

Minutes

Housing Committee
Monday, November 13, 2006

6:00 p.m.

Mayor's Conference Room, 4th Floor
Municipal Building, Jamestown, New York

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairperson Stephen Szwejbka, Council Members Anthony Dolce, Lillian V. Ney and Michael Taylor

OTHERS PRESENT: Director of Financial Services/City Clerk James N. Olson, Corporation Counsel Marilyn Fiore-Nieves, Todd Peterson, Peter Morgante

Chairman Szwejbka called the meeting to order.

The minutes from the September 18th, 2006 meeting were approved.

OLD BUSINESS

Chairman Szwejbka: There's something from Old Business that I was going to ask about. From old business, it came from your ward, Tony, from a lady who called me concerning some type of benefit from turning a (you know about this) multi-family house into a single-family house. She said there was something in the City Code or somewhere written, somewhere changed years ago that allowed people to get a financial benefit from taking a residence and going from a multi to a single. And, I'm just asking, if anyone knows, if not, we can explore for our next meeting.

Mr. Olson: There was an email that Steve Centi sent back because there was a question a couple of weeks ago.

Chairman Szwejbka: I sent it to Steve.

Mr. Olson: Okay. And did he send you back his response?

Chairman Szwejbka: Yes, something about he couldn't...

Mr. Olson: ...did he explain that I have that downstairs? I don't think there's anything in the City Code that I remember...

Dr. Ney: I'm going to make reference to that very thing, but I don't see it in my notes right now, but when I go through it, I think that they said that the City of Dunkirk, or someplace, had such a thing that there was an incentive from going from 3 to 2 or 2 to 1 and have a financial incentive, actually it was in place. Maybe when I do this, I'll find out. I'm looking for it now real quick and I can't find it. Oh, here it is.

Chairman Szwejbka: I'm trying to think of her name, she's part of our group.

Dr. Ney: I found it. This is when CHRC was handling the CDBG Fund you know, some years back through the City of Dunkirk. Now, whether that's applicable to our City, I don't know. I do wanted to say that CHRC mentioned that when they handled the CDBG monies for Dunkirk, there were CDBG monies that were put forward as an

incentive to reduce the three density to two. And the amount of the incentive was \$5,000, and they said also use some – they also had a rental rehab program that used CDBG money as well as home funds. The incentive, though, was a nice idea.

Mr. Peterson: That would have to have been part of the consolidated plan that would have to have been submitted and approved.

Dr. Ney: Well, the City would have had to of put it in...But still, it might be something that we don't want to forget about as the Council has asked their input into the CDBG process, you know, how they do every year. I think that would be something that sounds very reasonable coming from this committee, at least to explore, don't you think.

Mr. Szwejbka: Exactly. Yes. It was just like a \$5,000...

Dr. Ney: In that case, \$5,000 was the incentive. \$5,000 to use to reduce the density, so you'd have to do some rehab I suppose – whether you open up a wall or something...

Mr. Olson: I'll try to find Steve's email and I'll forward it...

Mr. Szwejbka: Yes, thank you. Because all the information's on there. It's from that group on the north side PRIDE group.

Mr. Olson: I think it was more internal between Sam and Steve, I got a copy...

Chairman Szwejbka: I emailed Steve the question.

Dr. Ney: Would you send that out to all of us then, that'd be helpful.

Mr. Szwejbka: That's my fault – I should have done that, but I wasn't familiar with it at all...well, moving on – anything else under Old Business?

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Dolce: I did invite, as you know, Todd actually went with me, the Mayor and the Police Chief we spent a week ago Wednesday with the group, PRIDE Group, up on Liberty and Lincoln, Grant. We did a tour of the neighborhood, we walked probably three blocks around the targeted house, we talked about some houses, marked down some infrastructure improvements. We then reconvened at the Church on 8th Street and had a lengthy meeting – a question and answer session about some issues. I did invite Bob Doverspike, who's kind of the leader of that group and anybody else from that group to attend tonight. I don't know if they are coming, or whether they're not. They may not come. But just to kind of report what they're doing up there. You know, they have targeted specific structures up there, in fact, I believe it's Bob Doverspike that has put together quite a detailed report regarding what their target area is and how many houses there are, owner occupied, absentee landlords, foreclosures, single family, 2 family, 3 family, 4 family – on each street, he's broken it down and then he has ...I'm not sure who actually did it, but they have put together comments about each house in various states of where they're at, and so this gives you a little idea.

