

**CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES**

JANUARY 23, 2002

PORTSMOUTH CITY HALL

7:00 P.M.

Present: Robert Layton, Chairman; Cicero Lewis; Nancy Emerson; Vern Gardner; Lynne Langley; Jean Pecunies; Peter Rice; William Thorpe; and Russ Van Billiard.

Absent: Dani Rooney.

Staff: Cindy Hayden, Community Development Director

Chairman Layton opened the public hearing at 7:00 p.m. to hear comments from the public regarding progress in the current fiscal year on CDBG-funded projects; an overview of CDBG project eligibility requirements; and input regarding what projects should be funded in the coming fiscal year beginning July 1, 2002. Mr. Layton asked Community Development Director Cindy Hayden to provide an overview of the eligibility requirements, budget process and projects status update.

With regard to the CDBG budget process and project eligibility, Ms. Hayden explained that CDBG funds are provided to the City by U.S. Housing and Urban Development each year in the form of an entitlement grant. Further, she said the main purpose of these funds is to carry out programs, projects and services that benefit residents of Portsmouth who earn low or moderate incomes. She went on to explain that this can take the form of benefiting individual families by, for example, providing low interest housing rehab loans to families earning low or moderate incomes; creating jobs through economic development loans or technical assistance; and carrying out public facility projects (such as streetscape or park improvements) in eligible neighborhoods.

Ms. Hayden said the funds can also be used to carry out projects that benefit, for example, the residents of housing facilities such as Wamesit Place, Gosling Meadows and Ledgewood Apartments, where at least 51% of residents earn low or moderate incomes. In addition, CDBG funds can be granted to non-profit agencies that provide services (such as housing and health care) to Portsmouth residents who earn low and moderate incomes. Finally, Ms. Hayden said CDBG funds can be used to carry out projects that improve handicapped accessibility such as installation of accessible ramps in public buildings and curb cuts on City sidewalks.

Ms. Hayden provided a PowerPoint slide presentation to describe project progress on CDBG-funded projects in the current fiscal year. She said the \$514,000 Kearsarge Way Streetscape Project & Hislop Little League Parking Lot Improvements began early last summer and included replacement of water lines (not CDBG funded), paving, curbing, sidewalks, and tree plantings. At Hislop parking area, the gravel lot was paved and wooden guardrail installed. The project is essentially complete with only the tree plantings to occur in spring 2002. Neighborhood residents appear to be very pleased with the improvements.

In addition, Ms. Hayden said the \$93,000 Greenleaf Avenue Sidewalk Project involved the installation of granite curbing and a sidewalk between the PHA-owned Wamesit Apartments family housing complex, and the Route 1 Bypass. This project is virtually complete.

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Work has also begun on the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Goodwin Park. Chain link fence has been installed around the monument and the conservators (Daedalus, Inc. of Cambridge, MA), under contract to the City, are performing the testing necessary before they remove the monument to their workspace to begin restoration. Under the terms of the contract, Daedalus has until Spring 2003 to complete the restoration work, however, the City is hopeful the project will be complete next Fall.

Ms. Hayden also highlighted the CDBG-funded Housing Rehab Program which provides low interest loans to eligible homeowners for code repairs; the Hometown first time homebuyers program which provides downpayment and closing cost assistance; and the Residential Accessibility Program which provides grants to homeowners for handicapped accessible ramps, bathroom modifications, and other accessibility improvements.

With regard to the CDBG budget making process for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2002, Ms. Hayden said that the Citizens Advisory Committee will gather input from residents over the next several months, prioritize eligible projects brought to their attention, and make recommendations for funding to the City Manager for approval. The budget must be complete and submitted to U.S. Housing and Urban Development for their approval by May 15, 2002. In closing, Ms. Hayden said that, each year, residents bring many worthwhile projects to the attention of the Citizens Advisory Committee, however, they can only recommend funding for eligible projects, and there are always more projects requested than there is available funding.

At 7:10 p.m., Mr. Layton asked for comments from the public with regard to input on community needs and potential CDBG projects for FY 2002/2003.

