

Minutes

Housing Committee
Monday, May 9, 2016
7:00 p.m.

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

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairwoman Marie Carrubba, Councilman Brent Sheldon, Councilwoman Vickye James

MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT: Councilwoman Maria Jones, Vince DeJoy, Harry Snellings, Chet Harvey

Chairwoman Carrubba called the meeting to order.

The minutes from the April 18, 2016 meeting were approved.

Remarks from Community Members/Committee Members

No one appeared to speak.

New Business

Ms. Carrubba: We do have the Director of the Department of Development, Vince DeJoy, here. He's going to report on the MyGov System.

My Gov Update

Mr. DeJoy: What I'm going to give you guys tonight is April's code activity report generated. It's day by day; all the cases. The one thing I will note is you will see a large number of condemned properties that were toward the end of the month somewhere in the 20th range. They are all under Bill Jones and the reason for that is kind of twofold. One; we've been working with the Mayor to put together to look at some potential property rehabilitation type of property tax incentives and one of the criteria would be condemned houses that we're looking at to develop at least a framework for some incentives to rehabilitate condemned houses and the Mayor asked for an accurate update for all the condemned houses. Many of the houses, a good number of houses, that were condemned before MyGov really kind of fell through the cracks in terms of having them in the system to be able to identify them to filter it out. What we did have is the Code Enforcement Officers each kept a spreadsheet, basically their own spreadsheet every time they condemned a house. We had a large number of properties that were condemned, posted by one of our retired code enforcement officers and

those are basically the ones that I think fell through the cracks. There was no real way to transfer those over from our legacy system that we had the platform to now the MyGov.

So what we did is Bill Jones and the other inspectors divvied up all the houses that were unaccounted for and went out and did a re-inspection of them and all the ones that should have been condemned were again condemned under a new case. At least now they will get periodic inspections. From what I could tell, the reports that I generated for the Mayor were just shy of one hundred properties that are condemned. Yes. It's more than I thought too.

Ms. Carrubba: And that's not including the ones that you've already taken down, right?

Mr. DeJoy: No these are just the ones that are still standing. Today we just condemned another house on Bowen Street.

Ms. James: I see the one on Cherry; 822, but I think it was 815 that I think was just condemned too this past week.

Mr. DeJoy: On Cherry Street?

Ms. James: Yes. I see you have 822, but I think it was 815; there was mold infestation and the sign just came up. I saw that just before I left and I came back and there was a sign - I see 822, but I think it was 815.

Ms. Carrubba: Can I ask you; is the number, is that the identification?

Mr. DeJoy: That's the house number, yes. Short address means house number.

Ms. Carrubba: No I'm talking about the ID number.

Mr. DeJoy: The ID number is just a unique case number that the system gives each new case. 16 is 2016 and it's probably the 188th case of 2016.

Ms. Carrubba: I was just trying to figure out because there are different properties because it's not like all the properties on one street are all together so it depends on when they came in. They're in numerical order the way the complaints were received? Do you know what I'm saying?

Mr. DeJoy: Yes.

Ms. Carrubba: It doesn't - you could have a house on Cherry Street as 314 for example, but it could also be 225, so it's not necessarily... Is there any way that you can group - can this system sort them so that they're grouped as in this street, all the houses that have issues on this street.

Mr. Sheldon: Probably. I would think.

Ms. Carrubba: I know you've got unique. It doesn't sort that way.

Mr. DeJoy: It can create a CSV, comma separated values type of spreadsheet, but it's... It probably could.

Ms. Carrubba: The reason I was asking was in terms of seeing which neighborhoods are really being impacted by this.

Mr. DeJoy: You can filter by streets.

