

**Evanston Housing Commission**  
**Thursday, May 19, 2005**

**Minutes**

Present: Susan Munro, Carol Balkcom, Eric Beauchamp; Judith Hurwich, Genevieve O'Toole; Robin Snyderman Pratt

Absent: Sara Ashmore Diggs,

Staff: Donna Spicuzza, Housing Planner

**I. Minutes of April 21, 2005** were approved.

**II. Communications:** Members received the 2005-2009 Consolidated Plan and a current Vacant Building List in their packet. Members felt the Consolidated Plan contained very useful demographic data and program information. They briefly discussed the current list and the new Vacant Building ordinance and, and asked that it be an agenda item for further discussion.

**III. Review Certificates of Consistency with Consolidated Plan:**

Representatives from agencies applying for HUD Homeless Assistance Program Funds and the Chair of the Evanston Alliance on Homelessness presented information on their funding applications. The applications must include a certificate of consistency with the City's Consolidated Plan, which the Housing Commission traditionally recommends. Three applications totaling \$658,293 were recommended by the review committee.

Marie Visely from Connections for the Homeless discussed their two applications. One is for \$368,787 for a two year renewal for the New Beginnings Transitional Housing Program which provides supporting housing to homeless families. New Beginnings for Young Families provides seven units of housing scattered throughout Evanston to families headed by older teens or young adults or with young children. Ms. Visely said the real goal of the program is to increase self sufficiency. Services include child care, help with transportation, how to access mainstreet resources, and life skills training. It's a two year program and they plan for the family to be self sufficient by then. She feels that the program has its biggest impact on the children.

The other application for \$68,646 is for Incline, a housing and supportive housing project which is an expansion of a program they just launched this year. This will add two units of housing to the existing four, without requiring additional supportive services. It is designed for chronically homeless persons with severe mental illness, substance abuse problems or dual diagnoses. The people served are referred from Hilda's Place Shelter and street outreach programs. The project is designed to assist chronically homeless persons get and stay in permanent housing. The case manager will work with the person to obtain a housing unit, help them move, practice acceptable tenant skills and take care of other issues that are necessary to sustain housing. This application was submitted and recommended after the Review Committee issued a notice to agencies which indicated they might request funding for permanent supportive housing but didn't. This action was taken in order to take advantage of available funds.

Tucker Wildes from Connections for the Homeless discussed their \$220,860 application for two year renewal of its Pathways Housing Program. This program provides supportive housing to eight adults with severe and persistent mental illnesses and were homeless. They lease eight studio and one bedroom furnished apartments which are scattered throughout Evanston. The program works intensively with the clients and also provides social opportunities.

When asked about whether it's more helpful to provide scattered site housing or to have all the units in one building, Ms. Wildes said that Housing Options has experience with both models.

With scattered site, clients don't have to have a room mate, which some people enjoy but others find stressful. She said that having both types available, they can usually decide which model is best suited to the person. She also said that in the scattered site locations, the client is not identified as being a client of a mental health program, and it is full community integration.

Members asked if it was hard to find landlords for the program. Both representatives said no, noting they have a 24 hour on-call number so they can be reached if problems arise. They take care of the issues, and the landlord get timely and reliable rent payments. One apartment finding firm came to them to ask if they can help and that has been a good relationship. They noted it is easier to find units for single households than for families.

Commission members asked about the number of homeless persons. Ms. Visely said they usually have 25-40 families on their waiting list at Connections for the Homeless. Sue Calder, chair of the Evanston Alliance on Homelessness, talked about the street count of homeless which they did in November. She said the numbers increased, but they also did a more thorough job of counting and finding persons. She mentioned that the various agencies in Regional Roundtable, which encompasses the Cook County area, is beefing up its family and youth committee, trying to help identify families living relatives or friends who are not really housed. So there is greater potential for homelessness. In response to a question about rental housing support bill, the presenters indicated they would contact the governor to sign the bill, as it is just the type of support they can use.

Ms. Snyderman Pratt asked about status of Homeless Management Information System for which they received funding last year and Ms. Visely gave an update, noting that more agencies were soon scheduled to come on line. They hoped to be able to take advantage of the reporting and tracking capabilities of the system in the coming year.

A **motion** was made to recommend that the City certify that the three applications are in consistent with the needs and goals of the Consolidated Plan, and **passed 6-0**.

#### **IV. Inclusionary Housing Ordinances Update:**

Robin Snyderman Pratt informed Commission of the meeting she and Nick Brunick of BPI had with the City Manager, Julia Carroll after learning of the Memo written by Corporation Counsel Jack Seigel about the proposed inclusionary housing ordinances. She said Ms. Carroll told her that the memo does the job of pointing out problems, but she didn't think they were insurmountable. She suggested that to make the policy work, it should be looked at as a workforce housing issue, and she understood the urgency of working on it. They were reassured that the Commission's recommendations would be moved along to the Planning and Development Committee and discussed there. Ms. Snyderman Pratt also made it clear that the Commission was amenable to modifying the proposals and they hoped to use them as a starting point for discussion by the City Council. She said she and Mr. Brunick felt many of the issues identified in the memo could be addressed, but at minimum they could hope for a statement of City policy for affordable set-asides on Planned Developments

Ms. Snyderman Pratt distributed a letter to Julia Carroll drafter by Nick Brunick and herself, addressing some of the points in the legal memo. Members discussed whether it should be sent to aldermen before the Planning and Development Meeting and decided to send it to Ms. Carroll as requested and ask her if she would like it distributed more widely.

