Frequently Asked Questions

Engine 6, 2042 - 2044 Beacon Street, Newton

June 18, 2013

Background: The City of Newton receives federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME funds on an annual basis from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In the next fiscal year which begins July 1, 2013, the City will receive $1,762,730 in CDBG funds and $145,974 in HOME project funds (for affordable housing only). Of the total amount of CDBG funds available, $602,230 is reserved for affordable housing development, such as the Engine 6 project, and capitalizing the Newton Housing Rehabilitation Program. The Planning Department is responsible for reviewing all requests for housing funds in light of identified goals and strategies which are included in the five-year Consolidated Plan, the City's Comprehensive Plan and annual reports which are submitted to HUD in May and September each year. Metro West Collaborative Development, Inc. is seeking $1,363,626 in CDBG and HOME funds from the City for the Engine 6 project.

1. Where can I read the full proposal for this project and other material related to Engine 6?

All information related to the project can be found here: www.newtonma.gov/gov/planning/hcd/housingdev/projects.asp. If you have questions about the project, you can contact Trisha Guditz, Housing Program Manager at 617-796-1156 or tguditz@newtonma.gov and/or Robert Muollo, Jr. Housing Planner at 617-796-1146 or rmuollo@newtonma.gov in the Planning Department.

2. What has happened to date and what is the project's current status?

Metro West Collaborative Development, Inc., (MWCD), the developer of the Engine 6 project, submitted an application to the City of Newton's Planning and Development Department requesting federal Community Development Block Grant and HOME funds on March 22. Housing staff is responsible for reviewing funding requests relative to identified goals in the City's housing plans. MWCD attended interdepartmental meetings in March and May to review any potential land use/zoning issues associated with the proposed project. MWCD met with the Project Review Committee, a sub-committee of the Newton Housing Partnership, on April 11 and April 26. On May 8, the full Newton Housing Partnership met to review the project and voted to recommend funding. Their recommendation was provided to the Newton Planning and Development Board which voted in favor of the project on June 3. The Planning and

Development Board's recommendation to fund the project will be forwarded to Mayor Warren after a 30-day public comment period which expires after July 2. If the Mayor approves MWCD's funding request, MWCD plans to purchase the Engine 6 building on August 12.

3. What is the process and what are the deadlines for commenting on the project?

The City is accepting written comments on funding the proposed project during the 30-day public comment period through July 2. Letters and e-mails may be submitted to Ana Gonzalez, Director of Community Engagement at agonzalez@newtonma.gov or Alice Walkup, Senior Planner, at awalkup@newtonma.gov.

In addition, the Planning and Development Board is meeting on Monday, June 24 at 7:30 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chambers to review the Housing and Community Development staff's proposed Fiscal Year 14 (which starts July 1, 2013) Annual Action Plan which must be submitted to HUD by July 11. The Annual Action Plan identifies the City's housing and community development plans for the next 12 months. The development of the Engine 6 project is included in the City's housing goals for the next fiscal year. There is a 15-day comment period beginning June 24 through July 10 for written comments on the FY14 Annual Action Plan. Comments should go to Alice Walkup at awalkup@newtonam.gov.

4. Does Newton have any projects serving the homeless now?

Yes. Advocates, Inc., a nonprofit housing and service provider and a member of the Brookline Newton Waltham Watertown Continuum of Care, is currently providing permanent supportive housing to 12 formerly homeless individuals at different sites in Newton. The West Suburban YMCA in Newton Centre provides permanent supportive housing to 28 single men. The individuals living at the YMCA and the Advocates' sites are considered chronically homeless. In addition, the Newton Housing Authority provides permanent supportive housing to nine women and their children who are survivors of domestic violence at one site in the city.

There are also a total of 22 transitional housing beds for women and their children and 67 beds for women and their children who are survivors of domestic violence in the city. Some of these families have come directly from emergency shelter.

5. Who will be living at Engine 6?

The individuals living at Engine 6 were chronically homeless prior to moving into this permanent supportive housing project. They will also have an income of less than $19,850 annually which is no higher than 30% of the area median income. Six of the nine apartments will have a preference for persons who have a connection to Newton.

See the packet of information for representative samples of four current Paul Sullivan Housing tenants as well as the definition of chronically homeless at www.newtonma.gov/gov/planning/hcd/housingdev/projects.asp.