Mr. Tom Belmont, President of the Atlantic Heights Neighborhood Association thanked the CAC for past support of neighborhood projects, and said they have tried to prioritize requests for future funding. He said the neighborhood's highest priority is to make sure funding for the improvements at Big Rock Park are sufficient. Second, he said they would like to have an electrical outlet at Maynard Park for use on certain occasions such as National Night Out. Mr. Belmont also said they would like to see continued funding for streetscape improvements, and would defer decisionmaking regarding which streets to do next to the City. He reminded the CAC that the neighborhood has previously proposed a central bus stop at Falkland Place across from Hanscom Park with the goal of reducing potential injuries. He said that, while the Kearsarge Way work was going on, this area was used for that purpose and it worked well. Mr. Belmont indicated that the neighborhood would like to move forward with a design plan for improvements to the wooded portion of Hislop Park. In particular, they are concerned with removal of the understory and brush in these dense woods to reduce potential crime. He said a handgun and bullets were found buried in the woods last year. Finally, Mr. Belmont said they would like to add two benches to Hanscom Park that would be in the shade; specifically, on either side of the concrete walk from Falkland Place underneath the crab trees. In closing, he spoke with high regard for the work completed in the neighborhood to date, and thanked the CAC for what they've done in the Heights. Mr. Belmont provided a handout describing the neighborhood's priorities (attached).

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Margaret Britton, owner of the 72 building and member of Friends of the Pearl, said the 72 has been deemed eligible to be on the National Register for historic buildings. Ms. Britton also said that the Land and Heritage Conservation Investment Program (LCHIP) has determined that she is eligible to apply for LCHIP funding for restoration of a portion of the building. Because the building is privately owned, this would be accomplished through a preservation easement from the NH Preservation Alliance, similar to a conservation easement across land. Ms. Britton indicated that, following the building's restoration, the 5-year plan is to have the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail take over part of the building.

Ms. Britton said she attended tonight's public hearing to seek funding for an elevator to make the public area of the building, which will be subject to the preservation easement, handicapped accessible. She said they get many requests for accessing the building by the handicapped. Ms. Britton said Friends of the Pearl is a large group and includes the Society for the Protection of New England Antiquities (SPNEA), Richard Candee, Valerie Cunningham of the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail, and Aaron Sturgis. She said the building was used for the Martin Luther King celebration, and that the Men of Color in Service as well as the Portsmouth Advocates have used the building for public gatherings.

Valerie Cunningham of the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail said the building is one of the sites on the trail. It was the first and only black church, and operated from about 1915 to the 1950s. She said they need an elevator because the sanctuary is on the 2nd floor.

Mr. Gardner asked if they had considered a ramp rather than an elevator. Ms. Britton responded that the elevation is too steep for a ramp. Mr. Gardner asked if the state had paid them for the easements, and Ms. Britton responded that the opposite was true; they would have to pay the NH Preservation Alliance, the entity that would be charged with monitoring the easement. She added that the preservation easement will include the steeple, the public walkway and the façade.

Ms. Jackie Cowell, Director of the Community Child Care Center (CCCC), complemented CAC members on their innovative use of CDBG funds at the Community Child Care Center. She also thanked the CAC for their ongoing support of her agency, particularly since the state subsidy that families receive for tuition assistance is stagnant now. In addition, Ms. Cowell is interested in working with City staff to market the CDBG-funded first time homebuyer and business loan programs to CCCC clients. Ms. Hayden said she would have someone from the Community Development Department get in touch with her to provide additional information about these programs.

Ted Connors, Executive Director of the Portsmouth Housing Authority, thanked the CAC for their support of the playgrounds at Wamesit Place and at Gosling Meadows.

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Maureen Babin of Crotched Mountain Community Care said she is interested in learning more about the Residential Accessibility Program and the Public Service Agency Grant Program and how they might be used to help the clients she serves. Ms. Babin said they have approximately 260 clients in Rockingham and Strafford counties. Her agency assists in setting up care plans for clients, and some clients need, for example, ramps so that they can continue to live in their homes. Ms. Hayden said she would have someone from the Community Development Department get in touch with her to provide additional information about these programs.

City Councilor Harold Whitehouse said he would like the CAC to consider using CDBG funds to replace the culvert under the causeway across the South Mill Pond, and replace it with a bridge. Mr. Whitehouse said there used to be a bridge there, and he believes that rebuilding the bridge would provide better water flow in the pond and reduce the smell. Further, he said he believes this should be CDBG eligible because there are elderly residents on fixed incomes in the area, as well as disadvantaged school children at the Middle School overlooking the pond. He said the new bridge and upgrade of Junkins Avenue should incorporate period sidewalks and curbing.

Hearing no further comments from the public, Chairman Layton closed the hearing at 7:50 p.m. Ms. Hayden reminded CAC members that their next meeting will be at 5:15 p.m. on Wednesday February 6th in the Planning/Community Development conference room, 3rd floor, City Hall.