Ms. Carrubba: Okay that's what I mean. If you could get it by street because I'm thinking in terms of are we looking at two on this street and are we looking at four on another street. It helps me because I'm looking through this and I could go back and forth; Allen Street, but it's number 456-458, but I'm sure there's another section on Allen Street. Just using that as an example; I'm trying to sort how many properties, how close together are they? Are they numbered near each other? Eventually I'd like to go and look just to see because the issue I'm getting; as I was telling you before the meeting, somebody sent me anonymously about two properties. They appear, from what they sent me, that there wasn't anything major, maybe it's un-mowed grass. They didn't specify; they just gave me the listing, no name, no one to call, just to save our neighborhoods. So then I thought is it near end of these that the people are complaining, but the house appeared to be pretty...

Mr. DeJoy: There are numerous days where somebody will call in about two or three houses right around the immediate area of where they live.

Mr. Sheldon: And this is just the month of April, right?

Mr. DeJoy: Yes.

Ms. Carrubba: Would any of these properties be considered by the Landbank?

Mr. Sheldon: I did see one.

Mr. DeJoy: One on Price I think I saw. What do you mean considered?

Ms. Carrubba: That the Landbank would... Are these beyond the Landbank in terms of them...

Mr. DeJoy: You mean the condemned ones?

Ms. Carrubba: Yes. Would they take any of them?

Mr. Sheldon: There was a condemned one. 113 Beechview.

Mr. DeJoy: Yes 113 Beechview.

Ms. Carrubba: That's a nice neighborhood.

Mr. Sheldon: That's a two-family house.

Mr. DeJoy: That's a two-family; that one actually I'm working very closely on. I'm actually working with CODE right now. Quite frankly, the people in the neighborhood wanted the house demolished and I've got to tell you, this house is probably going to cost \$90,000.00 to bring it back. But for the fact that we could put some money in from the HOME program, there's a CHODO, they're a community home organization and some of their funds. It's hard to see how the private sector could do many of these renovations and ever see any kind of return on their investment. It truly is. That one is in such a nice neighborhood; the house has got good bones.

Ms. Carrubba: But the shame of it is; you're saying there are 100 properties. The cost of tearing 100 properties down is expensive and I know it's expensive...

Mr. DeJoy: But the private sector; we're going to have a difficult time. Even with a property tax incentive. You're going to have an extremely difficult time in some of these houses. This one house, this Beechview house, we've had some estimates and it kind of blew me away; the price, the cost. \$50,000.00 just for the exterior; to put siding, new porches, a new roof, fix the foundation. And that's before you even get to the inside; which is a mess.

Ms. Carrubba: Do you have any idea how long it's been unoccupied?

Mr. DeJoy: Three or four years.

Ms. Carrubba: Maybe you can answer this question...

Mr. DeJoy: It's in a good neighborhood, it's structurally sound.

Mr. Sheldon: It's just the worst house on the street.

Mr. DeJoy: It's the worst house on a really good street.

Ms. Carrubba: Can you answer this question; if a house is vacant for a certain number of years, I've been told that the gas company will come in and take out...

Mr. DeJoy: They take the meter?

Ms. Carrubba: They'll take the gas line out...

Mr. DeJoy: I don't know about the line, but they'll take the meter out.

Ms. Carrubba: I don't know, somebody told me that there was a house on, I believe it was Hazeltine, that was unoccupied for - I know who was the former occupant and I didn't know that they had just walked away from the house, but they said that when the people moved in, that they had to pay to have the gas line reinstalled.

Mr. Sheldon: I would think they'd take it out if it leaked, but I wouldn't think they'd just take it out because it was vacant.

Ms. Carrubba: That's what I couldn't understand, but they said that the people that bought the house had to pay to have that gas line reinstalled, not the meter, the whole line.

Mr. Sheldon: Unless there were plans to demolish it and then they didn't demolish it.

Ms. Carrubba: So there is nothing that you're aware of or any arrangement that the gas company does.

Mr. DeJoy: Not that I'm aware of.

Ms. James: What happens to a house, I see that this one on Seventh Street is infested...

Ms. Carrubba: What page Vickye?

