

**Milwaukee City/County Commission on Supportive Housing
Cherry Court Housing Development
April 27, 2010**

Attending: Ken Schmidt, Rochell Williams, Robert Berlan, Suzanne Breier, James Tarantino, Paula N. John, James Marks, James Mathy, Martha Brown, Lynne DeBruin, Kari Lerch.

Call to order. Chairman Jim Tarantino called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

Review and approval of the January 5, 2010 meeting minutes. A motion was moved for approval of the minutes. Motion seconded. All in favor.

Supportive housing project update. Martha Brown gave the following updates on supportive housing projects:

Johnston Center Residences – 1230 W. Grant Street

- 92 units in a renovated building (former Johnston Community Health Clinic) and a new addition on the north side of the building.
- Support services to be provided by Hope House.
- Units in renovated building will open in summer 2010 with occupancy in August.
- New addition units will open in late 2010.
- Wait list kick-off event will be held May 6th at Kosciuszko Park Community Center.

Empowerment Village – National and Empowerment Village -- Lincoln (1525 W. National Ave., S. 5th St. and W. Lincoln Ave.)

- Construction underway at EV-National. 34 units plus office and program space for Our Space, Inc. in renovated building.
- Construction at EV-Lincoln will begin when Our Space moves to EV-National. 30 housing units.
- Cardinal Capital is the developer and Our Space will provide on-site supportive services.
- Move-in date not yet scheduled.

Veterans Manor (35th/Wisconsin Avenue)

- 52 units in new building will be available in 2011. Approved for CDBG funds.
- Financing expected to close in May. Construction will begin immediately.
- Support services to be provided by Center for Veterans Issues.

2500 W. Fond du Lac Avenue

- Anticipating finance closing in July 2010. Construction will begin soon after.
- Project is a partnership between Heartland Alliance and St. Ben's meal program.
- Services will be provided by Guest House of Milwaukee.

Discussion: We have a healthy number of units under construction that will significantly increase the supply of permanent supportive housing in Milwaukee. However, only one project (Washington Park Apartments Phase II) submitted an application as part of the 2010 competition for Low Income Housing Tax Credits. So there will likely be a lull after the current group of projects is completed. The tight credit market and low price of tax credits has made construction of these projects even more difficult. Jim Tarantino expressed some optimism that as bank credit loosens, there will be a renewed appetite for projects.

Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee Designated Housing Plan. Martha Brown attended the public hearing and provided an update on the Housing Authority's effort to amend its current housing plan for 13 high-rise buildings, some with mixed occupancy for seniors and non-elderly disabled, and, due to problems in the early 1990s, some designated for seniors only. The Housing Authority is seeking to amend its HUD-approved 1994 plan in order to allow more units be designated for non-elderly disabled residents. The rationale behind the change:

- Subsidized senior housing choices have expanded.
- Far more non-elderly disabled than seniors are on the Housing Authority wait list.
- Substance and alcohol abuse alone no longer deemed a 'disability' by federal law, which reduces some of the problems within mixed senior/non-elderly disabled buildings.
- SET Ministries provides support services to residents in all HACM high-rise buildings, including case management and nursing care.

If approved, 5 current senior-only buildings will become mixed occupancy, with most units in HACM high-rise buildings designated for mixed occupancy as well. This includes 745 units in senior-only buildings, and 1081 units in mixed buildings. In addition, non-elderly disabled applicants will get preference for placement in mixed buildings.

Action Item: Approve letter sent to Housing Authority regarding Designated Housing Plan. Martha Brown presented a letter from the Commission to the Housing Authority supporting the changes in the Designated Housing Plan. Sue Breier moved a motion to approve the letter. Ken Schmidt seconded the motion. All in favor.

Jim Tarantino commented that the email process used for pre-approval of the letter by the Commission was responsive and timely. He thanked the Commission, and asked if this was an acceptable process. Martha Brown stated she would need to research the open records law on this issue. She noted that conference calls do fall under the State open meetings law, but email conversation among commissioners may be a violation of the open meetings law.

A motion was put forward for Martha Brown to check into the open records law as it pertains to an email pre-approval process. Seconded. All in favor.

