

Minutes

Housing Committee
Monday, May 14, 2018
7:00 p.m.

Police Training Room, 4th Floor
Municipal Building, Jamestown, New York

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairwoman Vickye James, Councilman Brent Sheldon, Councilwoman Vanessa Weinert

MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT: Councilwoman Maria Jones

The members approved the minutes from the May 7, 2018 meeting.

Remarks from Community Members/Committee Members

No one appeared to speak.

General Discussion

Councilwoman Weinert: We were going to discuss our homework, correct? I had some interesting homework; I'm not sure about anybody else. Some of the things I've already looked at before, some of it I hadn't reviewed yet, so it was really interesting to see what actually has been done and how many studies there have already been on housing and so many things that have yet to be implemented, based on probably tens of thousands of dollars that has been spent on studies. I will say that on the record, because it is frustrating to see – there has been fully flushed-out ideas on how we can address and mitigate the housing issue that we have and it hasn't moved forward and I'm not quite sure why or what happened at the time, especially in 2010 when the JRC had the consultants here doing the big housing study. They had identified a few things as far as what needed to be done immediately before Jamestown's housing stock was at a point of no return; and a lot of them haven't been done. Some of it's resource driven, obviously, but other parts of it are just changes. It doesn't necessarily cost money, it's a change in process. Some of it could even actually make money. Not in a net gain way, but pay for itself, if implemented in the way that it was suggested that we implement. That was really interesting. JRC doesn't necessarily do surveying in the way that we had talked about doing surveying at this committee. It was more consultants coming in, doing tons of research; both quantitative and qualitative and I will definitely recommend to everyone to read those studies if you haven't because they are enlightening to say the least.

Councilwoman James: That's one of my pet peeves that we have the ability to have those consultants come in and spend a lot of money on those things and then sometimes they sit on a shelf in a beautiful binder.

Councilwoman Weinert: I'm not sure exactly what happened here; obviously a big part of the study was talking about how we really need a rental property registration program. That was something that was completely flushed-out. JRC even wrote draft ordinances for it and I had mentioned Youngstown, Ohio a few different times because they implemented one actually around the same time that we were doing the study in 2010 to great success. I don't know if anyone knows why we never moved forward with that.

Councilman Sheldon: Well, you need a little bit of history. Did you talk to Vince DeJoy at all? Did he give you some of these studies?

Councilwoman Weinert: No, I have a meeting with Vince on Friday.

Councilwoman James: How did you find them? Were they online?

Councilwoman Weinert: Yes, on the JRC website. Mary Maxwell gave me some as well.

Councilman Sheldon: Yes, it's unfortunate he's not here. I think he should be at these meetings and can address some of these issues. Some of it even predates me. The 2010 study, I wasn't on the council at that point. I don't think any of us were on the council. From what I've heard from other council people and former council people, there was a lot of pushback from the landlords on that.

Councilwoman Weinert: Yes. They actually did do a 2017 update and that was mentioned in here and how there was pushback and they kind of called us out a little bit.

Councilwoman James: That was in 2010?

Councilwoman Weinert: This was in 2017, they did an update on the study. The trend is still the trend. We haven't - there are obviously some things that have been implemented and it wasn't a complete - the JRC has implemented many of the things that they have control over as far as the seed grant opportunities and neighborhood revitalization, Hands on Jamestown; those types of things were in the study as well, but a lot of things have to come from us or from even higher levels. There are some suggestions in there of how to work with other municipalities on how to create a better kind of lobbying force to change some of these laws that really impact the housing stock. But, it's really enlightening and it reinforced some things that I was already thinking about, so that made me feel good too. The things that I've seen in other cities work well has been laid out. And then they also did a draft ordinance; this was in 2014, so I get there was probably pushback from the rental properties, but I think if we think about how we can move forward with this in a way in which we get their feedback is kind of what we've been talking about where it's here is the path, because I think we do have to have

the parameters of here's the path, we are saying this should be the objectives of the study and what we're trying to do. And if one of those objectives is having a landlord registration system, we have to decide if that's the path because that's definitely going to dictate the survey methodology. What I started thinking about it, it's getting from was is the elasticity from landlords as far as what they would sign on for versus what they would be adamantly against. Where is that middle ground in there. That's kind of what I was thinking. Did anyone else have anything?

