

APPROVED ON 1/28/04
CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES

JANUARY 14, 2004

PORTSMOUTH CITY HALL

7:00 P.M.

Present: Chairman Bob Layton, Vice Chairman Cicero Lewis, Dani Rooney, Jean Pecunies, Russ Van Billiard, Paul Staples, Lynn Langley, Nancy Emerson.

Absent: William Thorpe

Staff: Cindy Hayden, Community Development Director; David Moore, Program Manager

Chairman Layton opened the hearing at 7:00 p.m. and immediately turned the meeting over to Ms. Hayden to discuss which areas of the City are eligible for CDBG funded projects. She noted in this current fiscal year the City received an \$809,000 CDBG entitlement grant. Ms. Hayden explained that CDBG funds must be used to benefit families who earn low- and moderate-incomes and gave examples of CDBG programming. Ms. Hayden noted funding projects in eligible areas and handicapped accessibility projects throughout the city are popular CDBG requests. She noted that handicapped accessibility projects must remove a barrier, versus funding the creation of an entirely new accessible facility.

She noted the process of gathering public input into the budget begins tonight, and that people could contact staff in any manner to communicate ideas about how funds should be spent. Ms. Hayden noted that the CAC faces difficult choices as there are always more project ideas than funding. As part of this process, staff must make sure all projects considered are eligible, and then work with the CAC to prioritize eligible projects. Once the CAC finalizes the CDBG budget it is submitted to the City Manager for approval. The budget is submitted to HUD by May 15th for their approval. Ms. Hayden said that it is important that recommendations come in to the CAC early so they can be fully considered.

The eligible block groups, are those in which the majority of the residents earn low or moderate incomes. Overall, two previously eligible census tracts will remain so for the next ten years, and one new tract (loosely defined as part of the Frank Jones Farm neighborhood) has been added to those eligible areas. Ms. Hayden also clarified that this is the first year the tract comprised of Atlantic Heights had been officially recognized through the Census. She reminded the board that a survey of residents in Atlantic Heights initiated by the City made that tract eligible for CDBG funding previously. Ms. Hayden took the time to also point out exactly which landmarks, developments, and roads comprised the new eligible tracts. She noted a portion of the Christian Shore

neighborhood was picked up, and the Cabot and McDonough Street neighborhoods are no longer eligible census tract areas.

Ms. Hayden turned the meeting back over to Chairman Layton who read into the record a letter from Robin McIntosh, President of the Atlantic Heights Neighborhood Association. In the letter Ms. McIntosh thanked the CAC for their support of the neighborhood over the years. The letter highlighted five projects the neighborhood would like to see the CAC support. The projects include the work begun on Preble Way and Crescent Way and the lighting work, which was envisioned for Kearsarge Way. They also listed the Hislop Park improvements and asked that the CAC partially fund the \$8,000 the neighborhood has estimated it would need to complete the application needed to place the neighborhood on the National Register of Historic Places. The letter communicated the neighborhood's interest in improving pedestrian links between their neighborhood and downtown. The letter also suggested the purchase of vacant property on Falkland Way for use as a snow ban parking area.

Chairman Layton, thanked Ms. McIntosh who was present. Chairman Layton opened the comment period to others who were present and recognized Ted Connors of the Portsmouth Housing Authority (PHA). Mr. Connors thanked the board for the past support PHA had received on numerous projects, including the \$150,000 of CDBG funding to assist in the Cottage Senior Housing Project. He hopes the 20 units will be opened in the spring.

Judy Bunnell was next to speak and she thanked the CAC for their help in the construction of the new playground at Pannaway Manor (note: CDBG staff advised this project; it was not CDBG-funded). She expressed delight at the playground for the neighborhood and her grandchildren. She, as Community Services Director at the Portsmouth Housing Authority, asked that the CAC be supportive of the activities at the Senior Center and of the RSVP program. She is submitting a grant one more time and hopes that she is able continue that support.

