Building Blocks Coalition
May 28th, 2020

Notes

I. Welcome & Introductions

II. Budget Landscape & State House Updates
   a. Revenue
      i. Mary Tittman from Mass budget indicated FY21 tax revenue are estimated to be short by $4.4 billion to $5.7 billion range below the modest benchmark established in early calendar year 2020.¹
      ii. With the revenue shortfall, challenges with state budget process to move forward, advocacy for federal funds is crucial in preserving Housing programs.
      iii. The process of allocation of federal funds is still unclear, advocacy is needed to weigh in on the process, distribution and effective use of federal funds for affordable housing.
      iv. An op-ed by economists Alan Clayton-Matthews, Michael Goodman and Alicia Sasser-Modestino who argue that avoiding budget cuts through targeted tax increases is the best way to build a strong recovery in Massachusetts. This policy needs to be discussed further before Building Blocks can finalize their position.
   b. State House Updates
      i. The FY2021 budget could be a monthly budget or a quarterly budget, this is still being finalized by the Legislature. The budget may be pre-conferenced and may have limited opportunity for additional funding for programs.
      ii. Building Blocks needs to proceed with the FY2021 Budget asks to ensure the programs are adequately funded.

c. FY2020 Supplemental Budget filed by Governor Baker
   i. On May 12, Governor Baker filed a $1 billion supplemental budget for spending related to COVID-19. The Governor plans for the federal government to reimburse the state for the supplemental budget through FEMA to cover the costs of expenses for disaster response activities.
   ii. Details of specific line item allocations of the Supplemental budget are unknown. The state public housing authorities are slated to receive $13.5 million while individual and family shelters to receive $2 million through the Supplemental Budget.
   iii. CHAPA will advocate to the legislature for including some of the Building Blocks budget priorities in the Supplemental Budget

III. Discussion on FY2020 Budget Priorities & Federal funds
   a. Through the CARES Act, many federal funds were made available to Massachusetts state and local governments including CDBG, ESG, CRF, and more.
   b. Other states have leveraged CRF funds for housing assistance.
   c. Currently, the Baker administration is working to distribute the state funds. There is a lack of clarity on which agency is leading the charge on funds of distribution, both on a state and local level.
   d. Advocacy is needed to ensure the effective distribution of these funds and to leverage them to fill gaps in the state budget funding for programs.
   e. Laurie Massie from GBLS indicated that organizations working on homelessness prevention are advocating to expand HomeBASE. Federal funds like ESG and FEMA funds can support that expansion. Specifically, there is:
      i. Need for specific steps to provide statewide coordination or set statewide goals about de-densification of family congregate shelters or to set policies about ascertaining which families are at particularly high risk due to underlying health conditions and therefore should be prioritized for de-densified units.
      ii. Need to provide COVID-preventative safe shelter options for families who are not eligible for EA (again, with an eye towards reducing the public health threat of having these families staying in doubled-up situations, as for example has been highlighted repeatedly in Chelsea as an extreme public health risk factor)
      iii. Need to continue HomeBASE stipends and stabilization services that otherwise would end during the state of emergency for an additional 12 months in situations where families cannot afford market rent; de-couple RAFT & HomeBASE.
f. Joel Wool from Boston Housing Authority pointed out that CARES Act has provided some funding for Tenant and Project based rental assistance (Sec 8). There is funding available for Federal public housing but need funds for state public housing.

IV. Conclusion
   a. Building Blocks will proceed with advocacy for FY2021 with updated allocations and policy changes.
   b. Need for discussion and efforts on advocacy for Federal funds allocation for housing programs.