

APPROVED ON MARCH 31, 2005
CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

FEBRUARY 15TH, 2005

PORTSMOUTH CITY HALL

6:00 P.M.

Present: Chairman Bob Layton, Vice Chairman Cicero Lewis, Nancy Emerson, Dani Rooney, Jean Pecunies, Lynne Langley, Barbara Driscoll new member, to be approved at upcoming City Council meeting

Absent: William Thorpe

Staff: Cindy Hayden, Deputy City Manager; David Moore, Program Manager

Chairman Layton opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. Chairman Layton recognized Cindy Hayden who introduced Barbara Driscoll who will be appointed by the Mayor and City Council to serve on the Citizens Advisory Committee at an upcoming City Council meeting. Ms. Hayden said that Ms. Driscoll would be a non-voting member tonight because her appointment will not be official until the City Council meeting on March 7th. Ms. Hayden also announced that she expected Stephen Lichtenstein would be appointed to serve on the Citizens Advisory Committee at the same City Council meeting. The members of the committee welcomed Ms. Driscoll and said how pleased they were that Stephen Lichtenstein would be joining the Citizens Advisory Committee as well.

Chairman Layton then moved on to approval of the meeting minutes for the January 25, 2005 meeting. Ms. Emerson moved to accept the minutes and Mr. Lewis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Layton then recognized Ms. Hayden who went on to explain the handouts about the FY 2005-2006 budget requests and other items of interest, which were provided in the CAC packets for the meeting. In response to a question from Ms. Emerson regarding the correspondence provided on the Greek Orthodox Church, Ms. Hayden said that it was agreed in the beginning of the project that the development of the park would be a joint public-private partnership between the Church and the City. Ms. Hayden said she would follow-up with Father Pappas.

Staff also provided the committee with correspondence from Mayor Sirrell to the New Hampshire congressional delegation about the federal budgetary threats to the CDBG program at the federal level. Ms. Hayden explained that various groups associated with the CDBG program would be advocating on behalf of the program including the National Community Development Association.

Chairman Layton then recognized Ms. Hayden who went on to explain two handouts about the FY 2005-2006 budget, which are attached.

Ms. Hayden reiterated that budget funds were tight this year and presented several staff recommendations for the upcoming budget. She said that in order to complete the already designed Preble Way-Crescent Way Improvements, a significant amount of CDBG dollars needed to be budgeted in the coming year. She also said that bids for a portion of the Preble-Crescent Way project would be done in early March and provide a better idea for the total amount of funds needed.

She also said that staff felt that any additional studies needed in the Atlantic Heights neighborhood, should be carried out closer to when construction funding for new streets might be available. This is because property ownership and other site conditions, as well as neighborhood opinions change over time.

Ms. Hayden said that unfortunately, the public facility projects identified in the Frank Jones Farm Neighborhood Association were not generally CDBG eligible. Ms. Hayden said that several of the traffic concerns they raised are being addressed and that John Burke, the City's Director of Parking and Transportation would contact the neighborhood representative directly.

Ms. Hayden said there was no appropriate City owned parcel on which to develop a park for the neighborhood. In addition, a traffic island identified by the neighborhood for aesthetic improvements does not lie in the boundary of the CDBG eligible neighborhood. Ms. Driscoll said there is a small City owned lot on Echo Avenue, but did agree that it was not ideal for a neighborhood park given its size and location, particularly relative to commercial development and roads with high traffic volumes, as well as its distance from the core residential area.

Ms. Hayden recommended continuing to fund the multi-year Residential Accessibility Program, which provides housing accessibility for single family homes. She also advised that the Committee consider funding the design phase of the Non-Profit Accessibility program in a future fiscal year. She said that, typically the CAC has not funded this program each fiscal year, rather, it has funded year 1 design, year 2 construction and then taken a one to two year funding hiatus. Ms. Hayden also stated that the overall timing of the Music Hall's proposed accessible bathroom renovations might pose some challenges relative to public procurement issues and proposed project schedules.

