Massachusetts Autism Commission

Housing Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

April 24, 2025

3:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m.

Via Zoom

Members present: Bronia Clifton (co-chair), Laurie Anastopoulus (co-chair), Carolyn Kain, Dianne Lescinskas, Chris Peltier, Catherine Boyle, Nan Leonard

Guest: Ann-Marie Bajcoa

Ms. Clifton called the meeting to order and welcomed the members to the meeting of this Subcommittee. Subcommittee members introduced themselves and welcomed Ms. Bajcoa, President and CEO of Charles River Center who will be presenting today.

Ms. Kain made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from September, Ms. Leonard seconded the motion and with no objections, the meeting minutes were approved.

**Charles River Center Project Presentation – East Militia Heights Development in Needham**

Ms. Bajcoa shared a PowerPoint presentation on a new development to help address the unmet needs in the Autism Community. The land across the street from Charles River Center was previously owned by the Army – there was a sealed competitive bid for the land and Charles River won the bid. The land is 3.5 acres, and the plan is to have 86 units on the site. 50% of the units would be for individuals who would be supported by Charles River and the other 50% for the general public.

* Charles River looked at the project though the lens of – does it fit its mission, is it sustainable, does it meet an unmet need.
* Flexible design – high tech – working with MIT and Tufts on assistive technology built into housing
* Process - working with the town of Needham, 40B development – working with Peabody Property management
* $50 million development – authorized for $5 million from housing bill
* Will leverage state and federal funds for low-income tax credits
* Looking for an investor for contributions in exchange for tax credit
* Authorized $2.8 million from Needham Preservation Commission – town vote on May 5th
* The smaller houses (building) are designed after a Denmark model – 3 studio apartments, folks can live on their own and there is a common area to come together – each area has parking spaces (6) and outdoor space
* Community center onsite – to include game room, flex meeting space, possible gourmet kitchen for classes with local chefs, yoga – space will be open to larger community
* Larger unit has 68 units – mix of 15 studio apartments, 10 one bedroom (Charles River), 33 one bedroom for general community, 10 two bedrooms for general community (affordable housing units)
* Included in the total will be 5 units for staff – mostly in the larger building
* Will serve a population that may require less than 30 hours of staff support and not 24/7 care or overnight care – for folks who could live on their own but still need wrap around services
* First Place in Arizona – look at their website for ideas on community center

**ADU Update**

Ms. Clifton gave the subcommittee an update on ADU’s – Accessory Dwelling Units

* There is technical assistance for cities and towns who are trying to change their zoning laws to conform with the new law
* There will be some model templates for cities and towns to follow
* 900 square feet or half of principle dwelling
* If you wanted 2 ADU’s on your property, the second one not protected under the law – you need a special permit (ex. Convert a basement and detached ADU)
* The City of Boston is offering grants to assist in ADU units - $7500 grant and city loan up to 50% of cost with 0% interest
* Cost of a detached ADU – approximately $250-$350k
* The question was asked if you apply for the city loan can you still apply for home modification loan

**Federal Update**

Ms. Clifton gave an update on the current situation on the Federal level

* Reduction in force for HUD – estimated that half are being laid off or retiring, probationary folks laid off
* Impact could include the $30 million for home and national trust program
* If HUD staffing is reduced it will be difficult to manage programs
* Concerns that HUD may be directed to claw back funding already in hand
* Last 60 days have been asking projects in progress to pull on federal funding
* Sec. 811 has not been affected by cuts at the moment
* Concerns with future potential cuts to Medicaid and Medicare as well as concerns with waivers
* Emergency housing voucher under the American Rescue Plan – it was asked if they will be clawed back – Ms. Clifton will inquire about this
* HUD website has been scrubbed – voucher guidance in gone from the website
* Sec. 8 question on the waitlist and the new data system – data transfer will be done by the end of this calendar year
* DDS clients, who get purged from the sec. 8 waiting list – it was asked if DDS could take some ownership on this and if this could be a recommendation – there was a time when DDS had housing coordinators in each area office to assist with the concerns of the section 8 waitlist and clients not knowing they were removed from the waiting list – is there a way to get housing coordinators back to area offices
* HUD probably will not release any new section 8 vouchers
* Could we look at DDS adding ADU units to group homes- DDS has been discussing this and has met with licensing folks – there are some hurdles, but it is a topic of discussion for DDS
* The DDS NE region does have a housing coordinator - there is a recognized gap at DDS for housing coordinators

With no further business to discuss, Ms. Clifton made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Kain moved to adjourn the meeting and Ms. Anastopoulus seconded the motion. With no objections, the meeting adjourned.