouchers— Mobile Section 8 and MRVPs. Marketing to individuals holding these vouchers should be considered in addition to the lottery.

Josephine McNeil stated that she believes that Newton is not welcoming to low-income families as it does not have the services to support the families and that services must be considered simultaneously with the development of affordable housing units.

Lizbeth thanked Chris and Cheyenne for attending the NHP meeting.

Community Needs Assessment Update

Staff reviewed the Community Needs Assessment Report. Key findings from those interviewed include the following issues:

* Difficulty paying bills
* Loss of job
* Mental and health issues
* Need for housing stability

Recommendations included immediate direct support for individuals and developing programs that will sustain support.

Lizbeth Heyer reviewed with the NHP the letter that was sent to the Mayor regarding the use of ARPA funds that totaled $20m including $500k for supportive services. Since the ARPA funds must be expended in 4 years, NHP members voiced concern about promoting ARPA to address long term supportive services, such as mental health and childcare. Rather, it was recommended that funds be used for concrete purposes such as purchasing sites. Mark Caggiano reminded the NHP that Newton does not have a Foundation like Brookline that provides funding for these services.

Josephine McNeil remarked that there is a sense of urgency for the 168 families who have received emergency funding during COVID and that ARPA funds should be directed at these individuals. There is a need to stabilize the housing situation now for this group.

Lizbeth Heyer volunteered to update the original letter sent to the Mayor adding the need for $1m for supportive services and priority for buying property.

FY23 Annual Action Plan

Eamon Bencivengo presented the FY23 Annual Action Plan that lays out a plan to spend funds from CDBG/HOME/Emergency. The total amount is estimated to be $3.6m. Staff are making presentations to various committees. The goals are the following:

* Affordable housing (including a pre-commitment to the Armory)
* Fair housing
* Provision of human services
* Supportive services for homeless and at risk of homelessness
* Architectural access

Since the meeting time was ending and there were questions from the members, Lizbeth announced that the Action Plan will be on the agenda for the April meeting. Marva Serotkin recommended that in the future the Plan address a specific goal, such as housing stabilization and retention, rather then relatively small funds for many projects.

Upcoming Meetings

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

Respectfully Submitted,

Marva Serotkin