Ms. James: It's on page 14; it's the cockroaches. What do you do - do you fumigate first?

Mr. DeJoy: We don't do that.

Ms. James: So it's up to the landlord?

Mr. Sheldon: It's up to the landlord yes.

Ms. James: I know five years ago our neighborhood had that. It was a house on the corner, it was a rental and it was infested and it was all the way from Eighth and Washington all the way down... It cost me \$1,000.00.

Mr. DeJoy: That's horrible.

Ms. Jones: On the list I see there are condemned houses and the owners are still local so we know who they are, but what happens now? They're condemned; we're stuck with paying to demolish it. How does that work for them? They just get off scot-free?

Mr. DeJoy: No.

Ms. Jones: There's lots of people here that...

Mr. Olson: I put it on their tax bill. Vince sends me down the information and I put it on the tax bill. If they choose not to pay the taxes, once we turn it over to the county then it goes away and then Marilyn would file a lien on the property so hopefully someday we would get the money back.

Ms. Jones: Okay, but since they know you can't do anything about it right now, they just ignore it?

Mr. Olson: I'll put it on their tax bill.

Ms. Carrubba: So would that basically – say it is demolished and you've got a \$20,000.00 bill for the demolition. That goes against that piece of land so that whoever purchases it would have to pay the \$20,000.00 to get the piece of land?

Mr. DeJoy: Not necessarily.

Mr. Olson: No if it goes to foreclosure then it goes away. The lien stays there once Marilyn files the lien on it.

Ms. Carrubba: So they'd never have it free and clear basically.

Mr. DeJoy: Actually if it goes through county foreclosure, it cleans everything.

Mr. Olson: County foreclosure, they get rid of everything. It's crazy.

Ms. Carrubba: So you'd get whatever you can get for it. Or the county gets whatever they get for it.

Mr. DeJoy: They don't get anything. Only what they sell it for. It's not a pretty picture.

Ms. Carrubba: I'm saying if they get \$1,000.00 for a vacant lot, they get \$1,000.00.

Mr. DeJoy: If we had somebody that could go after these people full time, you might collect on some of them, get judgments on them, but even that – you get a judgment, good luck collecting.

Ms. Carrubba: Well they wouldn't be in the shape they were in if they had the money to take care of them.

Ms. Jones: So we're not the only city struggling with this, but what kinds of things are we doing to prevent this from happening in the future? This is like a bizarre kind of world you get stuck in and can't get out of.

Mr. DeJoy: We just do the best we can with three people going out on the street.

Ms. Jones: No, I know, I mean from a systemic standpoint. How does any city stop this cycle?

Mr. DeJoy: If I had that answer, I'd be on the lecture circuit making a lot more money than I am here.

Ms. Jones: It just seems like cities just don't have the money, we can't deal with this.

Ms. Carrubba: You're stuck with them either way. If he's saying that even one of these properties in a nice neighborhood could cost you – and that's probably a reasonable estimate...

Ms. Jones: It's just the way the laws are set up; this whole process systemically is not good.

Ms. Carrubba: Buffalo's got problems, Batavia's got problems, the city's doing some tax abatement, but their property values are much higher than they are here because of location so they get more, but it's sad because you think for each one of these properties what we're losing in property taxes is not helping our situation at all.

Ms. Jones: We need some really creative ideas to hold people accountable and more than just maybe the county taxes or city taxes or...

Mr. Olson: We bill people every month and they never pay anything. Some people will pay; most people won't pay us a dime.

Ms. Jones: And yet we get stuck paying for those. As taxpayers – I'm insulted. I'm mad.

Mr. Olson: I'm not happy either and I send them the bill.

Mr. DeJoy: Sometimes we collect but...

Ms. Jones: Not like we should.

Ms. James: When is says closing that means the case is done?

Mr. DeJoy: The case is in the closing phase.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

James N. Olson
Director of Financial Services/City Clerk