Mr. Szwejbka: Does it give you what legal state they're in as far as...

Mr. Dolce: They didn't know...

Mr. Peterson: We actually had a response to each of those houses, that in fact was in an email to me and I need to print out a copy of that email because it does explain the status of the majority of the properties that are on the list and again, this is their viewpoint, obviously, in terms of that survey and, you know, in some cases they did not know or may not have been aware of certain factors, you know, about each house; and I'm not saying we've got them all covered having looked through that list, but I think if we could provide something to the committee to kind of see what our response was and the various conditions that some of these properties are in and why they happened to be in those conditions.

Mr. Dolce: One of the things that came out of that that I was going to bring back to the Committee was one of the questions that came up about the reporting of houses and the status of houses, and a lot of times we all get phone calls about properties, or emails, or letters, and maybe this Committee can come up with a more concise procedure for following through...because I'm saying a lot of times there's different housing inspectors and he deals with one property and Greg Moran deals with another one, and this one deals another one, and we've got them playing phone tags and emails and it gets back to the constituent. Maybe if there was a set procedure where a complaint is made whether they get the complaint or the DOD and copies are sent where there's a form letter, or something that they fill out that says so and so called at such and such a time, such and such a date, about this particular property, it was addressed, we went out to the property and this is what happened. They were given a response back and then maybe that is then sent out and put in our folders automatically; or some procedure so that we're all kind of on the same page so that when a constituent either calls us back or calls them back, everybody knows the tracks that were followed.

Mr. Szwejbka: Now, with that new computer software...

Mr. Dolce: Sam brought that up – there was a new computer that will make it a little easier, but I was just thinking, that was something that the Committee might want to look into and Todd certainly knows how that goes...you guys are literally over there, you've got piles and piles...

Mr. Peterson: Oh yes. Everything is paper for the most part. We have the old AS400 system which has been around since time in memoriam to kind of traffic the stream of properties that is very uneven, unfortunately, just by the nature of the old DOS based system – is very antiquated. Most of us, I know, on a personal basis, usually use the Microsoft Excel's spreadsheet to kind of track our own properties, and for me, that was the natural thing to do based on my work history, so I mean, I always was able to follow all the way along where something is and every inspector that I work with down there, I know responds to the people, obviously, – provided we know who that is. Many times we don't know who that is. It comes in as an anonymous complaint. Many times they don't want to be known. You know, they like that cover of anonymity so that they don't feel...they might be targeted by somebody for example, it might be just dealing with a neighbor – something like that where they don't want any kind of confrontation, so they prefer to stay anonymous. I've dealt with a situation, maybe you're familiar with, over on Utica Street. I hear from the lady on a regular basis, we just kind of write back and forth to each other. And she's pointed out some things in the neighborhood that have been helpful. And, yes, they're the eyes and the ears out there. You need those folks to do that so you know what the devil is going on and how quickly you can respond to

something. Is it formalized? No. At this point, it's not, and maybe as I say, with the software that would provide that opportunity.

Dr. Ney:referral form or, especially one that could be accessed on-line as well as printing out...

Mr. Peterson: Well, we have that – you have that on the website certainly. And, we check that obviously every day and if a complaint comes in in that fashion, it's immediately assigned to one of us and we begin the process.

Dr. Ney: So that if Tony would call your office to say that one of his constituents is concerned about such and such, do you put it into that form, or just put it into your computer?

Mr. Peterson: Yes. It comes in the form of...if it's a written complaint, obviously taken by the receptionist...

Dr. Ney: Yes, but this isn't ...this would just be a phone call probably to you...what would happen to that?

Mr. Peterson: I still would have to fill out a complaint form.

Dr. Ney: Okay. Good. But you have some procedure...even though it's not formalized...

Mr. Dolce: But if we had a procedure is all of us or the person who made it, the copies of all those, or had, even if it was more generic, I mean if you don't want to have names on there, or whatever, or you could have a form...more so that the times and dates are documented for the use to get back – in other words, if you give me a copy of the file, I can then send along to constituents that the Housing Inspector was there on November 17th at 3:00 P.M.,...

