CPC and EDC Budget Proposal FY25

The Planning Department has devoted substantial time this year to working through the requirements of the new 3A legislation requiring multifamily housing in communities in and adjacent to the MBTA service area. The CPC has drafted zoning bylaw amendments that will be submitted for the June 2024 Town Meeting which, if passed, are anticipated to fully meet the Town’s compliance requirements. At June 2023 Town Meeting, the CPC requested an appropriation of funds for consulting assistance if needed to meet the state’s complex requirements. However, further clarifications to the requirements were provided by the state since that time. That information resulted in us being able to do a simpler analysis than was anticipated, and since we also have the support of our Regional Housing Services Office, these funds have not been needed so far and are not actually anticipated to be spent. At this time, no further funds are needed to comply with this program, and no change in our operating budget would be expected.

The Professional Services – Other line item includes the estimated fee for membership in the Regional Housing Services Office, which is estimated to be $15,500 in FY25, $1,000 more than it was in FY23 and 24. The five participating communities continue to work successfully with Anser Advisories as our consultant. The office may consider incorporating Stoneham and/or Wakefield in the coming year. There is no expected impact to the services they are providing us.

Continued support of the town’s economic development initiatives is proposed with a budget for the Economic Development Committee, within the Professional Services budget. The amount requested for this year is $10,000, a reduction from prior years based on the actual cost of programs and activities previously done as well as expected new activities. Funds are anticipated to be spent on a campaign to encourage patronage of local businesses, a networking event and continued work on a promotional video for the Town. Other activities are expected to include a social media spot to help residents access information on the sewer construction proposal.

As in FY24, several objectives for FY25 relate directly to the Community Master Plan, which was completed in 2020, and the Housing Production Plan, completed in 2018. One of these includes moving forward with developing properties in the Affordable Housing Overlay District, the CPC has worked with a wetlands scientist and local surveyor to complete the due diligence work funded in a previous Town Meeting appropriation. The first of the properties with a complete wetlands delineation and survey is 7 Saint Theresa Street. The CPC has drafted an RFP for disposition to an affordable housing developer and is ready for discussion with the Select Board for its authorization and release. The CPC anticipates supporting the Select Board in its decision making about the disposition of this property and managing the resulting project. Of the remaining properties proposed for disposition, survey work is nearly complete for 57 Haverhill Street and will soon be underway for 44 and 46 Oakdale Road.

This past year, the Planning Department was informed that its application to designate the Town a Housing Choice Community was successful. The program provides substantial grant opportunities, including planning and infrastructure funding that may or may not be directly related to housing projects. Designation also now gives the Town higher points in scoring grants in the One Stop program including MassWorks. The designation is valid for five years. The CPC will explore submitting its first grant proposal pursuant to this program this spring.