Councilman Sheldon: I did not hear back from my contact at the Real Estate Investors Association. I reached out to him. The other thing that we looked at, too, was the nuisance property ordinance and Chief was involved with that, we talked about that quite a bit. At the time, there was a lawsuit against the city and it almost has come to a resolution at this point, so we may be able to proceed with something like that in the future once they've resolved that. There was a settlement proposed and I don't want to get into that since we're on the record here.

Councilwoman James: I had on my list to contact COI. COI does a community assessment needs survey every three years. They had some great homeownership, residential, homeless things - I like that they have a part on there; community perceptions and one of the things that they were talking about here in Jamestown from the renters, some of the complaints that they were talking about, they have inability for a down payment and poor credit, which are a barrier for homeownership for them. And then they also talked about how they can't afford - we were talking about it'd be nice to get some of this old housing stock into people's hands, but someone was saying that they can't afford to make the needed repairs. Again, the bad credit. I should've copied this because this is a great piece too. I'll email it to you. What I like also is they have recommendations. Some of them seem pretty doable. There are nine recommendations and a lot of it is just awareness. Educating people, requiring radon testings on site of homes, conduct outreach and fair housing laws and increased awareness of assessment opportunities, increasing consumer financial education and knowledge. Require financial education for middle and high school students; plant that seed. Engage private and public entities to open emergency homeless shelters in both northern and southern Chautauqua County. There were just a few others, but improving housing stock by rehabbing, like we've been talking about, depressed housing units. The last time they did this was 2017, so it's pretty comprehensive. I will send this out to everyone. There are maps, there are charts. They touch on everything; vacancies, interest rates, affordability of homeownership, home values.

Councilwoman Weinert: It'd be interesting to cross reference that with some of the other studies that have been done because one of the findings in the 2010 and 2017 study was that actually, people have more money than - it's not that they have more money. The cost of housing is so low here and even with the median incomes where they are, the propensity to be able to spend more on housing is higher here than in other places. People are choosing not to reinvest in their property because they don't feel like they'll see a return. The argument is that we have not set a floor for housing. It just keeps going kind of lower and lower and lower because people aren't reinvesting in their property because they're not seeing a worth there.

They don't think it's going to be a net gain if they sell their property. I think it'll be interesting to overlay those two and see how does that influence our attitudes and objectives on the housing committee going forward. I think they're right on the money. It's almost like they're using a marketing plan around housing as far as, what is the actual impact of having a house in your neighborhood that is scored at a 5 or a 6? That's another interesting thing about this study. They went through and scored every single property in the city. All 8,000 houses have been scored. And they identified almost 15,000 units, so that would be single-family, two-family, three-family, and 50% of them are rental properties. 50% of the available units in the city are rental property. It's crazy to think about that. That we live in a city that so much of it is rental property and we have no process to manage or oversee that; outside of code enforcement. It's all punitive. Punitive is not always the right course when you can be preventative.

Councilwoman Jones: I think there's a lot of educational opportunities as well that make people understand investing in their property and what they could expect to gain. One of the things when you go around talking to people, well I don't want to paint that because my property taxes will go up. I think that was the biggest fear – and it doesn't, because you paint it. But then, people have fixed a front porch or added a better porch or whatever and then they got nailed with property tax increases. It's pretty hard when you're single, on a fixed income and want to fix it up, but I know they're going to increase my property taxes if I do; I can't afford to do that.

Councilwoman James: They will fix the inside, but not the outside. I've noticed that a lot. I have some friends and when you go in, it's beautiful inside, but they're not going to touch the outside.

Councilwoman Jones: That's the biggest complaint.

Councilwoman Weinert: You know what Baltimore did. They implemented a differed tax increase so if you put a certain amount of money in your property that would raise the property taxes, it kind of locked in a reassessment for a period of time and then it was gradual. So eventually you would pay all the taxes, if they would have gone up immediately. It was just spaced out in a different way so people didn't feel like they were going to get hit. Here I spend \$5,000.00 on my house and then my property taxes are going to go up. Where that way if you spend \$5,000.00 in one year, your property taxes don't go up for another three years.

Councilwoman Jones: Those are the kind of processes we should be looking at because that's the biggest thing I heard. These were people working every day and some people were retired or seniors, but that was the biggest concern.

