

Minutes

Housing Committee
Monday, May 11, 2009
6:30 p.m.
Police Training Room, 4th Floor
Municipal Building, Jamestown, New York

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Paul Whitford, Steve Szwejbka
MEMBERS ABSENT: Michael Taylor
OTHERS PRESENT: Director of Development Steve Centi, Council
President Greg Rabb, Director of Financial
Services/City Clerk James N. Olson

Chairman Whitford called the meeting to order.

The minutes from the April 20, 2009 meeting were approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT/PERSONS TO ADDRESS THE COMMITTEE

No one appeared to speak.

FAIR HOUSING DISCUSSION

Mr. Whitford: Fair Housing – that was the Analysis of Impediments that we were trying to work through and I think what we’re going to do is Steve’s office is going to get ahold of HUD and get technical assistance and we’re going to redo the whole thing, but it will be outside the realm of this meeting on Monday nights because it’s probably going to get too involved and we have enough sub-committees now and so we don’t need to set up another one.

Mr. Rabb: The only thing I ask is that at some point either drafts or whatever you’re doing with it comes before the Committee.

Mr. Whitford: That’s what I had mentioned earlier – once we get a draft, then it can come to Housing, but prior to that until we get there...

Mr. Rabb: ...they wouldn’t expect us to do it, but I want to make sure we see it.

Mr. Whitford: Did you get a copy of this here? The only other thing on Fair Housing is I’m going to try and get ahold of Michael Moots and see if they have any direction for anyone who calls in regards to discrimination in housing in any way, because they have a 211 number and you’re supposed to be able to call on any issue and they direct you to where you should be so if he does have that, then I think I’ll invite him to the next Housing meeting

and get that information out – at least what they can do now until we do the analysis.

NEW BUSINESS

NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION PLAN - RFP

Mr. Whitford: I wanted to bring up the RFP for the Neighborhood Revitalization Plan. Now this is the Strategic Planning & Partnership Commission that's really spearheading this?

Mr. Centi: Well it started there as a recommendation of one of the sub-committees – the Housing Task Force sub-committee to move in the direction of a Neighborhood Revitalization Plan. This Plan is going to look at a specific element that's missing from our current Consolidated Plan. Our Consolidated Plan is our Neighborhood Revitalization strategy that's part of our CDBG Program which we have to submit each year and every five years we revise the entire plan. Next year will be the year that we look at revising our five year Consolidated Plan from 2010-2014. So this plan, after a lot of discussion, it was decided that this plan should be kind of a wrap around of our Consolidated Plan. It wouldn't be a replacement for it – not as comprehensive as the entire Consolidated Plan, but what was looked at was to develop a market-based strategy taking a look at all the neighborhoods. There is a consultant that we've talked to numerous times. This RFP went to him, came back with a response indicating that he was looking at probably somewhere between \$90,000 and \$100,000 to complete this wrap around. There were some discussions with him about reducing the price – he came back with an alternative price of \$80,000. Right now, there's \$71,000 committed so there's a \$9,000 gap currently, but we haven't heard from one of the foundations and there's some private corporations – primarily in the financial sector – that are being approached about funding. Northwest Savings Bank offered \$5,000 toward the Plan. CHRIC is providing \$2,000 that came out of our trip to San Jose last Fall. We're putting \$15,000 in from the Urban Renewal Agency and Gebbie committed \$25,000; Chautauqua Region Community Foundation committed \$20,000; the Strategic Planning Commission's committing another \$4,000.00 – so there's a \$9,000 gap to meet that lower level. If Lenna comes through, we'll probably be at a point where we'll exceed the \$80,000 but it was suggested that maybe some of that money be set aside to be used for the implementation portion of this plan. What he's proposing to do is come into the area, take a look at every single structure in the City; they'll do a physical review of every building so they'll visit every building. They'll categorize every building in the City, every residential structure on a scale, depending upon...it's either going to be 1-5 or 1-4. Then what they'll do is, by similar market characteristics, will develop neighborhoods as a result of that. So what we're going to be getting out of this is now define neighborhoods that have similar market characteristics in terms of sales price, property conditions. They're going to analyze MLS last data going back if they can up to 15 years which will take a look at what the asking price was, what the selling price was, how long the property stayed on the market before it sold and what those trends are in each respective area.