Milwaukee County grant application – SAMHSA proposal. Jim Mathy asked for Commission support for a \$3.5 million SAMHSA grant application being submitted by Milwaukee County. The 5-year mental health transformation grant would provide resources to expand peer support networks, placing additional peer supports on site and in units to do best practice model. He commented that this is a highly researched grant, and consumers will not only receive services but will be trained to be peer supporters, empowered to be part of the solution. The model also includes the Seeking Safety curriculum, to be delivered by peer support specialists at supportive housing developments.

Discussion: It was noted that the grant provides additional layers of support services, on top of case management. Ken Schmidt commented on the fact that Hope House is a practicum site for graduate students, and noted that adding these resources to those of the Hope House staff greatly improved success rates for Hope House clients. Paula John noted the importance of access to medical care including medications.

Action Item: Letter of Support for SAMHSA application. A motion was made that the Commission provide a letter of support for Milwaukee County's SAMHSA grant application. Motion seconded. All voted in favor of the motion.

City of Milwaukee planning activities regarding supportive housing facilities. At a previous Commission meeting, Mike Maierle of the city planning staff described an effort to develop a siting plan for supportive housing within the city of Milwaukee. Martha Brown reported the planning work is still ongoing. She said the planners have identified a possible role for the Commission in the zoning approval process for such facilities, and asked for discussion of that possible role.

Martha described the current zoning ordinance and its design and dimensional requirements for buildings. Supportive housing developments typically do not conform to code requirements for density and parking, and consequently, having to apply for rezoning or to the Board of Zoning Appeals for approval, which involves additional fees, time and public hearings. This has resulted in loss and delay of projects.

The zoning group is proposing changes that would have new standards allowing for greater density and fewer parking spaces, and would require an approved service plan in order to build under those standards. The impact would reduce cost and shorten the timetable for permanent supportive housing developments.

The proposed role of the Commission would include advising the Commissioner of City Development (DCD) regarding appropriate service plan packages, evaluating the service component of projects, and providing letters of recommendation to the DCD Commissioner. If the Commission accepts the new role, it would be responsible for developing standards for supportive service packages, as well as developing the review process for proposed projects.

Discussion: Martha Brown asked Commission members to consider the proposed changes. She commented that developing the standards might require more time than reviewing proposals. Public hearings would end, and be replaced by Commission meetings, open to the public. Commission members discussed some of the concerns of serving the community in this capacity, but generally agreed that developing the standards was a good role for the Commission, and would provide a less political platform for the review process. One suggestion was to have mandatory, informational community meetings included in the process.

Action Item: Approve Commission role in providing letters of recommendation to Commissioner of City Development regarding permanent supportive housing facilities. Because the Commission wanted to discuss this possible role in greater detail, Chairman Tarantino scheduled a special meeting of the commission that would be devoted to this topic.

The meeting will be held at 10 am Tuesday, May 18. Martha will send the agenda and meeting location. All commission members are invited to attend.

It was noted that the next regular Commission meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, July 20, 2010 at 10:00am, with location to be determined.

Update on mental health insurance parity bill. Deb Kraft, of Community Advocates Public Policy Institute, gave the following update: On April 15, the *Wisconsin Parity Act* passed the Wisconsin Assembly by a 57-40 vote with strong bi-partisan support. The new legislation requires health insurers to cover mental health, alcoholism and other drug abuse treatment services at the same level as other types of medical treatment. The law also requires that insurers count costs paid by consumers for their mental health treatment toward their overall deductible and out-of-pocket limits.

The law takes effect December 1, 2010 and applies to state-regulated plans, and state and local government plans but does not apply to self-insured plans typically used by large private employers. The Wisconsin legislation parallels the federal government's Wellstone and Domenici Mental Health Parity Act, passed in 2008. Wisconsin's new law will apply to all businesses here with at least 10 employees.

Deb Kraft said the Public Policy Institute is hopeful this is the beginning of more legislation to 'making it real.' She gave the website, www.parityforwisconsin.org for more information.

Adjournment: Jim Tarantino made a motion to adjourn. Seconded. All in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

Meeting minutes taken by Donna Martin.