6. Where are these individuals living *prior* to moving into Engine 6?

Residents would have previously been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g. living on the streets) and/or in an emergency shelter or transitional housing.

7. How will these individuals qualify to live at Engine 6?

Eligible tenants must have been chronically homeless and have an income no higher than 30% of area median income. Individuals must meet stringent standards for eligibility. If an individual has a history of an addiction to alcohol or other substances, he/she must demonstrate a commitment to engaging in supportive services prior to moving into housing and demonstrate a willingness to continue these or other supports once in housing. Residents must also agree to abide by House Rules which can be found at www.newtonma.gov/gov/planning/hcd/housingdev/projects.asp.

What differentiates the supportive housing model for Engine 6 is that to be eligible for this housing, applicants must demonstrate that they are in recovery or treatment and capable of independent living with some support, as well as a commitment to engaging in supportive services prior to moving into housing and a willingness to continue these or other supports once in housing. Engine 6 will not be what is known as "housing first", which model intends to get individuals directly off the street and into housing before addressing any service needs of the individual. While “housing first” has proven very successful, it will not be utilized in any manner at Engine 6.

Pine Street Inn staff perform a very comprehensive review of all applicants. In addition to the CORI and SORI checks, there are a series of interviews with the applicant, including an interview with the occupancy specialist who coordinates the selection process and another with the case manager and program supervisor. The interview with the case manager and the program supervisor delves into great detail on the person’s history, their goals, what support systems they have in place, and their ability to live in permanent housing. Any potential issues are discussed with the program administrator before a decision is made.

Most frequently applicants have a history of being in a previous Pine Street Inn program and are well known to the staff there. There is a strong collaboration between staff of the PSI programs in sharing information regarding the applicant which is very helpful in determining

whether the person will be appropriate for housing. Where the applicant is associated with a non-Pine Street Inn program, a release of information is obtained from the applicant in order to discuss their homeless history with their provider.

In particular, the nature of the disability which qualifies an individual as chronically homeless is discussed with the applicant to ensure that the person has the supports in place and is open to working on an ongoing basis with the case manager if housed. We cannot discriminate and deny housing on the basis of a disability. If, however, staff determine that the applicant may have any negative impact on other persons living at this residence or in the community in which the residence is located, that individual will not be accepted for housing. In addition, if the applicant does not have the ability to function independently, supported by PSI staff, they will also not be accepted.

Pine Street Inn is very aware of the communities in which our housing is located and will not accept anyone who might be a danger to others in any manner in impact others' quality of life. The vast majority of persons who enter Paul Sullivan Housing are extremely grateful of the opportunity to move out of homelessness and into their own home for the first time in years. They will not do anything to jeopardize this new beginning.

8. What are the reasons that Pine Street Inn will deny an individual's application for housing at Engine 6?

Individuals are denied housing for the following reasons related to criminal and/or sexual offenses:

In the review of each applicant's criminal offender (CORI) record, the primary criteria are as follows: one drug-related incident or one incident of violent criminal activity less than a year ago, or multiple incidents, including drug trafficking and personal drug use or the possession of drugs. In this context, violence is characterized as any illegal criminal activity that has as one of its elements the use, attempted use, or threatened use of physical force against the person or property of another.

In the review of each applicant's sexual offender (SORI) record, anyone with a Level 2 or Level 3 classification is denied housing. Level 1 sexual offenders are considered by statute to be low risk, and their information is not available to the general public or as part of a SORI review.

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In question 7 above, the reasons for denial for non-criminal reasons are discussed.

9. What services will be available to the Engine 6 residents?

The list of services and the Residents' Guide for information about local resources that are available within a short walk or by public transportation. (See www.newtonma.gov/gov/planning/hcd/housingdev/projects.asp.) The Green Line's Woodland Station is a short walk away from Engine 6. There are also connections to bus routes from various Green Line stops in Newton including the 59 bus which goes from Newton Highlands to Watertown Square and Needham Junction. Also, the MWRTA's (Metro West Regional Transit Authority) Route 1 (and proposed Route 8) bus routes connect Newton-Wellesley Hospital with Newton Lower Falls, the Cedar/Walnut Business District in Wellesley, Natick and Framingham. These public transportation resources will link residents to grocery stores, pharmacies, food banks, various health care providers, jobs and other opportunities. Taking public transportation is a way of life for many residents of Paul Sullivan Housing.