Councilwoman Weinert: And I love a lot of the work that the JRC has done, but there's still so much more. We have Adopt a Highway where we have people that go out and clean up highways. Why not, when we have an aging population, people on fixed income, veterans, where it's adopt a house. When someone is living on a fixed income where they physically can't do it, where it's part of a volunteer effort, here's where middle school and high school kids

could really play a role, where it's adopt a neighbor's house. They talk about good community building, the lesson in life and seeing how some people have to live based on whether it's physical disabilities, mental issues, veterans, people that are just aging and don't necessarily have the support system that other people have. I think that would be another - there's a lot of different ways I feel like that we can approach housing that uplifts the spirit a little bit. On top of putting infrastructure in place to really take ownership over our housing inventory.

Councilwoman James: Chief, a little bit of that Weed and Seed pride. Remember when we had the kids come down. It's still going on, but we don't have Weed and Seed anymore. It was a summer camp and there were kids pay in, it's a Christian camp and they pay to come to camp and they go out and work on houses. They came maybe two years we had them, three years. They came to Jamestown.

Councilman Sheldon: Five or six years ago that was.

Councilwoman James: It's been awhile since Weed and Seed has been around.

Chief Snellings: Weed and Seed ended, I think 2005 or 2006.

Councilman Sheldon: This was a different group that came in. They took Jamestown on as a mission.

Councilwoman James: COI brought them in after Weed and Seed. COI brought them, that's probably what you're thinking about.

Councilman Sheldon: We were concerned about the lead paint.

Councilwoman James: It was great. They came in and just descended on the city and worked on some houses.

Councilman Sheldon: That's what gets me; all these churches that have mission groups that go outside of Jamestown. They go to Kentucky, Ohio. Stay and do the work in Jamestown. There's a lot of work to be done here.

Councilwoman Weinert: That's a really good idea.

Councilwoman James: We'll talk to Vince. We've got to get him involved in this also.

Councilwoman Weinert: What do you think the next step should be?

Councilwoman James: I'm thinking - Todd, help us. I want to ask you. It would be nice if we could spend some time around this. Do we have to let the media know? If there's more than...

Mr. Thomas: Yes. Even for a group this small, it would trigger the Open Meetings Law, so we'd just have to announce it. There's no reason you couldn't, I would just need a little lead time, put out a notice and really just the website and post it outside my office and send some emails is all that's required. It's just five days lead time. Whatever's convenient, we can make happen.

Councilwoman James: I'm thinking even once we get these studies, that if we had a represented from JRC, somebody from COI to kind of help us. You know, the professionals who do this every day.

Councilwoman Jones: We're still in the data collecting so that would be appropriate.

Councilwoman James: Once we feel that we've got a little bit more data, I think that we should go ahead and have a work session where we can really get something done if we're going to do something.

Councilwoman Weinert: Do you want to do something on the June 4th Housing Committee meeting? Maybe we can tentatively say June 4th and reach out to the organizations and see if we can get those.

Councilwoman Jones: The other thing too is do you want them all here at the same time? They're pretty big, some of those studies are pretty big to get through.

Councilwoman James: That's why I'm thinking, do we want to think of a special meeting where we spend some time around it or are you looking at trying to carve in our time?

Councilman Sheldon: We could start at 6:00 maybe?

Councilwoman Weinert: That's what I was thinking. That way, people are used to that time and it makes it a little...

Councilwoman James: So, 6:00 and we can give everybody 10 or 15 minutes.

Councilwoman Weinert: Yes. We can see if JRC or COI or the real estate group is open to coming and giving their two cents.

Councilman Sheldon: Yes, and they can present those surveys that they have.

Councilwoman Weinert: Yes, and then we can just take it all in.

Councilwoman James: Okay June 4th at 6:00 pm tentatively.

Councilwoman Weinert: I think we invite one of them for the next two meetings maybe. I think an hour is enough for one. There's a lot of - the more that I thought about this as I started

building the survey and I said we're not ready for this. There is so much research that has already been done.

Councilwoman Jones: So, you're saying we're going to invite each group here for about an hour from 6:00 to 7:00 at the next meeting. Who's coming at the next meeting?

Councilwoman James: Do you want to do JRC?

Councilwoman Weinert: Yes, let's reach out to them and see if they're available.

Councilwoman James: And on the 18th I'll ask COI.

Councilwoman Jones: And maybe all the organizations won't take an hour, but certainly this might. I thought the data was pretty big on that one.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Todd M. Thomas
Director of Administrative Services/City Clerk