

HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE
MINUTES OF APRIL 9, 2007
6:00 – 8:00 pm

Present:

Task Force Members:

T.J. Martzial – HNS Division Director, acting chair

Grant Lee - PROP, Executive Director

Wendy Cherubini - District 2 Representative

Mark Adelson – Deputy Director, Portland Housing Authority Manager

Kirk Goodhue – District 1 Representative

Lee Urban – Planning & Development Dept. Director

Wendy Harmon – CMPAC Representative

City Staff:

Jeanie Bourke – Director of Inspections

Amy Grommes Pulaski – HCD Program

Public:

Steve Hirshon – Bayside Neighborhood Assoc.

Introduction & Welcome

TJ opens the evening and explains Councilor Suslovic will not be able to attend due to a prior engagement.

Discussion of Funding Category: Inspections

TJ opens the discussion to Inspections. He describes that when he arrived he learned that the City of Portland funds Code Inspections. Currently the way it is funded does not meet CDBG guidelines. The Planning and Development Department has met several times to discuss how to revamp the way code enforcement is funded through CDBG. The way HUD wants to fund code enforcement is through a focused effort in one identified section of the city. They want a comprehensive approach to revitalize the area. For inspections this means systematic residential inspections in addition to complaint calls and business inspections. After many meetings and knowing the other efforts that are going on in the City, staff thought it would be best to focus on Census Tract 6. Jeanie Bourke, Director of Inspections, has been part of these meetings and understands the changes in how this program will be approached. TJ opens the floor to discussion.

Kirk asks if the plan includes single family, multi-family residential, and business, and also what is involved in residential inspections. Jeanie arrives, is introduced and explains the residential inspections in online Chapter 6. The code has inspectors review walls, floors, ceilings, windows. Grant wants to know if it is safety oriented. Jeanie explains it is the condition of the area- toilets leaking, holes in walls/ ceilings, equipment, egress issues, smoke detectors, trash storage. For the exterior we look at peeling paint. The code does not have to meet current standards but existing standards. Kirk asks how things are grandfathered. Jeanie explains that if it is not in disrepair we do not ask them to bring it up to today's standards. Jeanie explains that it is a local code that has not been revamped in many years. Mark Adelson cannot recall when it was last revamped. Jeanie also explains that the fire department does their own inspections for egress, fire alarms. Wendy C. asks to clarify that a house may be in compliance with the housing code but not fire code. The fire department does not do one and two unit homes. Inspectors do review house/ safety regulations but do not enforce fire doors. Wendy C. points out that fire doors are an eligible activity for the rehab loans. Jeanie said that her department could coordinate with the fire department in order to bring the entire home up to code, both residential and fire.

Kirk questions whether this would be entirely CDBG funded. TJ replies that it would be for one and a half full time equivalent employees. Amy explains that the comprehensive approach that HUD would like starting with inspections, where inspectors could then promote available funding for the residential rehab program in HNS. This can also be combined with focused sidewalk funds, said Mark.

Jeanie explains that due to the number of units in Census Tract 6, this program may take more than one year before moving onto another area. She says there are many types of housing units in this area: multi, single, condo etc. Wendy C. suggests that we focus first on the houses that need the most updating, or have had the most violations, or has not been inspected in the longest time.

TJ explains that one of the ways we need to promote this as an effort that will affect everyone. No one home owner is being singled out.

Grant questions the role of the Task Force? He doesn't know how to relate or participate in this topic? TJ responds that a possible recommendation from the task force would be for the staff to bring the current Inspections program into compliance with CDBG regulations.

Kirk questions what would be funded if Inspections is not in compliance and asks how it has been presented to CMPAC? Mark responds that it has been presented as a budget item, but has never been presented as a program, eligible or not.

Wendy C. asks how many units, and Jeanie respond its over 1000 due to the high towers in the area. Wendy C. explains that through this program you would bring other properties into compliance and raise the level of living in the area.

Wendy C. voices her concern and explains that when this is brought to the Housing Committee and City Council level that others around the City realize that. It's also important not to spread these precious funds too thin and should be limited to Census Tract at a time. Kirk comments that it would be beneficial to make it more comprehensive and include focusing on streets, sidewalks, parks etc. Mark likes the recommendation but would use the word revitalization of the area.

Lee and Jeanie leave.

Discussion of Funding Category: Housing

TJ brings up Housing and asks if there would be any discussion. Members ask for a recap. TJ explains the current process and how they asked for \$100,000 this year, which was cut to \$50,000 by CMPAC and to \$30,000 from the City Manager, the reasoning being that it has been difficult to spend the money. Wendy C. questions whether Jeanie has the staff to do the proposed work. TJ explains that there used to be numerous housing inspectors but the number of employees has been cut more and more and has thus caused inspectors to only respond to crisis and not be proactive, such as the proposed project. TJ also explains to counter lack of project is to do energy audits and to follow up on the inspections described in the above program.

Wendy C. questions the other resources, such as the first time home buyer program, which is funded by HOME. Is housing money available for site prep or other things that could be done to support new housing in Bayside? TJ responds yes, however previously funds used for newer development were used from the Housing Development Fund, debts that had been repaid loans.