Ms. Hayden reminded CAC members that in the current fiscal year they had funded the construction phase of the Non-Profit Accessibility Program, and that the work at Cross Roads House was being funded through this line item. She said there was a balance in this line item and, if the board desired, staff could take a closer look at the handrail project proposed by the Senior Center to determine its eligibility in the current fiscal year.

Ms. Driscoll and Nancy Emerson made positive comments about funding the Portsmouth Senior Center handrails request. There seemed to be a consensus on this matter and Ms. Hayden said she would gather some additional information.

Ms. Hayden recommended continued funding for the multi-year Housing Rehabilitation Program , which makes low interest and deferred loans for code improvements . She suggested that, while the fund has not been tapped yet, the CAC might want to continue to maintain current funding for the Affordable Housing Challenge Grant as affordable housing is such an important issue. Ms. Driscoll inquired about who is eligible to apply for the Affordable Housing Challenge Grant funds. Ms. Hayden replied that eligible entities include non-profit housing developers such as The Housing Partnership and other similar agencies.

Ms. Hayden also recommended continued funding for the multi-year Public Service Agency Grant program and stated that funds available for next year could not exceed \$120,000, per the federally imposed spending caps.

Ms. Hayden also recommended funding for the Portsmouth Non-Profit Loan Program noting that the revolving loan fund repayments continue to allow the program to be self sustaining.

Ms. Hayden said staff is recommending not providing additional funds for the Portsmouth Economic Development Loan program. She stated that demand for loans continues to be very low due to shifts in the local/regional economy and the availability of competitive private sector financing. She said the department would continue to manage the existing loans and conduct the required annual audit. She also said that if the economic climate changes, the loan program could be funded again at a later date.

Ms. Hayden added that the general administration line item which pays for salaries, health benefits, legal notices, postage, and office supplies will remain just under the 20% general administration cap required by HUD.

Ms. Hayden then provided a draft budget reflecting staff recommendations for FY 2005-2006 CDBG funding.

General discussion then ensued about the funding options. Ms. Driscoll asked about the possibility of using the funding for the Affordable Housing Challenge Grant for another purpose. Ms. Rooney agreed that it was frustrating that the program funds had not yet been utilized, but she pointed out that the Committee would retain the ability to reprogram the funds later within the fiscal year. Ms. Emerson agreed that the Challenge Grant should be funded at \$25,000 because the housing advocates, including The Housing Partnership and Art-Speak, Inc., have asked that it remain funded.

Ms. Hayden said that the amount of revolving loan fund repayments has decreased as has the total CDBG grant that comes to the City each year. She said that repayment of most housing rehab loans provided in recent years are deferred due to the lower income levels

of those assisted. She explained that deferred loans, vs. monthly repayment loans are not repaid until the homeowner sells their property. She also noted that extensive CDBG projects such as the Preble Way and Crescent Way streetscape improvements have required significant funding levels in recent fiscal years. Ms. Langley pointed out that in early March the committee would know more precisely the cost of the Preble Way and Crescent Way Streetscape Improvement Project.

Ms. Rooney asked for confirmation that the Senior Center's handrails would be able to be funded from the current year's funds budgeted for the Non-Profit Accessibility Grant Program (construction phase). Ms. Hayden said there are additional funds, remaining in that line item.

Ms. Emerson stated that the public service agencies would be disappointed to learn about the limited amount of grant funds for the Public Service Agency Grant Program. In response, Mr. Lewis said that the committee would need to establish priorities and reminded the committee of the great work the CDBG funds have done over the past and urged the committee to remember that the primary purpose of the grant funds is to assist people who earn low and moderate incomes.

Ms. Hayden stated that over the years Portsmouth's CAC has wisely directed that CDBG funds be used on a variety of programs including a mix of housing programs that have significant benefit to City residents who earn low and moderate incomes.

The committee then discussed the dates of the upcoming meetings and the potential need to reschedule some of the meeting dates in March and April. Ms. Hayden said that she and Mr. Moore would look at rescheduling meetings and be in touch with committee members with a revised schedule.

Chairman Layton adjourned the meeting at 7:15 p.m.