Fran Joseph, of Compass Care, came to thank the CAC and talk about the Senior Companion program, which provides friendly visitations between seniors. Together the seniors may play cards, communicate verbally or in writing, and gain a sense of self-worth. This approach to care encourages a better lifestyle and helps build trust and confidence for seniors who may then seek other help for their medical and emotional needs. After explaining the program she said the goal is to try to keep people out of nursing homes and offer companionship. The Foot-Care clinic at Parrott Avenue has been funded by the CAC and she wished it would continue. The Foot-Care clinic, offers foot care for seniors, especially those with diabetes. She will be submitting a proposal again.

Chairman Layton, hearing no other speakers, closed the public hearing. Ms. Hayden sought to clarify that no CDBG funding was used to build Pannaway Park and noted that sometimes people see Ms. Hayden involved in projects and think that CDBG money was

used. In addition, Ms. Hayden clarified that the \$150,000 Mr. Connors mentioned had already been funded in the current year's budget.

Vice Chairman Lewis asked what the CDBG program can do about affordable housing. Ms. Hayden began by saying that the CDBG program already does many things to help alleviate this problem. For example, programs such as Housing Rehabilitation and the Residential Accessibility programs keep the houses people are already in affordable. The HomeTown program provides funding to make housing prices more attainable for those earning low and moderate-income. In addition, housing developments like Cottage Senior Housing and attempts to fund new housing through the Affordable Housing Challenge Grant are designed to provide more supply to the affordable housing market.

Ms. Hayden said the City's master plan currently being developed, will address affordable housing. She also noted the need for education about the issue as it is seen as a regional issue, particularly since Portsmouth has so little developable land. Ms. Hayden said efforts are also being made to keep existing affordable housing affordable. She noted Ledgewood Apartments as an example where, the City supported PHA in their efforts to work with Ledgewood's private owners in establishing an enhanced Section 8 program there. This program gave the owners more incentive to leave the housing affordable instead of turning it into market rate housing.

Ms. Rooney commented there was a new sign indicating a new name for the apartments. Ms. Hayden hadn't heard of it but said she would check into it.

Vice Chairman Lewis asked about the future of Lafayette School and its possible use for affordable housing. Ms. Hayden said that through the years there had been multiple proposals and said she wouldn't be surprised if a new use was proposed in the next couple of years.

Ms. Hayden added that the City also works through the Public Service Agency Grant program to fund agencies who work on affordable housing, such as The Housing Partnership.

Vice Chairman Lewis said that he had served on a committee which established a demographic profile of the City. He said the same process should be established to show what the current demographic make-up of the city is. Ms. Hayden responded that a profile, such as the Vice Chairman described, is already part of the City's draft master plan. Ms. Hayden said she would provide that information to the CAC. She indicated that people in the middle income areas are the hardest hit, because we have a lot of high end housing and a lot of subsidized housing. Ms. Hayden referred to a presentation she gave at a United Way meeting on January 13th and said she would be happy to provide it to CAC members at their next meeting.

Ms. Langley and Ms. Emerson asked about the CDBG-eligibility of Wamesit and Ledgewood as they relate to the Census tracts in which they are located. Ms. Hayden said individual developments like Ledgewood are eligible for CDBG funding that

benefits residents assuming at least 51% of residents earn low or moderate incomes. Gosling Meadows, PHA's family low-moderate income housing complex, also lies within an eligible Census tract because greater than 51% of residents in that tract earn low or moderate incomes. Ms. Hayden said that, sometimes, Census tracts contain very high concentrations of low/moderate income residents (for example PHA's Margeson Apartments) and this can skew the whole Census tract.

Ms. Hayden said she would provide maps of the census tracts and block groups to the committee.

Chairman Layton invited other comments. Ms. Rooney inquired about the feasibility of the snow ban parking project in the Atlantic Heights as mentioned in the letter sent to the committee by Robin McIntosh. Ms. Hayden said she can check with John Burke and have them do a layout of what a parking lot would look like. She said it is a surprisingly small lot in the way it is configured. Ms. Hayden said she would get back with the CAC on this issue.

Ms. Emerson asked about the appropriateness of completing sidewalks on Woodbury Avenue. Mr. Staples said that this had already been achieved a few years ago and Mr. Staples said the sidewalks are much better.

Chairman Layton closed the meeting at 7:40 p.m.