

CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Department of Planning and Development Michael J. Kruse, Director



DATE: October 20, 2005

TO: Nonantum Advisory Committee and Interested Citizens

FROM: Danielle Bailey, Community Development Planner

SUBJECT: September 14th Meeting Summary

Nonantum Advisory Committee

September 14, 2005

Members: <u>Interested Citizens:</u>

Loretta Busa Bill Coady Joe Diduca Bill Coady Don DeFilippis

Ald. Scott Lennon

Ald. Carleton Merrill <u>City Staff:</u>

Valerie Paoletti Danielle Bailey, Community Development Kathy Zegarelli

This meeting represents the first gathering of the new fiscal year. The last Nonantum Advisory Committee (NAC) meeting was held in January. The committee has not met as a group since then because there is only one active project and there were three public meetings held for that project.

ELECTIONS FOR CHAIRPERSON AND VICE CHAIRPERSON

Any current member, except for the Aldermen, may run for chair or vice chair. Duties include bringing the meetings to order, maintaining order during the meetings, serving as the contact person between the city and the committee, and working with staff to schedule meetings and agenda items. The vice chair will act as chair when the chair is unable to serve.

Nominations were requested. Kathy Zegarelli was nominated for chairperson and accepted the nomination. No other names were provided. Valerie Paoletti was the sole nominee for vice chair. Valerie accepted the nomination.

A motion was made by Ald. Carleton Merrill to support Kathy Zegarelli as chair and Valerie Paoletti as vice chair. The members voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

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This past summer, committee membership was reviewed as it was the end of the five-year plan for FY01-05. One member chose not to continue, but a new member, Anthony Antonellis, was approved. FY06 marks the beginning of the new five-year plan and some of the policies were updated. One change is that only one member is allowed per household. However, if the member cannot attend a meeting, someone else from that household can attend and vote in their place. Last year, the NAC had two members on it from the same household. Going forward, only one member per household is allowed. With those changes, the NAC presently has 8 residents and 3 Aldermen as members, for a total of 11. City policy is that there can be up to 15 members so if anyone is still interested in becoming a member, please contact Danielle Bailey.

PROJECT UPDATES

Nonantum Parks Improvements

Staff recounted the master planning process for those members and interested citizens who were unable to come to the three public meetings to date. The first meeting was in May and two meetings were held in June. All events were scheduled in the Pellegrini Activity Building Gymnasium. The meetings averaged 20-35 residents and most of the residents actively participated. Much of the early planning work was done in small working groups that focused only on one park. Pressley Associates did a good job of listening to the public and changing the plans to meet their needs. The consultant also worked with the City, particularly the Parks and Recreation Department to review the plans' details to ensure that they are comfortable adopting the master plans. Based on initial input from the residents and feedback from the Parks and Recreation Department, Pressley Associates will be unveiling the final plans for Stearns Park and Pellegrini Park on September 26, 2005. Notices should have already been sent out to all the residents within a quarter mile of each park. The master plans will be presented, as will the strategies for implementation. Time will also be devoted to the establishment of "Friends" groups for each park. The plans can only be successful with the involvement of the residents and having them take ownership in the parks. Additionally, organizing "Friends" groups will aid in fundraising which may be required by the Community Preservation Act (CPA) committees.

As the NAC will recall, funding for the master planning effort came from the CDBG program and the CPA. The strategy is to obtain implementation funds from CPA in conjunction with the remaining CDBG funds to complete Phase 1 of the master plans. If the NAC approves of the master plans and strategy, a vote must be taken in order to move to the next step. Before submitting another CPA application, the NAC and Planning and Development Department must receive permission from the Parks and Recreation Commission to partner to apply for additional CPA money. Staff, hopefully with the support of 1-3 NAC members, will be presenting the master plans to the Parks and Recreation Commission on Monday, September 19. If approval is obtained, staff must complete the CPA application by October 3, 2005. (Post meeting note: On September 19, the Per Commission did approve the request to partner to apply for Phase 1 implementation funds for both parks. On October 3, the CPA application was submitted for the amount of \$1,490,000. This figure includes construction costs as well as costs for a consultant to handle bid and construction administration.)