Now what they'll also do is they'll go into certain neighborhoods and out of these...let's say they identify 10 neighborhoods, we don't know how many they'll come up with but, for example, we feel that this neighborhood which is currently categorized as a "3" can move to a "2" if these things were done within the neighborhood - specific recommendations - and it's important to understand that we're not talking about using block grant money to go in because in all likelihood, the restrictions that we have with using our funding for low-moderate income areas is not going to meet this strategy in terms of what they're going to be proposing so there's going to be a need for private dollars; and when we met with the foundations, we made a presentation to three of the foundations - they said "if you're planning on funding the study, then be ready to back it up and fund it with private dollars to do some of these things. So we're hoping to see money come in from outside the area... not outside the area, but from outside the funding that we have available through the City. What they're recommending from our vantage point is to continue to do what we're doing in regard to low-moderate types of rehabs, infrastructure improvements because those might be part of an overall strategy to come in and do some street work or curbs or sidewalks or whatever. The firm that we're talking to is a firm called CZB out of Alexandria, Virginia and the principals in the company are - if you take a look at their credentials and their background - are amazing. The guy that we've met with is actually the founder of the company, but he's probably, out of all the members, probably the least experienced and that doesn't mean a lot when you consider the quality of the people in this firm, but what was interesting was, there's an individual named Allan Mallack who was one of the featured speakers for the National Vacant Properties Campaign - the one that I gave you the information for - and Allan Mallack is on their Advisory Board. John Merino also told us he went to Harvard as part of a leadership conference that they had there - it was kind of by invitation or recommendation and he was one of the participants with most of the other participants being people that were in the federal intelligence community. At the end of one segment, he noticed that the instructor that he had there at this conference cited Charles Buki who is the guy that we've been talking to and he had to ask him about it because he knew the name and he said that he's been one of the most valuable resources in terms of dealing with urban housing issues. So these are high quality, it's a high quality firm, similar to what Goody Clancy was on the Urban Design side of it and so I think, our hope would be, that this will kind of give us some tools that we can use going forward in terms of allocating funds. The strategies that they'll come up with might be where you'll go into a particular neighborhood and the recommendation might be that the houses on this street need to have their porches rebuilt and they would like to see them in some type of uniform type of material. They're not real keen on pressure-treated steps, but did comment that we had a lot of pressure- treated steps within the community. They talked about lighting - having similar lighting; painting, and maybe having house numbers that were the same so that there was some uniformity as you dressed up this area; but without a large expenditure of money. But it would be private money, and you know the hope would be to stimulate property owners to then invest in their own properties; but he's talking about - they're going to take it right down to the level where you'll have a block

that might be rated a certain category and within that block you'll have a street that will be rated maybe different than what the block is so that the street's targeted as being one that tends to draw down the market value of that whole block. Then they'll go down to a house where you'll have a street and then the house within that street could be one that's bringing down the street. By making these recommended changes, you enhance the street which in turn enhances the block, which in turn enhances that whole identified neighborhood.

Now the other thing about it is that they may come out and say that there's certain neighborhoods within the City that don't warrant any additional investment - either of City funds or of private funding. That's not a total shock, but it could happen. So from a political standpoint, you may have a consultant come in and identify neighborhoods within your wards that are targeted for no additional investment, so to speak. What they claim is that they give you all the ammunition that you need from a political standpoint to deal with the realities of what's going on out there in the market place.

Mr. Whitford: I think you also indicated that one of the most important aspects of this entire program that's trying to be kicked off by this Strategic Planning Committee is that you have to engage the public in those neighborhoods similar to the Northside PRIDE, but probably not patterned exactly the same. It's just you have to engage them in each one of those targeted groups so that they will invest.

Mr. Centi: I mean that's not a bad example to follow when you consider that they went out and formed their own group. I mean, other neighborhoods could do it. We've invested over half a million dollars in that neighborhood collectively between City funds, putting in street lights, plantings, with rehab projects that we're working on right now, things that didn't cost us anything not directly out of pocket but we went in and did a complete external sweep of every property, total code enforcement sweep in that area at the time we got the ball rolling designating them as a target area so we could focus CDBG funds in there. We've got the CHRIC house that we're working with them at 52 Grant - you saw that...being completed. We're working with a couple of other ones a couple of home projects in there, did two demolitions that we funded and one that was a Code enforcement action that led to the demolition of another property. So these are things that we have at our disposal that we can do and if it hadn't been for that neighborhood coming together in the manner that they did, it probably wouldn't have happened like that.

Mr. Whitford: I think partially too is that you get somebody the caliber of Bob Doverspike, you know, he took the ball and he put in a lot of time and energy and to find an individual like that in each neighborhood might be a task in itself. You have to commend Chuck Cornell because it kind of developed out of his idea - he went door to door and just asked them if they'd like their neighborhood changed. I mean the response he got was incredible and then, of course, you had Bob Doverspike and he has a lot of energy.

