

**CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES**

FEBRUARY 5, 2003

PORTSMOUTH CITY HALL

6:00 P.M.

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

Absent: William Thorpe and Russ Van Billiard (notified staff).

Staff: Cindy Hayden, Community Development Director; Karen Jacoby, Community Development Program Manager.

Chairman Layton opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. and turned to the first order of business, approval of meeting minutes from November 18, 2002, and minutes from two different public hearings on December 3, 2002. He noted that draft minutes for each had previously been provided to CAC members.

Ms. Emerson moved that the minutes of the November 18, 2002 meeting be approved as presented. Mr. Staples seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. Ms. Yannekis moved that the minutes of hearing #1 on December 3, 2002 be approved as presented. Ms. Emerson seconded the motion, and all voted in favor. Ms. Pecunies made a motion that the minutes of public hearing #2 on December 3, 2002 be approved as presented. Mr. Lewis seconded the motion, and all voted in favor.

Mr. Layton asked Community Development Director Hayden to provide an overview of the potential CDBG projects for FY 2003/2004 that had been brought to the attention of CD staff and the Citizens Advisory Committee by the community.

Ms. Hayden provided CAC members with a handout, titled *Potential FY '03-'04 CDBG-Funded Projects Raised Through Public Input Process, February 5, 2003*, listing each of the projects raised to date, and suggested she provide a verbal overview of each project, and answer questions and obtain feedback from CAC members to provide direction to staff. Ms. Hayden said all projects listed were CDBG-eligible.

Ms. Hayden said the first four projects listed were located in the Atlantic Heights neighborhood. She said improvements of the City-owned Hislop Park is an issue that has been raised by the neighborhood association for several years. She reminded members that this 6.29-acre park is located along the Piscataqua River and that most of the park is heavily wooded, however, the little league field is located within it as well as a playground.

Mr. Staples asked if there were bathroom facilities at Hislop Park and Ms. Hayden responded that temporary facilities are bought on site during the summer months. Mr. Lewis asked if sufficient funds were budgeted to complete the design work. Ms. Hayden said that \$15,000 has been budgeted in this current CDBG fiscal year. These funds were budgeted to pay for a master plan for the park, and for more detailed design and bid specifications for a phase 1 project. She said a number of consultants attended the recent pre-proposal meeting, and that staff would

report back to CAC members on design proposal prices once they are submitted to the City early next month. Ms. Emerson spoke in favor of the redesign of this park, noting that she remembered neighborhood residents saying they were concerned about safety.

Hearing no further comments or questions, Ms. Hayden moved on to describe the next proposed Atlantic Heights project – the purchase of a lot on Falkland Place for use as a snow ban parking area. Ms. Hayden provided a Realtor’s property listing sheet, which provided additional information about the .26 acre lot. She said the lot is currently zoned Mixed Residential Business and is listed at a sale price of \$150,000. Ms. Emerson stated that she was uncertain about the wisdom of spending CDBG funds to purchase parking spaces. Ms. Yannekis concurred and noted that the South End and other areas of Portsmouth also lack adequate parking areas.

Ms. Hayden moved on to describe the next project, an additional phase of streetscape improvements in Atlantic Heights. She reminded CAC members that phase 1 streetscape improvements on Kearsarge Way were completed at a cost of approximately \$500,000. This included new granite curbing, street trees, a new sidewalk, and significant improvements to the travel way. She said the next phase, Saratoga Way, is currently in final design and would go out to bid next week, with bids due in early March. She said the project budget is likely to be very tight, as significantly more drainage work was needed than originally anticipated. She reminded CAC members that the Saratoga Way improvements are funded in the current fiscal year at \$260,000, including design and engineering costs, and that contingency funds may need to be tapped.

Ms. Langley asked if the order of the Atlantic Heights projects on the handout reflected the neighborhood’s prioritization of the projects. Ms. Hayden responded that it did not. Ms. Emerson asked if the installation of lighting on Kearsarge Way was to be paid for with CDBG funds. Ms. Hayden said as part of the work on Kearsarge the underground conduit was put in place at very little cost, however, no CDBG funds had yet been allocated to fund the light poles themselves, which are quite expensive.