Staff proceeded to go over the plans and cost estimates as prepared by Pressley Associates. Both parks plans are broken out into two sections- Phase 1 and Phase 2- for implementation purposes.

Beginning with Stearns Park, the residents talked about the uses that they cared about the most. Everyone appreciated the open space section and did not want to make any significant changes to it. The tennis courts were also considered important and they liked the current location. The little league field was also important and they did not want to see that removed. The only remaining section was the playground and basketball court. All the residents agreed that there should be more age diverse play equipment at Stearns, that is also fully or partially accessible. In order to gain more play equipment, something had to be sacrificed. Given that there are basketball courts down the street at Forte and also at Pellegrini Park, the group initially phased out basketball completely. Upon further consideration, the group decided that a half basketball court would be best and that would still leave enough room for more play equipment. One attendee stated that some people are upset by the loss of a full basketball court. The reason why some kids and adults don't like to use the Forte Park court is that it is not shaded and its secluded nature is not comfortable for the parents of younger kids.

Phase 1 at Stearns Park primarily covers the playground, half basketball court, and tennis courts. Some Phase 1 details include: rubberized safety surfacing (in lieu of the wood chips), decorative fencing by playground, landscaping, new shade pavilion, more seating, new bubblers, and decorative trash receptacles. One likely change to the Phase 1 plan at Stearns Park would be the construction of a new walkway to the new senior housing. Because implementation could take years, it is preferred to connect the pathways sooner than later.

Phase 2 at Stearns Park covers the little league field, pathway reconstruction, lighting along new sections of pathway to match existing lights, some picnic table clusters, and park signage. One comment was made about the fencing by the little league field; it would be helpful to create a break in the fencing near the backstop so that players would not have to walk out of their way to play softball. Staff explained that if an opening were installed, it must lead to a pathway that is accessible so this area would need to be redesigned. Another requested change was to separate the tot lot swings from the tot lot because young children could be hurt by the swings. Staff countered that the children cannot get in the swings themselves and therefore would have adult supervision. Other options for addressing this concern could include removing the tot swings altogether, moving the tot swings next to the other swings, or pushing the swings to the edge so kids can't run around the swings.

At Pellegrini Park, Phase 1 covers the reconstruction of the parking lot and entrance area, and the reconfiguration of the play area and courtyard. Phase 1 details include: new pedestrian entrance to the playground and activity building; defined parking lot accommodating 18 spots (16 + 2 handicapped spots); beautification through landscaping, decorative fencing, signage and seating; an outdoor half basketball court with fencing; playground with rubberized safety surfacing; water play area; picnic section; and a multi-purpose large pavilion. The outcome of Phase 1 will be the better organization of the space and the improved curb appeal of the park. A great deal of thought went into the plan to balance the use of the park and the annual festival.

Parks and Recreation will only support the installation of water play equipment at Pellegrini Park if the community pays for the water bill. The annual cost is estimated at anywhere from \$2,000-4,000. Ald. Lennon thought that if for whatever reason the water play section does not get installed, that space could be used for additional play equipment that is more age specific. Currently, the playground in the master plan is for tots and school age children.

It was decided that bocce will remain informal in the stone dust section. This allows for the most flexible use of the courtyard space. All sections of the courtyard will be made accessible and the space will be more organized and defined. The courtyard will also include a seat wall for special events.

Phase 2 at Pellegrini Park encompasses the field improvements, relocation of the softball field deeper in the corner, border fencing, tennis court fencing, new walkways, trees and landscaping, bleachers and players benches, and athletic lighting.

The cost of the Phase 1 construction is approximately \$600,000 for Stearns Park and \$820,000 for Pellegrini Park. The master plans, while solid, are not set in stone and can be changed as needed or required.