Mr. Centi: It's not a huge area either. I mean, if you take a look at it, it's only...

Mr. Whitford: What is it - Liberty, Grant and Lincoln...

Mr. Centi: ...from Sixth to Falconer. So it's not huge - you carve a little niche out of there and that's not saying other people couldn't do it - it's been done before - the Chandler Appleyard area really came forth more on a faith-based effort with the leader of that particular revitalization effort being the Pastor of the Church in that neighborhood on Chandler Street. Those types of things are going to get the attention of those of us that have funding available. You can't put all your eggs in one basket - we don't have the ability to do that. We still have to balance it out with City-wide types of projects, whether it's rental rehab or owner-occupied rehab. Of course, I read in the paper today that nothing's going to get resolved until all the houses in the City are owner-occupied. Now I don't know where that happens...

Mr. Whitford: That was in the newspaper?

Mr. Centi: Yes. It was that article that they had about the City revitalizing one property at a time. Nobody even called us to consult with us to see what the strategy is or how many projects you concurrently have in the hopper - it was really done just by interviewing Len Faulk and I don't know what led to that discussion.

Mr. Rabb: Well, I'm sure they talked to Len because of the Strategic Planning Commission, but there's two points I'd like to make: One is that the City Council endorsed this approach that you're outlining with CZB so it did start with Strategic Planning but the City Council went on record and it was awhile ago saying "yes - we need to do this." And also, even though it does come out of Strategic Planning, City Council is represented there because I'm Co-Chair, so it's part of our efforts - not just Strategic Planning, not to take anything away from them which is me too, but I just want to make sure that we see this as a partnership with Strategic Planning and Development and City Council - it's all of us together.

Mr. Centi: ...and it's being funded in a similar manner as the last great partnership that we had, I guess, with the Urban Design Plan.

Mr. Rabb: Absolutely. That was a good model and I think that's what we're doing...I think what's unique about this is that we're doing that at the neighborhood level.

Mr. Centi: Right.

Mr. Rabb: And you guys do a great job with taking care of what HUD requires so that we can continue to get the federal money, but then that's limited and this is supposed to take us to the next step - not in competition - but cooperation with them.

Mr. Centi: Well, you know, they might identify some neighborhoods that are middle class neighborhoods that need a little bit of impetus or some stimulation in order to improve their status, but we don't have any funding that can go in there and do that...have nothing to offer if people don't meet the income eligibility requirements that HUD imposes on us. So our funding is really going to be limited to dealing with...and then the areas that they talked about were parks improvements, infrastructure improvements, and you know, that's part of our on-going programs here - the downtown business district and things like that. That's what we can do so that's really how we're...we'd still continue to do that even though the Plan's going to be coordinated through our office, the funding's going to flow through the JRC as kind of the entity that's going to deal with it.

Mr. Szwejbka: So Steve if we do get the funding, \$80,000 for the study, and they make the recommendations, what are the other sources of money - you say we have to go outside...

Mr. Centi: It's probably going to be the foundations. When we met with them...we did a presentation even though we had already been working with Chautauqua Region Community Foundation and Gebbie - they were pretty much on board with it - in fact, John Merino knows one of the principals within the company and he's the one that kind of talked to them about maybe knocking the price down a little bit. But we didn't want to gut the study and not get the most value out of it, we wanted to see if we could go out and raise the money. We originally weren't going to put money into it, but we were able to...we're going to use some of economic development fund money through the Urban Renewal Agency. We're going to have a little bit of an influx because we sold the lots on Foote and Harrison, plus when we sell the properties that they need for the Washington Street Bridge, we're going to pick up another \$11,000 there so we had a little bit of money we could invest in it. Before when we kind of leveraged the Urban Design Plan, we had about \$50,000 of State money which was the original seed money; in this case we didn't have any and when we first started talking about this, we said "well, if you're going to get this done, you're going to do it without us from a financial standpoint," but when we had our presentation, it was really primarily for the purpose of the Lenna Foundation. You remember Joe Johnson who used to be the Finance Director here - he's the Executive Director of Lenna and they wanted him to hear it so we put together a power plant presentation about the Plan, made the presentation to them and they were the ones that came right out and said, it was Merino himself, that said "we have to be prepared as a foundation to back this up once the study gets done with dollars." Now they've put close to \$1,000,000 just in the downtown to rebuild the two alleys and to do the façade program. So we need a similar type of investment from the foundations in order to do these things.