Ms. Yannekis inquired what speakers from Atlantic Heights had meant at the public hearing on January 28th when they had commented on the need to “complete” projects. Ms. Hayden said she believed they were referring to the need to install the two pedestrian scale lights at Big Rock Park and that they would like two additional benches to be placed in the shade in Hanscom Park. She said the Hanscom Park lights had been back ordered and were not received by the City until December; the City is scheduled to install these in the Spring. With regard to the benches for Hanscom Park, she said staff had hoped to have sufficient funds to purchase the additional benches last summer as part of the Big Rock Park improvements, but that there were no excess funds to enable this. Ms. Hayden said they may also have been referring to their desire for pedestrian scale lighting on Kearsarge Way.

At the Chairman’s request, Ms. Hayden moved on to the 1895 Cottage Hospital Senior Housing Project. She reminded members that this project will result in the renovation of the City’s historic Cottage Hospital (also known as the 1895 building) to become 20 units of affordable senior housing. The City will continue to own the facility and enter into a long-term lease with the Portsmouth Housing Authority (PHA). Project financing includes HUD HOME funds, a \$310,000 grant from the Federal Home Loan Bank’s Affordable Housing Program, Low Income

Housing Tax Credits and Federal Historical Credits. \$150,000 in CDBG funding is sought in the form of a low interest loan to be repaid from available project cash flow.

She reminded members that while the 1895 project was not funded in the current fiscal year, the CAC had voted on December 3, 2002 to amend the FY 2002/03 CDBG Annual Plan to add the Cottage Senior Housing Project as evidence of the City's commitment to this project. In that this project had been recently discussed at length, there were no questions or comments from members.

Ms. Hayden said the next four projects listed had to do with handicapped accessibility. She said the first of those projects was building renovations at the Betty's Dream facility. She reminded members that this is a 24-unit residential facility for the physically handicapped located on Longmeadow Lane, and directed members' attention to a letter from Executive Director Charlene Greeke and the project cost estimate attached to it. Ms. Hayden said the project as described is to create a second means of egress from each of the apartments to include new doorways, exterior patios, and connecting sidewalks at a cost of over \$100,000. She said the agency is also investigating other means of funding the project.

Mr. Staples said he thought this was an important project. Ms. Langley asked why the construction or reconstruction of sidewalks would be eligible for CDBG funding. Ms. Hayden said that removal of architectural barriers to create handicapped accessibility is a CDBG-eligible activity and that, in this case, all of the Betty's Dream residents earn low or moderate incomes as well.

Also with regard to Betty's Dream, Ms. Hayden said a feasibility study is funded in this current CDBG fiscal year to assess options and constraints for improving the route of travel from the Betty's Dream residential facility on Longmeadow Lane to the new sidewalks on Woodbury Avenue. She said she, as well as Public Works Director Steve Parkinson and a consulting engineer doing work on other City projects, had recently met with Executive Director Greeke and some of her board members to discuss these issues. Constraints include right of way widths, topography, user needs, etc. Further engineering/design work is likely needed in the coming fiscal year. Potential CDBG funding of identified improvements would be coordinated with other City road improvements in that area scheduled for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2004.

Ms. Hayden directed CAC members' attention to the next accessibility project listed. She said the Friends of the Pearl/Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail is seeking funding for handicapped accessibility improvements at the Pearl Street Church in the McDonough Street neighborhood. Entrance to the sanctuary area at The Pearl, which is used for public meeting space, is not currently accessible as it is above street/sidewalk grade and is currently accessed via inside stairs.

Ms. Hayden also said the CAC has typically funded accessibility improvements at non-profit agencies with grants provided on a competitive basis, through the CDBG-funded Non-Profit Accessibility Program. Historically, this has occurred in two phases, with engineering/design costs funded in year 1 and construction of the accessibility improvements funded in year 2. Ms. Hayden also provided CAC members with additional information on The Pearl, and said that she and Community Development Program Manager Nancy Carner had met with Meryl Black and Richard Candee, at their request, to discuss the proposed project further.

Ms. Yannekis asked for a list of the community groups that use this space. Ms. Hayden said that staff would obtain that and provide it to the members. Ms. Emerson asked if the CAC could make a site visit to the Pearl so that they would have a better understanding of the project request. There was general consensus that CAC members would like to take a field trip to The Pearl and Ms. Hayden said staff would arrange this and notify CAC members of the scheduled time and date.

Ms. Hayden spoke to the next potential project listed on the handout: renovation of the existing public restrooms at Leary Field to make them handicapped accessible. She said renovation of these facilities to create accessible men's and women's restrooms, if funded, would be carried out in conjunction with other City-funded improvements at this facility.

