

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date and Time: Monday, September 30, 2013 @ 4:00 pm., Board Room

Members Present: Nagle, Rasmussen, Brezinski, Loy, Werth, Tipple, Groat

Others Present: Gisselman, Peckham, Jacobson, Hebert,

In accordance with Chapter 19, Wisc. Statutes, notice of this meeting was posted and sent to the Daily Herald in the proper manner. It was noted that there was a quorum present and the meeting was called to order.

Review Citizen Survey

Groat was pleased with the response from the citizen survey. She felt that it provided some useful information for the city and outlined the top three issues contributing to blight as financial limitations of property owners, growing rental properties, and inadequate enforcement efforts. She also stated that the respondents believed that the most effective ways to eliminate blight included increased enforcement, licensing of rental properties and demolishing and removing blighted structures. She stated that while citizens were positive about the condition of their neighborhoods they did not appear confident that the condition of housing city would be improving in the future. Rasmussen commented that she particularly appreciated the thoughtful comments. She indicated that while taxes were a concern, city services, including increased police services cost money. Rasmussen stated that the housing task force has been working on the rental licensing program and objected to Keene presenting the idea without being concerned with program details. Brezinski objected to rental density zoning. Nagle stated that he had placed the item on the Finance Committee agenda to allow for discussion regarding the funding of the program. He wanted to make sure that this would be a program funded by licensing fees. He stated that he did not want the program to compete for levy dollars with existing services. Brezinski acknowledged that citizens and council are getting impatient for results. Rasmussen indicated that improvements are being made and pointed to the change in the citation process. Groat indicated that the Blight Committee had looked at rental density zoning. She indicated that initially the committee thought it had merit but ultimately rejected the idea. Several concerns were noted during the investigation including the projection that rental housing will become the housing of choice for a growing population in the future. Elderly and many of the younger generation will prefer rental due to the lack of maintenance and the ability to be mobile. These populations will demand high quality rental properties. In addition, rental zoning is enforced in several Minnesota communities including Winona 30%, Mankato 25%, Northfield 20% and West St Paul 10%. Three families have sued Winona over the density ordinance. The judge upheld the city's ordinance in April, which is now under appeal.

Review Blight Committee Recommendations

Groat stated the committee had reviewed the status of existing neighborhoods based upon housing values, housing ages and crime statistics. The committee reviewed best practices and tried to compile a comprehensive list that included people, places and resources. She stated the committee believed that this comprehensive approach was necessary to retain and attract good property owners and tenants, improve the existing housing stock and leverage resources to accomplish the goals. Groat reviewed the group's recommendations. Nagle encouraged renewed effort on managing vacant foreclosed properties. Rasmussen commented that we have plenty of programs to provide assistance to homeowners but limited funds to landlords. Werth indicated that we currently maintain a waiting list for landlords seeking funding. She stated that these homes must be brought up to code to receive funds. Nagle indicated that rental is a commercial enterprise. He did not believe the City needed to prop up landlords or banks. These groups should get out of the business if they cannot manage their properties. Groat reviewed the Point of Sale Inspection Program. A number of City's in Ohio, Michigan and Minnesota require inspections prior to home sales. These inspections are similar to the septic inspections required by Marathon County for rural properties. Communities generally are looking for a pre-sale inspection to verify that no eminent structural failures, unsafe electrical, plumbing, or gas systems exist. Some cities use city personnel and others have the homeowners contract with approved inspectors. The inspectors then submit their findings to the city. In situations where unsafe

conditions exist homeowners must improve prior to sale or obtain a commitment from the buyer. The programs apply to owner occupied dwellings and complement the rental inspection program. This allows major blight issues to be resolved during the sale when funds are available to deal with maintenance issues. Werth indicated that she has seen the insurance industry taking this stance on aged electrical systems. The insurance companies upon inspection of the property mandate upgrades.

Groat stated that developing a policy to purchase and raze blighted property is effective in improving neighborhoods. Werth indicated that banks are willing to work with the city on these homes but when the city doesn't buy them they are sold and no improvements are made. Werth understands the frustration with our situation by reminded the committee this is the result of 30 years of decline. It is important to move forward. She stated that she had toured residential neighborhoods in Green Bay and was impressed by their efforts to eliminate substandard housing through city purchase.

Rasmussen indicated that we have reduced staffing to such a point that it is difficult to keep pace with all of the enforcement demands.

Rasmussen thought that the stakeholder meeting held in the spring of 2012 was an excellent way to engage people to the neighborhood issues. She stated the roundtable discussions and the idea of rehabilitating block face areas was great. She encouraged the city to continue with these efforts in the near east side. Werth indicated that she and Hebert advocated for the Athletic Park neighborhood. Werth stated this neighborhood was perfect due to its proximity to the school, access to the waterfront and downtown. Groat stated that the theory in the redevelopment field today was to work on neighborhoods that have significant assets to offer residents and that have not crossed the tipping point.

Rasmussen indicated that the plan was comprehensive and thought the ideas were great. Loy indicated that as the committees started to review the problems they were faced with the significance of the social problems contributing to these issues. These problems cannot be solved overnight. The committee has provided you with a playbook of solutions.

Nagle indicated that the solution is tackled house by house. Sit down with property owners, set specific dates for compliance, and hold them accountable.

Project Status Report

Groat stated the next phase for the blight committee would be to prioritize, create timelines and developing performance measures.

She stated that the crime committee is working on their plan and that the employment/jobs committee had not been formed. She stated that this committee would be a second phase.

Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 5:20PM.