

**CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES**

**JANUARY 28, 2003**

**PORTSMOUTH CITY HALL**

**7:00 P.M.**

Present: Robert Layton, Chairman; Cicero Lewis, Vice Chairman; Nancy Emerson; Lynne Langley; Jean Pecunies; Dani Rooney; Paul Staples; William Thorpe; Russ Van Billiard; and Gia Yannekis.

Staff: Cindy Hayden, Community Development Director.

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Chairman Layton opened the hearing at 7:00 p.m. He said the purpose of the hearing was to inform the public of CDBG project eligibility requirements, and obtain input from the public with regard to community needs and desired CDBG projects for the coming fiscal year. Chairman Layton then asked Ms. Hayden to outline CDBG funding eligibility requirements.

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. In short, she said Portsmouth uses its CDBG dollars to fund a diverse range of housing, neighborhood improvement, economic development, public service, and handicapped accessibility projects.

Ms. Hayden said CDBG-eligible neighborhoods in Portsmouth include Cabot Street, McDonough Street, Atlantic Heights, and Osprey Landing. She used a PowerPoint slide presentation to provide an overview of the types of neighborhood projects that have been carried out in these neighborhoods in recent years. In the Cabot Street neighborhood, she highlighted streetscape improvements as well as new playground equipment at Cater Park; and, in the McDonough Street neighborhood, she mentioned the Rock Street Park improvement project and aesthetic improvements to the City parking lot on McDonough Street. She also showed before and after slides of Goodwin Park, which sits between these two neighborhoods; she said this park underwent a major rehab several years ago and the park's historic Soldiers and Sailors monument is currently being restored. She said CDBG funds have been focused in the past several years in Atlantic Heights with substantial streetscape improvements on Kearsarge Way and Saratoga Way (Spring 2003), and park rehab projects at Hislop Park, Big Rock Park, Hanscom Park and Maynard Park.

Ms. Hayden said CDBG 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. New CDBG-funded playgrounds have been provided to all three of these housing complexes. In addition, Ms.

Hayden said CDBG funds can be used to carry out projects that remove existing architectural barriers to create handicapped accessibility through such projects as installation of accessible ramps or lifts in public buildings and curb cuts on City sidewalks. She said CDBG funds can also be granted to non-profit agencies that provide services (such as housing and health care) to Portsmouth residents who earn low and moderate incomes. In the area of housing, Ms. Hayden said CDBG funds can be used for grants and loans to assist residents who earn low or moderate incomes to rehab their homes to meet code violations, or to buy their first home.

Ms. Hayden concluded her slide presentation and went on to discuss the CDBG budget making process for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2003. She 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, 2003. 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.

Chairman Layton asked if any of those present wished to provide any input or comments on community needs and potential CDBG projects for FY 2003/2004.

Ms. Stephanie Krenn, President of the Atlantic Heights Neighborhood Association thanked Ms. Hayden for providing the map of City-owned land in the Heights and the real estate listing for the lot on Falkland Place. She also said she wanted to let the CAC know how very helpful CDBG funding has been for her neighborhood, particularly in building a strong and active community. She said as soon as a CDBG-funded project is completed, neighborhood residents have come out to adopt-a-spot and plant flowers, decorate light poles, or invite a forester out to teach them how to prune the apple trees in Hanscom Park. Ms. Krenn said as soon as the wood planters were constructed at Big Rock Park, Ms. Langley and she were out planting flowers in them; this led to other neighbors coming out and bringing food, and making plans for other social activities.

Ms. Krenn said the neighborhood's first priority is for continued progress on streetscape improvements. She said the Kearsarge Way improvements changed the way residents saw their neighborhood. Specifically, she said, over 200 people attended the neighborhood's yard sale last year, many of whom had grown up or previously lived in the Heights. Ms. Krenn said many of those people told her how thrilled they were with the improvements to Kearsarge Way, and that neighborhood residents are grateful and optimistic about the scheduled improvements to Saratoga Way. She said all of the streets are too narrow and the pavement is in poor condition and, further, that the Heights was not designed with cars in mind. She said the neighborhood understands the City will select the next street to be improved, and the neighborhood would like to be informed about that process and the associated rationale.

