

MEETING RECORD

Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting October 21, 2014

CAC in Attendance: Gure Ali, Peter Flanders, Kelli Aiken Flynn, Belinda Gerry, Joe Gray, Rob Kilgore, Adam Lee, Steve Letourneau, Tom Poulin, Doris Russell, Theresa Smith, Mitch Thomas and Rick Whiting

Consultants: Frank O'Hara

Staff: Reine Mynahan and Lori Lewis

Welcome:

Committee Chair Adam Lee welcomed everyone back to today's meeting.

Minutes:

Review the meeting minutes of October 14, 2014

Motion: by Mitch Thomas to approve the minutes of the meeting on October 14, 2014.

2nd by Doris Russell

Vote: 13-0-0 in favor, motion carried.

Introductions:

CAC member introduced themselves as there were new members present at that were not at last week's meeting.

Housing Conditions Data:

Frank O'Hara went over the "Facts about Housing Conditions in Auburn" slide presentation packet with the CAC members.

- Mostly rentals in the target areas built before 1939
- Target areas have a high vacancy rate not a healthy one
- More rental units verses homeowners
- Lower rents and home values in the target areas
- Lead paint hazards mostly concentrated in the center of city
- Substandard units concentrated in the Downtown area – lacks plumbing, kitchen, etc.

Frank talked about the compliance letter from Zack Lenhert. There are many dangerous buildings in Auburn and the letter lists six of the worst buildings. This is a chronic issue and there are not just these buildings.

Housing Programs:

Reine Mynahan gave an overview of all of the loan programs that Community Development offers. Some of the programs have to meet Housing Standards and all are approved by the Community Development Loan Committee.

Questions/Comments:

1. *For Commercial loans; how long does the job have to last?*
Response: We don't track beyond the initial reporting period.

2. *How many of the buildings/units are substandard?*

Response: Reine will investigate.

Discussion or Concerns:

1. People with limited income are excluded from rentals/is harmful to kids
2. Tenants being billed for other tenant's electrical usage; renters need stable housing costs
3. Tenants exposed to mold, lead, allergies when in poor quality housing
4. New building – people care more when they live in a nicer building
5. Lead affects all kids
6. Crime, drugs, etc – poor housing conditions lead to problems
7. Absence of “carrots and sticks”, City needs more ability to enforce
 - a. System encourages bad landlords
 - b. Need to reduce absentee landlords
8. Tried property maintenance standard codes in past but was defeated by landlords
9. When Sex offenders listed in newspaper it pushes them into downtown area, keeps other tenants from moving in
10. Absentee landlords – don't fix anything
11. What percentage of landlords are absentee? Do they live in Auburn? Reine will investigate
12. Code enforcement makes a difference, Portland has 3 officers who work with code enforcement
13. Good landlords want code enforcement and incentives
14. Change of use requirements prohibited/standards too high
 - a. Different hoops in Lewiston/ that's where businesses go
 - b. Commercial to residential & residential to commercial
 - c. Need flexibility based on age of building
 - d. New construction standards are unrealistic
 - e. Codes too weak for existing buildings – overkill for investors who want to upgrade
15. Tax assessments unrealistically high
16. Tightening in capital/because of reputation of landlords, hurts ability to borrow
17. Tax acquired process
 - a. Banks won't allow capital investment, lack of clean titles
 - b. Makes the building sit longer
 - c. Capital investment up front could get property moving faster
18. CDBG – low income attachment a problem
19. Need a system that is high on maintenance and low on regulation for conversion
20. Bring 1 & 2 bedroom units to downtown – renovations
21. Need a loan guaranty program to reduce risks
22. Bank pool – get banks together /would LAEGC consider residential/mixed use?
23. Talk to banks on how to bridge gap with bank and landlord/investors
24. Clean up exterior areas of properties – make things “look nice”
25. Extend New Auburn improvements
26. Lighting – improve & have it cost less in long term
27. Want to feel safe in neighborhoods
28. Union Street should be a focus

Summary of Comments

| Stick | Carrot | Other Focuses |
|--|---|---------------------------------|
| Property Maintenance Code Increase enforcement | Building code flexibility/make change in use easier | Address safety/lighting |
| Absentee landlords Responsibility and accountability | Bank loan pool or guarantee program | Healthy housing for all incomes |
| | CDBG resources | Exterior improvements |
| | TIF-like resources for small investors | Union Street neighborhood |

Public Comments:

Jeff Keenan introduced himself and presented an idea for developing an Auburn Opportunity Park. This park would be located in the Great Falls area. He presented a map and handouts to the Committee to review as well as answered various questions.

Tizz Crowley had ideas for improvements to the target areas.

1. Data -- median contract rent data is unrepresentative – it includes people with rental subsidies, so is lower than normal “market” rents
2. Isolation -- neighbors don’t know neighbors – a major problem in neighborhoods
3. Absentee landlords also a problem
4. Consider passing an ordinance similar to Portland’s to make landlords responsible for the bad behavior of tenants
5. Bring the property maintenance code proposal back, but with two modifications
 - a. Only apply to absentee landlords (is this legal?)
 - b. Only apply to non-owner occupied larger than x units
6. Provide a “TIF-like” benefit to small investors
 - a. When they make a property upgrade, hold the property harmless for property tax increases for 3-5 years

Adjournment

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Lewis
Community Development Assistant