Mr. Peterson: Right.

Mr. Szwejbka: Something I was going to ask and I don't know if it would be possible for confidentiality reasons, but could this Committee be supplied with a listing of the on-going housing investigations and the status so if someone called Tony or Lillian or myself that I got a complaint about, we could look in our files and say they're looking into it...

Mr. Dolce: We've done that. The problem with that is keeping it up to date.

Mr. Szwejbka: Right.

Mr. Dolce: ...I mean within a month or two things may change, but at least you would have something...

Dr. Ney: Well, things don't happen that fast around here I would say, so I would think...I am surprised they didn't continue those practices with the Committee – I think that should be something that we should get.

Mr. Dolce: If we knew exactly how many houses were abandoned, how many were...

Mr. Szwejbka: Is that requested through the State?

Dr. Ney: You could carry it back for us if you would and then...

Mr. Dolce: ...just at that target area, look at the numbers that are ...

Dr. Ney: Right.

Mr. Dolce: It's amazing. I mean, that's something if we want to work on as a group to do that, you know, to have something and it's not...you might work with one Housing Inspector more than another one, whatever, but at least if they were all on the same page and everybody was doing the same procedure with the same form saying when you get the complaint, this is what happens to it, this is where it goes and we kind of do that informally, but it would be easier...

Mr. Szwejbka: I actually started doing that myself at home, writing them down...I've got them here...I already did this one...so I go back and cross it off, I think that's something we really need to address.

Mr. Dolce: The other thing this group, just to kind of finish up with what they're doing since they didn't come tonight, but they're holding fundraisers, they want to raise some money, they'd like to obviously, at some point, try to purchase some abandoned properties and do a rehab themselves, which is a big goal, but you know, they've targeted some homes they would like to look at.

Dr. Ney: Is it still in the County Budget that we've all been loaned?

Mr. Dolce: I think it's been vetoed.

Dr. Ney: But it's still in the budget in the sense that they haven't ...the legislature, they either haven't overridden it or...

Mr. Dolce: They put the \$200,000 in the budget...I think that was one of the items he vetoed.

Dr. Ney: Yes. But I mean it hasn't been acted on in the final stage...

Mr. Dolce: No. That's kind of up in the air, but you know...

Peter Morgante: The biggest problem you have in the City with the houses is that the houses are classified in one classification, the apartment houses are classified in another classification, the homes that have been turned into offices are turned into another classification, and they're all taxed differently. And, that's not right. I said this many times in Council, on Lakeview Avenue, there's 29 apartment houses up there who have been lowered or at the old rates. The houses on the same street have been given 300% increases.

Mr. Szwejbka: Well, I think that this discussion is maybe for another committee...

Mr. Morgante: Well, now wait...now wait...this is a housing issue right now. This is a safety issue. This is a problem how you classified the houses and different things. Let me ask you this. And what committee's going to take it up?

Chairman Szwejbka: I think that's something under Finance that we've already talked about as far as assessments.

Mr. Dolce: They're classified according to the...

Mr. Morgante: ...the salability of the property.

Mr. Dolce: If there's a difference between an R1 building, an R2, a multi-family and commercial, and so, when they were reassessed, they were reassessed based on the value of the property that was the going evaluation. It took into account the neighborhood, it took into account the structure, an addition, all of those things that GAR put into that when they did that. And, you know, I mean, if you're saying that a residential went up, it went up---you're right. Because it's worth more...

Mr. Morgante: Mr. Dolce, I went to four meetings. I was at the Supreme Court in Mayville over this issue. Houses were assessed on the marketability of what they could sell them for – and that's how they were assessed. And you can argue all you want. I'm telling you and I speak with experience.

Mr. Dolce: We're talking specifically here about abandoned buildings.

Mr. Morgante: I know that - same thing – houses are buildings.

Mr. Dolce: I know. But this Committee's dealing with individual housing issues...

Mr. Morgante: Alright.

Mr. Szwejbka: Your concern is taken well here, but, just a personal feeling here, if you really feel you've been wronged, and I've been listening to you, I don't know how many times coming to meetings saying that you did this survey and you know certain people that have different assessments, you know this street – Lakeview Avenue – you've got all...you should go to the Courts and try to get some kind of relief, because this Committee can't do anything for you. Am I wrong?