The other thing they talked about was the County's fund. They wanted to set up that revitalization fund but then again that's County wide; it's going to have some political implications to it to decide where it's going to be spent;

there's people within the County that don't want to see the City get any money and we don't even want to deal with that because they'd be fighting over who's going to get what, and if we get any they're going to want to know why we got it and they didn't get it in Sherman or you know...in Cherry Creek.

Mr. Whitford: I think it's still in the infancy stage anyway. There really is no funding there.

Mr. Rabb: And I wouldn't rule out getting some of that money for the City of Jamestown. The last time I checked, we were in the county.

Mr. Centi: Yes - some people feel that we are.

Mr. Rabb: I happen to know that we are. I have no problem consistently reminding people.

Mr. Centi: Well, I think what they'd like to do - I know that in Syracuse they did something similar where they put up some seed money and then they had a big, huge influx of corporate funding. Their fund was like \$10,000,000.

Mr. Rabb: Well they're a lot bigger than us.

Mr. Centi: Yes - I know. But I think it's a strategy that they were hoping to employ by putting the seed money out there or the government putting it up and seeing what kind of match they got. But you know with these economic times - it's going to be difficult for corporations to step up to the plate. Foundations have even been hurt financially by what's gone on; but the point that they made was if you're going to fund the study, then be prepared to follow it up. Now I can't tell you how much that would be, but I think they have enough of an interest in it and they've been in the loop the whole way and they're part of this moving forward with the study.

Mr. Rabb: At some point, this is going to turn around so this is the best time to get this ready so that when things do get better, we've got the whole process under way.

Mr. Centi: Well, if we hear from Lenna - they're ready to get going at the beginning of June. They have a June 1st start date - it's just that we haven't actually...I mean if we hear this week from Lenna, then they were going to wait until we got back from Louisville so that our staff was here because they're going to be working pretty closely with our staff and that's what they wanted. Sam's met them and he was comfortable with them; I think when the guy first started his first statement when he said he didn't like entitlements and he didn't like low-income housing tax credits, well I guess we're not going to show you Euclid, Appleyard, or any of those because that's what was used for those projects. But I thought - "boy this guy's going to be trouble," and then when we met with him in the Mayor's Office, he backed off on that a little bit.

Mr. Whitford: I think we should set a meeting for the first Monday in June and just kind of touch on Fair Housing, an update on that, and the Neighborhood Revitalization Plan.

Mr. Centi: We won't be here that day. We'll be in Louisville. It's Monday, the 1st.

Mr. Whitford: Okay. Why don't we do it for the 8th then? Then maybe you could have someone bring us information on Reclaiming Vacant Properties.

Mr. Centi: What we're doing is there's three of us going and each of us is taking...we're not overlapping any of the seminars...

Mr. Whitford: I know there's 10 seminars in there. I went through it and it's like you can't go to them all.

Mr. Centi: Each breakout session we'll be in a different one. There's three mobile workshops and we're all going to a different mobile workshop too.

Mr. Whitford: Who's going?

Mr. Centi: Greg Moran, Amanda and I. The other thing, if you could, if you want to remind the Council members that next Monday's our CDBG Public Hearing.

Mr. Whitford: Right. I've got that down.

Mr. Centi: We finally found out how much money we're getting. This is the latest I've ever seen it. But we did a little bump - we got \$20,000 more in block grant which isn't huge - it's like \$16,000 more that will go in some line item - but we got \$47,000 more in Home which is good because we pledged \$120,000 for the Appleyard III Project so we want to make sure we can kind of leverage some of those bigger projects, but at the same time, still do our owner-occupied rehab. So we'll be presenting our plan next week, and I've been working on it and still working on it; in fact, someone just called - they want to come in and submit at the last minute tomorrow morning.

Mr. Whitford: Now that's the Public Hearing right?

Mr. Centi: Right. That's our 2nd Public Hearing. The 1st one was on March 25th when we kind of opened up the input period. This will be the one where we submit our plan and then it starts the 30 day clock ticking for public input; then at the June 22nd voting session, then we'll look for Council to approve that so we can send it in.

Mr. Rabb: And you're running that Public Hearing next week - like you did last time?

Mr. Centi: It's actually the Mayor's Public Hearing, but yes, Sam will be there.

Mr. Rabb: Fine.

Mr. Whitford stated the next meeting will be held June 8, 2009.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

James N. Olson
Director of Financial Services/
City Clerk