

NewsWire

Police officers promote sergeants

Wellesley Police officers Terry Cunningham and Tom Komola were given a unique brand of promotion by the Board of Selectmen last week. The board unanimously voted to promote Cunningham from a sergeant to a lieutenant, and Komola from a patrol officer to a sergeant in recognition of the retirement of a lieutenant.

Normally the town would wait until Lt. John Whalen retired to move any officers up the ladder, but Police Chief Tom O'Loughlin said temporary promotions will allow the town to get an idea of what kind of a job the officers will do in their new leadership roles before the decision becomes final. "This is a rare opportunity to see them in action and see how they meet the responsibilities," O'Loughlin said. "My sense is that they are just fine. I recommended them because I know that each of them has performed to date in a position that represented the department and the town well."

March the selectmen will review the two promotions, check to see that both officers have the high enough on their civil service exams, and make the promotions final.

Selectmen approve \$3 million budget

Wellesley selectmen last week approved a \$3 million general government operating budget for fiscal year 1996. Budgets for the library, police department and department of public works are handled separately from the general.

Executive Director Arnold Wakelin, who was forced by the selectmen to cut \$170,000

Selectmen create middle ground Committee would solicit developers for affordable housing

By David B. Caruso
TAB Staff Writer

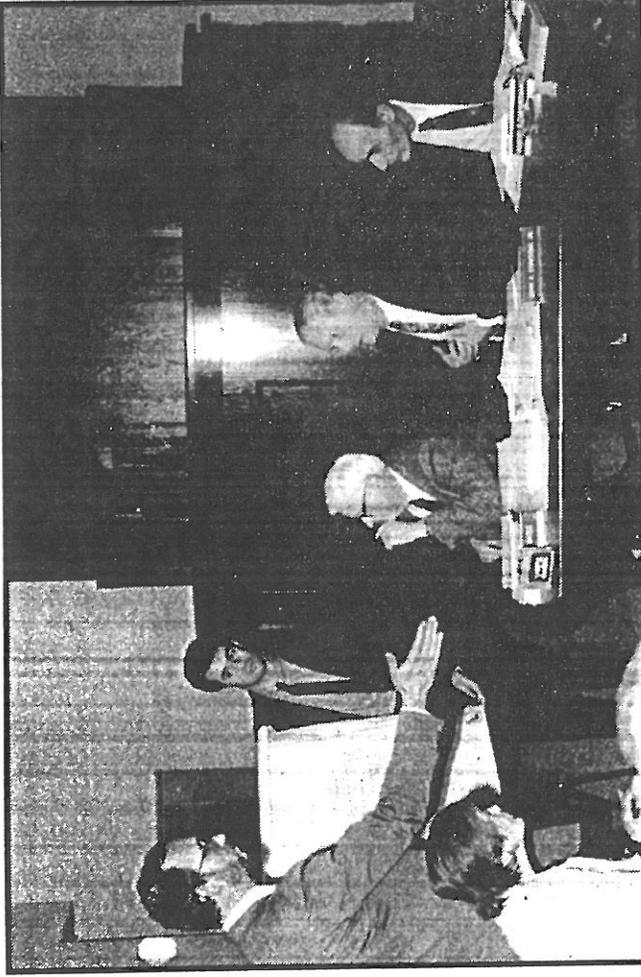
Selectmen created a new permanent committee last week that will be charged with finding land in town suitable for affordable housing development, and soliciting contractors to build the projects.

Although the Wellesley Housing Partnership Committee exists only in theory and the board has yet to take a vote on its role, the selectmen said they are committed to the principal of an organization whose job will be to encourage the creation of new, less expensive housing units.

A draft of the committee's mission statement prepared by town hall staff has suggested four major goals, including charges to: identify scattered sites including town-owned land and vacant buildings that have the potential and capacity for single and multi-family housing; seek funding sources for town-sponsored and cooperative effort affordable housing projects; solicit and encourage private proposals, with an emphasis placed on the conversion of existing structures; and develop a new process for evaluating comprehensive permits.

Selectman Joseph Avellone said the establishment of the committee is one of the best steps the town has taken to take control of development within the town. By pro-actively seeking development that is "in character" with Wellesley's housing stock, Avellone said, the town can avoid some of the large-scale projects encouraged by the comprehensive permit process.

"If we can develop a pro-active approach to affordable housing that is consistent with single-family neighborhoods, it will put us in much better stead," Avellone said. "Certainly there is a two-fold benefit here. One is doing affordable housing in an intelligent way that meets the town's needs,



Members of the Capital Sites Management development team meet with Zoning Board of Appeals members in 1989; developer Logan Huffman and his team at a ZBA meeting in 1994. The selectmen hope a new committee designed to work with developers on affordable housing projects will avoid future showdowns.

but the other benefit is that this will put the town in a much better position when dealing with the state in the comprehensive permit process."

