

The Boston Society of Architects

The Housing Committee Minutes
19 September 2008

Date: 25 September 2008

In attendance were: Tina Brooks (Presenter), Janet Buck, Daniel Carson, Frank Garofalo, Diane Georgopoulos, Daniel Glazier, Lillian Lew Hailye, William Hammer, Celeste Hynick, David Johnson, David Kelman (Co-Chair), Claude Lancome, McAvoy, Peter Munkenbeck, Gloria Murry, Richard Ness, St. John Smith (Co-Chair), Ilkka Suvanto, Wayne Whitaker, Alfred Wojciechowski.

Presentation: Housing in Massachusetts: Where Are We Going?

Presenter: Ms. Tina Brooks, Under Secretary of the Department of Housing and Community Development, DHCD, and Director of Housing and Community Development.

Ms. Brooks noted that this is a good time for DHCD, because a longitudinal statewide survey of all cities and towns in the Commonwealth is nearing completion.

Ms. Brooks described the survey as a good demographic view toward housing and economic development.

- Where are the jobs?
- Age of each community, i.e., its principle time of development.
- Age and percentage of population in each general age bracket, with historic trend. Age brackets appear to be fairly stable.
- Cost of living by community.
- There appears to be a surplus in multi-family housing stock, but there is a mismatch by community need.
- Also there is no apparent solution for lower income family.

The challenge is for the State to fully understand the broad scope of the challenges including existing infrastructure, public transportation, employment opportunities, and other energy sources, which together project an accurate image for each community, and also for individual neighborhoods within each communities, in great detail, including availability of good day care centers.

Ms. Brooks advised that 40B legislation is still the States strongest response to housing need.

40B is an instrument for higher density housing intended to work closely with a community master plan, if there is a master plan. She did not mention working with the Community Conservation Commission.

It is also possible now to work more closely with the economic development side of her Department, especially the value of the existing infrastructure.

Under existing housing stock, the survey identified housing stock within each community; where is it? The age and maintenance level; the vacancy rate for rental properties and the direction of the vacancy rate based on the last 5 years of experiences; the median income, the median cost of homes per dwelling unit; affordability.

Ms. Brooks expects the Federal Housing Recovery Act to generate grants soon, which will be available for implementation by DHCD, in the form of direct subsidies, and a better base for credit. She is uncertain how forgiveness of bad mortgages can be accommodated, or what relief extends beyond this financial package. How does bond bill financing fit with State and Federal housing programs? What is the value of foreclosed properties, or properties threatened by possible foreclosure?

Contrary to the statement above noting that the survey records an access of multiple housing stocks, Ms. Brooks advises that the existing available housing stock is not site specific to local need, and will require upgrading on a long laundry list of change. She therefore advises that there is a large demand for multiple housing units, especially in denser neighborhoods with good public transportation.

The housing landscape is formidable.

- What can we do?
- Where can we look for available foreclosed properties?
- Is the earmark of 20 million dollars adequate?
- Is \$60,000 allocated/unit for renovation cost, adequate?
- With these margins, will developers find subject projects profitable?

Ms. Brooks advises that the buy-back provision in the Federal Housing Recovery Act, will help, especially families who remain in homes threatened with possible foreclosure.

One of the problems for DHCD is identification of neighborhood groups. This information is now sorted by banks holding mortgages.

Not the least of community financial problems is that the community tax base is inadequate to provide good public services.

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Despite the grim housing status, Ms. Brooks is encouraged that DHCD is better prepared to face these issues, and she believes that they can regroup for a better, more efficient utilization of their organization for delivery of services.

End of Presentation

Next Meeting

Friday, October 17, beginning at 8:30 a.m. in the BSA 5th Floor Conference Room, 52 Broad Street, Boston, MA.

Presentation: The Olmstead Site Housing

End of Meeting Minutes