Ms. Hayden then moved on to describe potential pedestrian improvements that would benefit the residents of CrossRoads House located on the Route 1 Bypass, and the Wamesit Place apartments located on Holiday Drive just off the Bypass. She said this project would involve infrastructure improvements targeted to improving the safety of pedestrians as they travel to the cross walk at the traffic lights located just south of CrossRoads House. She said this project would be carried out in conjunction with scheduled transit improvements at that location. Ms. Emerson said she thought that the installation of signage would be of great assistance to pedestrians in this area.

With regard to the last potential project listed – support for Microbusinesses – Ms. Hayden reminded CAC members that staff had forwarded a letter to them from the MicroCredit-NH program regarding the need to support microbusinesses. She said representatives of this agency had also met with staff to provide additional information about their organization.

Ms. Emerson asked if the City currently offered any business assistance services. Ms. Hayden said that the CDBG-funded Microenterprise Assistance Program had been offered up until the end of June 2002 at which time Jim O'Donnell, who had been providing these services on a contractual basis, left to pursue other opportunities at the end of his fiscal year contract term.

Ms. Emerson inquired about the CDBG funds that had been budgeted for the Microenterprise Assistance Program in FY '02-'03, but not expended, due to Mr. O'Donnell's departure. She said she thought there had been discussion at one time regarding reprogramming those funds to the Atlantic Heights Streetscape Project. Ms. Hayden said there was just under \$40,000 in the Microenterprise Assistance Program line item in the current fiscal year, and that there had been informal discussion about reprogramming that money, but that the CAC had not yet voted to reprogram those funds. She said the CAC could reprogram those funds at any time within the current fiscal year for any CDBG-eligible project, or wait until the beginning of the new budget year.

Ms. Langley asked what the process would be for making funds available to MicroCredit-NH. Ms. Hayden said she didn't believe that MicroCredit-NH was currently proposing a particular CDBG-funded program or service. However, if the CAC allocated funds for some type of program to support microbusinesses, a process similar to the one used previously for the City's Microenterprise Assistance Program would likely be followed. She said that had involved seeking proposals from private consultants and public agencies to provide business counseling services. She said Jim O'Donnell had responded to the request for proposals. Ms. Hayden also said that, in the first several years of program operation, Mr. O'Donnell had been under contract

with the NH Small Business Development Center (SBDC), and that the City, in turn, had a contract with the SBDC to provide the Microenterprise Assistance Program. However, in the last five years of the program, the City contracted directly with Mr. O'Donnell.

Ms. Hayden then turned to the last potential projects and programs listed on the handout and said each of the programs listed under "Ongoing Programs" -- including the housing rehab, first time homebuyer, and economic development and non-profit loan programs -- had been CDBG-funded over a multi-year period. She reminded the CAC, that the last payment under the Osprey Landing Section 108 program will be made in this current fiscal year, therefore no additional funds will be required that aren't already budgeted.

Ms. Hayden concluded by saying that each of the potential programs and projects for the coming fiscal year could be discussed, and additional questions answered, at the upcoming CAC budget discussion meeting on February 20th.

Mr. Layton then moved on to the next agenda item, a PowerPoint presentation from Ms. Jacoby on year 2000 U.S. Census information as requested by CAC members previously. In her presentation Ms. Jacoby defined Census tracts and blocks within the City, particularly as they relate to CDBG-eligible neighborhoods; and explained the significance of various socioeconomic data about the age, median income, poverty levels, educational attainment, and commuting travel times of Portsmouth residents, particularly highlighting changes that took place between 1990 and 2000. She provided CAC members with a handout of the full presentation.

Ms. Hayden then moved on to the next agenda item at Chairman Layton's request. She reminded CAC members that agencies are currently completing applications for the CDBG-funded Public Service Agency Grant Program. She said applications are due at the end of the month, and demand is expected to be particularly strong given the City general fund budget situation. She reminded CAC members that she had previously provided them with a copy of a letter from City Welfare Director Keith Bates relative to this matter that had been sent to each public service agency.

Chairman Layton asked if there was any other business. Ms. Hayden reminded members of their next meeting to take place at 6:00 p.m. on February 20th in Conference Room A

Hearing no further business, Chairman Layton adjourned the public hearing at 7:30 p.m.