Ms. Krenn moved on to the neighborhood's next desired project: improvements at Hislop Park. She said when the neighborhood was designed, this was intended to be a recreation area. She said residents would like to have a safe park at Hislop with waterfront views and an open vista, with something for all ages. Further, she said they would like CDBG to fund some park improvements at Hislop in the coming fiscal year so that momentum is not lost. She said the neighborhood is looking forward to working with the City over the next few months on a design

for park improvements (design work is already funded in the current fiscal year). She also mentioned that Hanscom Park is a memorial park and the neighborhood really needs a park at Hislop that they can use for more active recreation.

Ms. Krenn said the next project they are seeking CDBG funding for is the purchase of the .26 acre parcel on Falkland Place, which is currently for sale, for possible use as snow ban parking. She said she is aware there are security issues with creating snow ban parking under the Interstate bridge, but wonders where else residents could park during snow bans. She said the neighborhood would look for matching funds to purchase the lot.

The last item the Atlantic Heights neighborhood would like to see carried out, Ms. Krenn said, is the completion of two projects: additional benches in the shade for Hanscom Park, and pedestrian scale lighting for Kearsarge Way.

Mr. Van Billiard asked what the current zoning was for the Falkland Place parcel. Ms. Hayden said she would find out and report back to the CAC.

Chairman Layton asked if others in attendance would like to speak. Mr. Richard Candee said he was present to represent the Pearl Street Church/Black Heritage Trail, along with Margaret Britton, the owner of the facility and Erin Autry, a student in one of the classes Mr. Candee teaches. Mr. Candee echoed the sentiments expressed by Ms. Krenn regarding the positive improvements that CDBG funds have brought to the Atlantic Heights neighborhood. Mr. Candee provided handouts with additional information about the Pearl Street Church. He said they are seeking funding for the design of accessibility improvements at the Church; the facility desperately needs to be made handicapped accessible as the meeting hall space in the sanctuary is on the second floor. He said many groups use the Church for public events such as weddings, meetings, and other community activities.

Further, he said that while the Church is currently privately owned, they are looking into ownership by a non-profit organization. He also said that once the improvements funded through the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) are carried out this Spring, there will be a permanent historic preservation easement on the exterior and interior of the building, and that will make the NH Preservation Alliance a co-owner.

Mr. Candee said the church was the center of social life of the black community, and that prior to World War II it was the only black church in NH. Further, he said that Martin Luther King once preached there.

In closing, Mr. Candee urged reinvestment in the CDBG-funded handicapped accessibility program for non-profits so that they can determine the feasibility of creating handicapped accessible egress and handicapped accessible bathrooms at The Pearl.

Mr. Staples asked if Leary Field or the Plains currently had accessible bathrooms. Ms. Hayden said Leary Field has men's and women's bathrooms but that they are not accessible; she said she believes temporary accessible facilities are provided during the summer. She said there were no permanent bathroom facilities at the Plains, but she did not know what was provided in terms of temporary facilities during the summer months.

Mr. Staples also asked about accessible sidewalks in the Maple Haven neighborhood. Ms. Hayden said CDBG funds could not be used to construct new sidewalks in the neighborhood,

only to remove “architectural barriers” or curbs and replace them with accessible sidewalk ramps.

Chairman Layton asked if any others in attendance wished to speak. An individual representing a resident of Feaster said it is difficult to find an accessible route of travel between PHA’s Feaster apartments and the new Parrott Avenue Senior Center. She asked what the improvements to Court Street would entail. Ms. Hayden said she knew the Court Street improvement project would soon go out to bid, though it is not CDBG-funded. She said she would look into the matter and get back to her with an answer.

Chairman Layton asked one more time if other members of the public wished to speak. Margaret Britton, owner of the Pearl Street Church, said that the historic preservation easement will create public access to the building in perpetuity and that they are in the process of putting together the next big effort to solicit funding for building improvements. She said the Society for the Protection of New England Antiquities is involved in the effort, as well as many students from Boston University.

Hearing no further comments from the public, Mr. Layton adjourned the public hearing at 7:30 p.m.