Dr. Ney: No.

Chairman Szwejbka: We can't do anything, but if you feel you've been wronged, you have the right to get some type of legal sanction...

Mr. Morgante: You know what the Judge told us?

Mr. Szwejbka: No I don't.

Mr. Morgante: That we can do anything we want to do, and we're doing it.

Mr. Szwejbka: Okay.

Mr. Morgante: You can raise your taxes and raise the base at the same time – take it or leave it and walk away.

Mr. Szwejbka: The NYS Attorney General's Office, if you have a complaint about a municipality about something, and again, I could be wrong here, we have legal counsel here – if you have a question concerning legalities how the City did their reassessment, I

don't think it's anything as a Council we can look at. Can he go to the Attorney General's Office and file a complaint?

Ms. Fiore-Nieves: Sure.

Mr. Szwejbka: That's what I thought.

Mr. Morgante: But they don't listen to it. I'm going to say one more thing then I'm going to drop it. The properties were not reassessed. No house was reassessed. They were reappraised by local realtors...

Mr. Szwejbka: So we're playing with semantic words?

Mr. Morgante: No.

Dr. Ney: They weren't local. What are we talking about here?

Mr. Morgante: Mr. Sorg and them people – they've used the records of local realtors, the sale prices. That's what it is...

Mr. Szwejbka: Well, I'm going to ask that we just move on – and I do appreciate...but you should try to get some legal...if you believe you've been wronged, go through the Courts, and I applaud you for doing it too. My taxes went up – several people at this table – they've gone up and I accept it. If you don't accept it and you think you've been wronged, you should do something about it. Let's get on to Mr. Peterson – the reason you're here.

Mr. Peterson: Okay. Well, I'm here, I attended the meeting obviously with Tony and having been a proponent of certainly getting these kinds of groups off the ground. I'm very happy to hear that they wanted to move forward with something like that and we've encouraged that in other neighborhoods...first time that something like this has really got some legs underneath it. The concerns that we have obviously with a newer group that are seeking a 501(C)(3) status at this stage and when they start talking about wanting to "acquire a property," the difficulties that they are going to encounter, and I think I was more interested in finding out from them, I wish Mr. Doverspike, in fact, was here tonight as the actual mechanism for doing that and taking that kind of a step. That's a difficult step, at best, especially where you have properties where there are questions about who actually owns the property at this particular stage in time. We deal with bankruptcy and foreclosure situations all the time where again property has been left basically sitting there. People do sadly walk away from them these days. They have disappeared off to North Carolina, to Florida, to Oregon, wherever they feel they need to go and kind of leave things in limbo. And, it's tracking those folks down, trying to make them certainly accountable for the conditions that we find at the property and going through the normal, legal procedures which everybody I think is kind of familiar with at this point, and citing these folks for the problems and making them accountable by taking care of them. It's very, very difficult to do. We can spend literally weeks and even months trying to locate one individual and even if you find that individual, if that individual has passed away, then you start dealing with issues of heirs, who may still be, or have a vested interest in that property. I know we were talking today about the Article 19 procedures which where the City, in fact, can take possession of a property. But the steps to go through are just so massive, and again if you have properties that you really have a question about – who is the owner, where is the owner, it gets even more convoluted after that. So, we really have to do a lot of homework and they would have to do a lot of homework, and my thought is also the fact that you have a lot of existing agencies that

are obviously working in housing rehabilitation and my own personal suggestion, and I think the other inspectors agree with me, is that they link up or team up with another agency to seek funds for that purpose. Going out on your own as a brand new housing group, you know, is tenuous at best and when you're competing with a lot of other folks that have been doing this for many years, Chautauqua Opportunities, CHRC, you know, Community Inclusion, they've got a track record and if you're going out the first time by yourself, you might wait 5-8 years before you are considered for funding. I think they need partners at this point to kind of team up with them to make their chances and there's no guarantees in anything like that in terms of getting funds to get started. But it is a great first step for them – it really is – to be able to do this. You'd want them to work certainly with our department so that they know the histories of properties and what they can and cannot do legally with a property before they invest a lot of time and a lot of energy and only to hit those stone walls and then have to work through those stone walls to try to get the property.