Some residents will qualify for The Ride and be able to utilize this transportation as well. Finally, Pine Street Inn provides cab vouchers to residents on occasion when it is necessary for a resident to be somewhere important and there is no other alternative.

10. How can Waban residents be involved in the Engine 6 facility on an ongoing basis?

Many of Pine Street Inn's permanent housing residences have volunteer groups who come to these residences to serve a community meal, play games or participate in other activities with the residents. Pine Street Inn also has had volunteers involved in such activities as an art class and jewelry making, for example. Pine Street Inn would welcome groups of Waban residents becoming involved in whatever way would be meaningful and appropriate for everyone.

11. How will information about the facility and contacts for its on-site staff be conveyed to the Waban residents?

A list of all staff and appropriate phone numbers will be distributed to members of the community when the residence opens. There also will be an answering service number posted on the exterior of the building at the main entrance.

The name and contact information for the director of Paul Sullivan Housing, who is responsible for the residents and their support services, is:

Ralph Hughes, Director
Paul Sullivan Housing
Pine Street Inn
82 Green Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
T 617.892.8702 • F 617.524.7821
ralph.hughes@pinestreetinn.org

12. What is the Brookline Newton Waltham Watertown Continuum of Care?

The City of Newton is the lead entity of the Brookline Newton Waltham Watertown Continuum of Care (BNWW CoC), one of 19 continuums in Massachusetts formed as a result of the U.S Department of Housing and Community Development's annual competitive application process for homeless assistance program funds. In Massachusetts, continuums are comprised of one or more contiguous cities and/or towns. The purpose of forming these continuums is to bring communities together in a coordinated planning effort to work towards alleviating homelessness.

The BNWW CoC, established in the mid-1990s, meets monthly in Newton City Hall. The BNWW CoC is comprised of representatives of nonprofit organizations, municipal government, state agencies, businesses and religious organizations, as well as homeless and formerly homeless people. Newton Housing and Community Development staff coordinates the annual application for the highly competitive federal funds. In March 2013, the BNWW CoC was awarded $1,204,639 in homeless assistance funds of which $749,719 is specifically for Newton projects including $323,905 to assist 12 formerly homeless individuals in permanent supportive housing living in unidentified scattered sites in Newton.

13. What does the Brookline Newton Waltham Watertown Continuum of Care (BNWW CoC) have to do with the Engine 6 Firehouse project?

Pine Street Inn, one of the members of the BNWW CoC, is partnering with the developer to provide the necessary support services to the nine residents in the building.

14. What is a comprehensive permit and how does it relate to this project?

Passed in 1969, the Massachusetts *Comprehensive Permit Law* M. G.L. c40B, sections 20-23 enables local Zoning Boards of Appeals (ZBAs) to approve affordable housing developments under flexible rules if at least 20-25% of the units have long-term affordability restrictions. The goal of 40B is to help address the shortage of affordable housing statewide by reducing unnecessary barriers created by local approval processes, local zoning, and other restrictions.

14. What is a comprehensive permit and how does it relate to this project? (cont)

Developers (a public agency, nonprofit organization or limited-dividend company) have the right to appeal an adverse local decision to the State in communities with little affordable housing (less than 10% of its year-round housing or 1.5% of its land area). Newton's inventory of affordable housing is 7.5%.

To develop a site pursuant to 40B, at least 25% of the units must be affordable to lower income households who earn no more than 80% of the area median income (Alternatively, for rental housing, the project can provide 20% of the units to households below 50% of median income.) Municipalities are allowed to establish a local preference for residents (currently, up to 70% of the units can be for local preference).

After a project has been determined to be eligible, the developer can submit an application for a comprehensive permit to the local Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). The ZBA is empowered to grant all local approvals necessary for the project after consulting with other relevant boards, State regulations, such as the Wetlands Protection Act, Title 5, and all building codes, remain fully in effect under the comprehensive permit.

The proposed development of the Engine 6 building (rehabilitate the building into 10 studio apartments) is not possible under the City's current zoning and therefore, MWCD must have an approved comprehensive permit to develop the project.