



Fact Sheet 2: Engine 6 Group in Newton

Racial Justice Initiative Temple Beth Elohim February, 2018 Sheri Kassirer

What is the Engine 6 Group?

To quote its website “Engine 6 is a voluntary association of residents of Newton MA, who advocate for housing diversity and affordability and for a fair process in the allocation of housing funds. We seek to hold City government accountable to its own planning and housing pledges and to all fair housing and civil rights laws. It was created in 2013 to support the conversion of the former Engine 6 firehouse in Waban into housing for nine chronically homeless individuals with one live-in manager, which was blocked by the City in response to loud neighborhood opposition.”

How does it work?

- * It is led by a trio of individuals in close communication with each other who have sought the timely and expert support of another 12 individuals who are called the Steerers. The Steerers commit to this role and can be called into action within a short period of time. Around 20 individuals attend the regular monthly Engine 6 meetings out of an email list of 300. Allies include other organizations such as Green Newton, Bike Newton, the League of Women Voters of Newton, advocacy groups for seniors, and others.

- * The group has no budget and therefore is not burdened with fund raising. From time to time when there is a special need, the group “passes the hat” to gather the required funds.

- * The group has been successful in drawing upon the expertise of affordable housing professionals within its group to assess 40B applications and applications for Special Permits and Zoning changes and then make recommendations.

- * The group’s advocacy includes testifying at hearings before the City Council, the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) and the Community Preservation Committee (CPC). The group also meets with and emails the Mayor, City Councilors, ZBA and CPC and submits letters to the editor of the local newspaper.

What makes the effort successful?

- * A far reaching “power analysis” to quote Fran. Understanding the City of Newton’s civic and legislative organization was a key first step. How decisions were made within the city government, what information was required when, what key constituencies were required to be heard from, all these basics were fundamental elements in the beginning.

- * Reaching out to allies such as the League of Women Voters, the Green Newton, Bike Newton was critical. Continuing to keep those lines of communication open is important. Note these allies are included above in the communication list. Maintaining good relations with the City Council is considered an ongoing crucial element as well.

- * Another fundamental ingredient is the design and legal expertise in assessing Chapter 40B and Special Permit applications. The group evaluates each project and

determines whether to support it. Recruiting affordable housing professionals to assist in the evaluation has been critical to the group's success.