Grant asks if projects in Bayside would than be a higher priority? Through a focused effort, yes they would. Kirk questions whether the Bayside Neighborhood Association is knowledgeable of this proposed program? The Task Force questions Steve Hirshon, who recently entered the meeting. BNA is not knowledgeable of this program yet.

Wendy C. asks staff the current balance of the Housing Dev. Fund and the projected funds over the next few years? She feels that this would affect the Task Force's recommendation. Most of the funds that were paid out are not coming back, they are spent. Wendy suggests creating a HOME consortium between City, County and Westbrook or other areas. TJ explains that the City and County staff have already discussed this and presented it to the Housing Committee. The Consortium could increase HOME funds by an additional \$250,000 to \$300,000 dollars for the City of Portland. This locks the city into a combined plan with the county, and a joint effort.

Mark would like to see a projection for new housing development, even if it is challenging.
[Bring numbers and projects for HDF for Task Force]

The Task Force does not have a recommendation now. Previously the Task Force agreed that further CDBG funds could be allocated to housing as the need grew and staff requested more funding.

Review Past Meeting - Minutes and Listen and Learn Public Forum

TJ presents past meeting minutes for approval. For March 28 minutes are approved. TJ also presents meeting minutes from April 3 as a method to discuss the Public Forum.

Kirk was encouraged by various comments by the community. It justifies the direction of this committee. Mark liked the comments about CMPAC, which gave the Task Force some direction. It appeared that people liked the idea of a point system for CMPAC and staff to use in reviewing applications. Mark points out that if the point system could be endorsed by Council, it would help the process. Otherwise an organization could bring 20 people to the Council meeting and be funded. TJ thinks it would be helpful for Council to know that many cities around the Country do not present a detailed budget to the City Council; rather it is presented as a block number of funds going to social services. TJ feels that there is a real sense of frustration that agencies do not know how they are evaluated or funded. Another thing to consider would be to have a unified application for United Way, the City and the County. This was brought up in the 80s but fizzled out. But this would be a time to revisit this with UW's focus on collaboration. TJ says it's a great idea because we don't want to reinvent the wheel. Grant says that UW now has outcomes. Wendy C. says you cannot ever address the differences between programs (cost per program etc). If you collect the same information in the same format it would help.

The Task Force brings up the inconsistencies in the Child Care System. Currently CDBG funds heating one child care center, salaries in another, vouchers in a third. Some child care providers serve primarily low and moderate income families, while others serve only a small portion. It varies considerably. Amy describes Ethan Boxer-Macomber's idea of creating child care vouchers that can be distributed to low and moderate income families. Wendy C. voices concern to the ability to leverage money from vouchers for additional state money. A recommendation could be for the child care providers to get together to discuss this issue.

Wendy C. thinks one thing worth looking at is the need for child care locally or regionally. Peaks Island Child Care program is discussed. Wendy explains how you only here about the eligible children, not the ineligible children when talking about certain agencies.

Mark explains that it would be better to have better reporting structures. Currently, staff works with agencies to make them eligible for HUD standards. However the purpose is to make them more accountable.

Wendy C. was surprised Doug Gardner did not discuss the programs for which he is funded. Wendy questions how General Assistance is used? Grant said he administers general assistance for six or seven communities for the State. The Task Force agrees they would be interested in hearing more from Doug in the future. Steven Hirshon was surprised at how different towns spent their General Assistance fund differently.

TJ discussed how neighborhood meetings and do not focus on HCD, mentioning the nick name Pit bulls and Potholes. The entire neighborhood meeting concept needs to be revamped. One suggestion was to have separate HCD meetings than the Councilor meetings; another was to eliminate HCD meetings in ineligible neighborhoods.

Grant says that we should not fund super small grants. Wendy Harmon explains the agreement CMPAC made with the finance committee and Council not to fund programs less than \$5000 and not to fund incomplete physical improvement projects. Not giving PW \$20,000 to do a project that costs \$30,000 is one example.

Wendy C. moves to accept April 3 minutes, seconded by Mark. Minutes are approved unanimously.

Wendy C. would like to propose firm criteria for the physical improvements projects in eligible areas. Those that create a City-wide benefit, for example the Portland Observatory and the Castle at Deering Oaks Park, should be funded by taxpayer dollars, not HCD. Over 1/3 of the \$600,000 cost of the Castle in Deering Oak was funded with HCD funds. If it is that important it should be paid for with tax dollars or through fundraising. It short changes the block grant program. Wendy Harmon brings up Victorian Mansion. Wendy C. also brings up the project to demolish St. Lawrence, an organization that does not have sufficient funds to complete their project. The task force discusses the issue of St. Lawrence.

This brings up the subject of capacity. Do the organizations applying for funding have the capacity to complete the project? This needs to be incorporated into the evaluation and application. What criteria will we have? What benefit will it have to the neighborhood? What does capacity mean and how do you show it? The task force would like to make strong recommendations to Council, but to do this they look to staff for recommendations for the Task Force to discuss.