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## **Boston City Council Committee on Ways and Means**

*Dockets #0524-0531, FY22 Budget*

*Department of Neighborhood Development*

*Fair Housing & Equity*

***Working Session: Friday, May 7, 2021, 10:00 a.m.***

***Hearing: Monday, May 24, 2021, 2:00 p.m.***

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The following is a collection of questions that were asked by the Committee regarding the Department of Neighborhood Development's budget and the Office of Fair Housing and Equity at the Working Session on Friday, May 7, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.

Recording here: <https://youtu.be/GavZAZTbqCk>

The Administration is requested to respond to all questions in one of three ways:

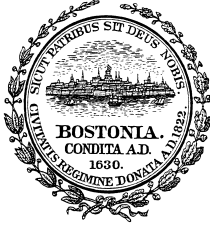
- 1) Verbally at the hearing on Monday, May 24<sup>th</sup>, at 2PM.
- 2) For factual questions, through written responses supplied prior to May 24<sup>th</sup>, including budget book page numbers or other references where appropriate.
- 3) By deferring to a specific scheduled departmental budget hearing.

Please annotate and return this information request before May 24<sup>th</sup>, indicating how each question will be answered.

### **DND Budget Questions**

#### **Councilor Kenzie Bok, Chair, asked:**

- I know there has been progress in this area; I'd just like an update on what has been done to increase education about co-ops for first time homebuyers, supporting residents who may like to be co-op members, and increasing support for co-ops in Boston. I know that there is a module being added to the classes and also a revolving fund being finalized for shared loans -- can you please provide an update on these initiatives?
- How are we thinking it might be most effective and responsible to use the American Rescue Plan funding on the housing side, in addition to rental relief?
- How is the First Generation Homebuyers pilot program going and are you thinking about expanding that?
- What are your plans for transitioning homeless individuals into emergency shelters, including those in hotels throughout the COVID-19 pandemic into permanent housing? I see there is money allocated for that, so please expand on the details of the plan.
- The eviction moratorium is waffling a bit as it was struck down by a federal judge recently and now there is a stay, which may be lifted at some point. What is DND proactively doing to get ready for that so that even if there is a wave of paper evictions, we don't see a wave of actual executed evictions?



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### **Councilor Ricardo Arroyo asked:**

- Can we get more details about the increase of \$3.5M in contracted services for FY22?
- Can DND go into more detail about the post-COVID homelessness support funding?

### **Councilor Julia Mejia asked:**

- We have heard from constituents in BHA who are students living with their parents. They are in a difficult situation where, unless they are enrolled full time, they are not classified as students and their rents go up when they earn a little. How can DND work with the BHA to make sure that part-time students are able to work and go to school without risking higher rents for their families?

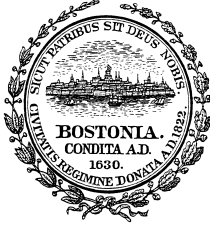
### **Councilor Ed Flynn asked:**

- There is funding for improvement to the St. Botolph Housing Development, and the status is listed as “implementation underway”. Can we talk about the timeline, and what sort of upgrades are expected?
- DND received significant federal funding this year, should we expect this level of external funding next year? If not and we get less external funding, how do we plan to sustain our programming and projects?

## **Fair Housing Questions**

### **Councilor Kenzie Bok, Chair, asked:**

- Councilors were informed last year about a \$250,000 sum that was allocated to create an initial pilot contract between Fair Housing & Equity (FHE) and Suffolk University around Fair Housing testing; can you update us on this, and how those efforts will continue into FY22?
  - Is there any data from this year’s testing, what methodology was used, and if our contract with Suffolk is continuing, will we cycle through types of discrimination to test?
- How can we do something similar to what the City of Seattle is doing, and grow into an internal program where we are not just doing Fair Housing testing, but also doing enforcement actions against landlords who we find are discriminating



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- against voucher holders and other protected classes (people of color, family status, disability, etc.)?
- According to Suffolk's data, transgender people were the most discriminated against in housing; what if anything is Fair Housing doing to focus on that community?
  - Please explain the average age of open cases in more detail and the reason why the closing of cases gets delayed.
  - Do you have sufficient numbers of staff to support the caseload you have?
  - Have we been doing any enforcement actions?
  - Do we have a proactive landlord education program, and if so, what is our approach to that?
  - How does FHE plan to use the new investment in its budget this year?

### **Councilor Ricardo Arroyo asked:**

- Can FHE's staff give a little more clarity around its full time employees (FTEs) and full time employment (FTE) cost adjustments?
- Many of FHEs staff are funded through external funds: Are there any plans by the Administration to make at least some of the positions funded through the operating budget? How stable is the amount of external funds that support these positions -- i.e does the amount of money change from year-to-year, or remain pretty much the same?
- To what extent is FHE proactively investigating cases of discrimination in Boston rather than depending on residents to file complaints.
- Are there any plans to expand funding to FHE or use existing funding to allow the office to conduct further studies about housing discrimination in Boston?

### **Councilor Ed Flynn asked:**

- Currently, what is the staffing level for Office of Fair Housing and Equity to conduct investigation into housing discrimination cases? What is the usual caseload for housing investigation, and has it significantly increased during the pandemic? Is there an opportunity for this office to work with the Human Rights Commission?