Staff mentioned that throughout the CPA review process, there will be several meetings where the pubic can attend and comment. The more visible and vocal the residents are, the more advantageous it will be for the approval of the application. Other advantages for approval are that the CPA committees have supported the project in the past, the public has been heavily involved in the planning process, and there are some CDBG funds available.

After all the discussion on the master plans and implementation process, staff took a vote on the NAC's recommendation on the next steps. Kathy Zegarelli made a motion to accept the master plans and move forward with the Phase 1 implementation strategy for both parks. The NAC voted to approve the motion unanimously.

The NAC must eventually decide on the specific use of the CDBG funds. Staff recommends keeping the remaining \$140,000 in CDBG funds open until feedback is received from the CPA committee. \$25,000 in CDBG funds is set aside for interior improvements to the activity building at Pellegrini Park. One preliminary idea for the interior work is redoing the bathrooms. Staff will begin working on the plans for the interior improvements soon.

APPROVE JANUARY 19, 2005 MINUTES

The minutes were approved with no changes.

Other Business

Earlier this year, the reallocation of the unused funds for the California Street 'Gaslights' project was brought before the Planning and Development Board. Whenever a significant change is proposed, where 25% or more of the budget is affected or a major change in the project scope, the Planning and Development (P&D) Board must review the request and make a recommendation for Mayoral approval.

Typically, when a project is completed and there are surplus funds totaling less than 25% of the original budget, staff transfers the remaining funds to a contingencies pool to use for any CDBG projects with cost overruns. Using that same contingency policy as a guideline, staff recommended that the leftover California Street funds, approximately \$40,000, go into a contingency pool which would then fund other projects.

The situation and timing of the request was highly unusual, meaning that there are rarely instances where projects have significant leftover funds. In addition to California Street, there was another CDBG project with a substantial surplus, almost \$38,000; this was the Park-Tremont Traffic Signal project in Newton Corner that received a sizeable grant from the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority.

Staff explained that by combining these two pots of money, it was possible to partially fund one of the newest CDBG target areas- Newtonville- which otherwise would not get funding until FY2009. Given the instability of the future of CDBG, staff recommended that the funds be used as soon as possible to do some of the projects as prioritized by the FY06-10 Consolidated Plan.

Joe Diduca, who also serves as an alternate member on the Planning and Development Board, was upset that the funds could not be used for another project in Nonantum. The philosophy of the Neighborhood Improvement Program is to develop and implement projects that address neighborhood needs. Once a project is complete, staff moves to the next project.

The contingency policy has benefited every CDBG program and target neighborhood. While the goal is to complete the project within the budget, it is very common for costs to exceed the budget. The difference is made up by the contingency pool.

A question was raised regarding the substantial change policy of 25% of the budget; is this a city-established written policy, a general unwritten guideline, or is it a federal mandate? Staff was uncertain and will investigate. If it is Newton's policy, then the policy can be changed through the Planning and Development Board and the Mayor. (Post meeting note: CDBG regulations require that grantees define what constitutes a substantial change to the CDBG program. Newton's policy is part of the Citizen Participation Plan adopted as part of the Consolidated Plan- see Section 2: Public Meetings and Public Hearings.)

The request was approved by the P&D Board and the funds were reallocated. The group was disappointed by the loss of \$40,000 since funding is so scarce.

Looking forward, the likelihood of a significant budget surplus happening again is rare. But if one does occur, the group wondered if the advisory committee could be involved in the decision making and possibly consider another project, one that is feasible and could be implemented in a timely manner. If such a scenario does recur, the advisory committee would be notified; this is a new policy established for the new five-year plan. All advisory committee members will be notified of any P&D Board requests that affect their neighborhood. Another change staff would like to begin is to share the project budgets with the committee at each meeting so that there are no surprises and we can all be on the same page.

The group asked about the signage for the California Street 'Gaslights'. Staff decided against the idea as there did not seem to be a lot of interest in it. Ald. Lennon suggested that a small plaque be placed on one of the poles dedicating the project to Terry O'Halloran.

SET NEXT MEETING DATE

This item was not discussed.