Commission members discussed the analysis by Corporation Counsel Jack Seigel of the proposed ordinances and some of the points he raised. Eric Beauchamp noted that he agreed with a number of the issues raised. He also felt that if required to set aside lower-priced units, developers would still maintain their profit margin by raising prices of other units and contribute to increased housing costs in Evanston. Ms. Snyderman Pratt suggested that if they knew the requirements upfront, perhaps acquisition costs would be negotiated so as to achieve the desired profit margin. Mr. Beauchamp said many developers look for 15 – 20% returns before they decide

on the project. He felt condo prices would go up. There was more discussion around what the impact would be on affordable housing.

Mr. Seigel is scheduled to present his analysis to the Planning and Development Committee's May 23 for discussion. Housing Commission members were urged to attend. Ms. Spicuzza said the meeting will start at 6:30 p.m. and this is last on the agenda. She also noted that the Planning and Development Committee is now composed of all nine aldermen, so all the Council members would be aware of the issues.

#### **V. Discussion of Employer Assisted Housing Program.**

Ms. Spicuzza reviewed the Employer Assisted Housing pilot program parameters and results of the 18 month program. The program goal was to provide downpayment and closing cost assistance of \$5,000 to five employees of the City of Evanston. Ms. Spicuzza noted that it was designed to meet IHDA requirements so that users could take advantage of IHDA "matching funds" of \$5,000 for households under 50% of median and \$3,000 for households under 80% of median, for a total grant of \$8,000 - \$10,000.

She said about a dozen employees attended information sessions on the program, eight received home purchase education, and four received intensive follow-up from the housing counselor. There was ongoing marketing to employees through a variety of means, including the internal web page, paystub notices, fliers and employee newsletter. Two persons with household incomes over 50% and at or below 80% of median received \$5,000 from the City and \$3,000 from IHDA for their home purchases. They purchased two of the newly constructed townhomes that were subsidized with HOME funds to reduce the price. The housing counselor reported that single income employees with children who went through the sessions often found that housing prices were still beyond their reach and most wanted to purchase a single family home rather than a condominium.

Robin Snyderman Pratt noted that in comparison to Evanston Housing Corporation's performance of one loan in the last year, doing two loans wasn't bad. Ms. Spicuzza said she wanted to note in fairness that the First Time Homebuyer's program was designed in a different mortgage climate with a goal of filling a gap, but it has been hard to compete the last few years with low rates and new products, including adjustable rate mortgages.

Carol Balkcom asked if there was a downside to continuing the program. Ms. Spicuzza said one question was whether people would be able to benefit from it given high housing prices. Ms. Snyderman Pratt said that the Commission hoped the program would not only benefit City employees but could be the leading program to set an example for other Evanston employers. However, that next step to market to other employers was never taken. She noted that the Evanston Housing Coalition is talking about doing an event to celebrate the investment it has made and the 100 homebuyers served in 15 years through the First Time Homebuyer's Program. She said they discussed incorporating the employer assisted housing program into the event to build momentum for private sector investment. The Mayor could invite local employers and chamber members, and encourage other employers to offer assistance like the City's downpayment program. They would promote the First Time Homebuyer's program as another tool to help their employees live near work. She pointed out that employers could also take advantage of tax breaks through an employer assistance program. Ms. Snyderman Pratt said that the contract with Housing Opportunity Development Corporation (HODC), the non-profit agency that administers the program, could be expanded to include outreach to other employers, the cost of counseling for other employer programs, or applying for tax credits on behalf of a pool of employer participants. She hoped that the City would renew the program and make it even better.

Judith Hurwich asked about other companies that provide this and wondered if there were funds in the Mayor's Special Housing Fund to pay more to HODC. There are 25 employer assisted housing programs in the region. Members discussed increasing the income cap for eligible

employees to 100% or 120% of median income. The Tax Credit can be applied when beneficiaries are up to 120% of median income, but the IHDA match is only for household income up to 80% of median. Members felt it would be good to reach a wider audience, even if the grant was only \$5,000 without IHDA match. Mr. Beauchamp asked if the program was promoted to teachers because he felt they would be interested and eligible, however it is just for city employees. There was discussion about expanding EHC's First Time Homebuyer program designed for police, to include teachers.

It was suggested they budget the same amount for grants plus another \$10,000 to HODC which would cover the cost of the tax credit application.

Ms. Snyderman Pratt asked Ms. Spicuzza about her meeting with the Wilmette Housing Commission about Evanston's employer assisted housing program. Ms. Spicuzza said they were interested in the program and found Evanston's experience helpful, but they doubted that limiting the program to employees at 80% of median would work because of their much higher housing prices. However, they were still interested in exploring how the program might work.

Commission members noted that they were in favor of continuing the program but raising the income limits to 120% and possibly increasing the grant amount by \$3,000. They also recommended increasing funding for the program administrator so they could help market Employer Assisted Housing programs to other Evanston employers, and possibly underwrite some of their costs for applying for tax credits. They asked that staff prepare new program guidelines for recommendation to the City Council.

**VI. Discussion of Evanston Housing Corporation Promotion.** Ms. Snyderman Pratt talked about tying in the City's Employer Assisted Housing program with an Evanston Housing Coalition celebration this summer in the course of the discussion on Employer Assisted Housing.

**VII. Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Donna Spicuzza,  
Housing Planner