It was, most observers agree, Wellesley's stormy experience with the comprehensive permit process and the state's anti-snob zoning laws that have sparked the creation of the committee.

In 1969 the Massachusetts legislature decided to combat a lack of affordable housing in the state's affluent suburbs by creating a process through which a developer could ignore local zoning restrictions, thought by many to be specifically designed to drive up property values, and

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Crisis on the fields of glory

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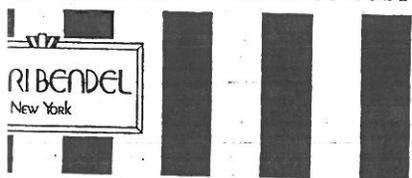
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DEVELOPMENT

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exclude lower-income families.

By obtaining a comprehensive permit, available to most projects containing affordable housing units, a developer could bypass size and density limits and other local zoning statutes.

A fallout of the policy was that developers interested in building luxury apartments and condominiums not normally allowed by Wellesley's zoning laws could override the town's planning concerns by including a few affordable housing units in their projects and applying for a comprehensive permit.

One such application before the Zoning Board of Appeals is Hastings Village, an 87-unit five-story apartment complex proposed by local developer Logan Huffman.

Wellesley has the power to turn down a comprehensive permit application, but such rejections are routinely overturned by the state Housing Appeals Committee because Wellesley has done relatively little to encourage affordable housing development in the past.

"As one selectman ... I don't want to be in that position anymore," Avellone said.

Although a housing partnership committee will not be able to stop a developer from applying for a comprehensive permit, the existence of a committee will, the selectmen hope, give the town a better image in the minds of members of the state Housing Appeals Committee.

"Time is a-wasting on this," Avellone said. "The town was caught short conceptually last year because we really weren't as pro-active as we should have been in terms of locating affordable housing opportunities."

A handful of local developers have expressed an interest in working with the yet-to-be-named Housing Partnership Committee members in building low-density affordable housing that fits in with the single-family home character of Wellesley's neighborhoods.

"It'll be attractive to me," Wellesley developer Stephen Burt said. "I'm pleased that they've acted and I hope that they give some teeth to this committee."

Burt has come before the board of selectmen with affordable housing proposals before, but was unable to convince the town to support the projects in the face of heavy opposition from neighborhood groups.

Last summer Burt asked the board to approve

a development on Forrest Street that would have created eight single-family homes, two of which would have been offered at affordable rates, on a site zoned for three luxury houses.

The project was never officially turned down, but Burt withdrew his offer when it became apparent that he would not get the selectmen's support.

"Having gone through the Forrest Street experience and coming away empty handed, I would next time want to go in having [the town] on my side," Burt said. "The question is whether this committee will stand up to neighborhoods, and if they don't, I don't think any affordable housing will ever be built."

Because the Housing Partnership Committee will be taking an active role in encouraging development, it may run into opposition from neighborhood groups which would oppose less expensive housing units for fear that they would drive down property values.

Selectmen Chairwoman Barbara Shanahan said she has anticipated some opposition to the committee, but said she is confident that if the partnership does its job correctly, it will focus on the type of development that neighbors will welcome.

"My hope is that the committee will have done its work," Shanahan said. "When people have been objecting [to affordable housing], it has been because of the density of the projects. We need to be sensitive to the community and the fact that this is a well-developed town."

Planning Board Chairman Robert Murphy said he expects the committee will have the most success in advocating projects that involve no new construction, seek to renovate existing buildings or occupy town-owned land.

"They have their work cut out for them, and, frankly, I think some of the people that are, in the abstract, in favor of affordable housing are going to face a serious reality check when [the committee] goes out and starts to look for developers."

Wellesley has commissioned a number of affordable housing study committees in the past, but all of them have stopped short of seeking builders to begin work on possible development.

The selectmen will be continuing to refine the exact role of the partnership committee in the next several weeks, and can be expected to make some changes in how it will carry out its mission as the town reacts to the concept. □

FIELD

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"All of the programs have suffered from lack of field space," director of recreation Jack Hutchinson said. "In the spring, soccer competes with little league for town fields. In addition to that, the high school has started a

use fields because they are in constant use.

Hutchinson said the town needs to do something soon to bolster its stock of fields, but is not confident anything can be done to solve the problem once and for all.

"The snow dump site would be good for baseball," Hutchinson said. "Soccer is at a point where, if we don't get more facilities, they will