Dr. Ney: Well, that's good, that's what it's all about – trying to build the private/public partnerships and the City has the expertise in the laws and the ordinances and all those things, and there's the enthusiasm out there in the neighborhoods which should only be encouraged.

Mr. Szwejbka: Todd, do you think it'd be helpful down the road for us to start up some type of community forum or open meetings for these groups to come in, other than the Housing, maybe if people don't want to come to the...

Mr. Peterson: Well, PRIDE really, I think, was the first one that we've talked about, I know, when Strategic Planning and part of the DJDC group, the Prendergast Avenue area's beginning to get organized. Now, you've got...

Dr. Ney: Actually, they were first but they have not had the organization to...

Mr. Peterson: No, and they haven't...this has more legs under it at this stage where the people really are...

Mr. Dolce: inaudible...they had different issues...

Dr. Ney: Well, we did too.

Mr. Szwejbka: We're trying to get all these groups together – Chautauqua Opportunities, CHRC, ...and maybe with some local banking, financial institutions...

Mr. Dolce: Well, we're supposed to have that a couple of years ago – the Housing Committee was supposed to have a Housing Fair...

Mr. Szwejbka: ...Housing Expo...

Dr. Ney: We had wanted to have it and then asked for it, but then unfortunately it didn't materialize.

Mr. Peterson: Greg Moran mentioned to me today that there is a group, I believe, up in Cheektowaga, or up in that general vicinity, that has been very, very successful. There are very successful housing groups around the country, but something at a local basis that these people can draw on as a resource – “OK, here's how we did it” basically, here are the pitfalls, here are the reasons we were successful, and those kinds of things.

Dr. Ney: Some of the things that the Strategic Planning and Partnerships Commission talked about last week, Jim was there, are very much along these lines and when I give my report, I hope you can stay, because I would like you to comment on some of them, but they're very similar issues with a conference that John Murphy went to and he's told us all about that. We did have a community forum a couple of years ago at which most of the interests turned out to be in neighborhoods and neighborhood revitalization. Very few people came to the other breakout groups. The Council and the Strategic Planning Commission had co-sponsored that forum at the Jackson Center.

Mr. Szwejbka: ...that Prendergast group – is that part of the same north side PRIDE?

Mr. Dolce: No. That's different. The Prendergast group really came out as kind of a single issue. A couple of issues of a specific targeted building, house, I actually, think it started with the reconstruction of Prendergast when they had the issue over the medians, etc., and then other discussions and so forth took place, and we did a tour down there and we walked...

Dr. Ney: ...if you don't mind my being frank – I know I'm interrupting early on in the life of that group – they really got a bit of a jolt because they had more or less been told that they couldn't take their neighborhood walk and they shouldn't do it, and the department employees wouldn't be able...shouldn't accompany them – remember all that?

Mr. Dolce: Oh yes...

Dr. Ney: It was just an unfortunate reaction that was not understood in its entirety, so they got rebuffed quite a bit and that set them back, you know, six or eight months, which was too bad because that's what makes these groups, I mean, that's what they're doing all over the country. You read the literatures – I'm sure you do...

Mr. Peterson: And when we go out, we act as Code Enforcement Officers so if somebody complains about a specific property...

Dr. Ney: But, I mean, it wasn't meant in that spirit as you well know, but so now, we've gotten over that hump and I think the City is obviously helping now, which is wonderful.

Mr. Dolce: Well, the successes that they had obviously there was one or two housing issues there that were resolved and improved. The street has obviously been done – there's been additional street lighting put in which was an issue, so their goal was a little bit different – they wanted to just maintain and keep clean...this group is a different area with different goals. They're looking at...

Dr. Ney: ...great needs...

Mr. Dolce: Yes, different needs. One of the positive things, if nothing else, and Todd's concern is well taken about their ability to go out and get funds. Like I told them that night, a lot has already happened – infrastructure improvements because we took notice of some things. The Mayor walked through there, he didn't promise something, but he said we certainly would take a look at the targeted area for CDBG funds, etc. We've been working with Doug Hoisington planting some trees, and so, they're already reaping some benefit from organization and the squeaky wheel – getting the oil, so to speak, and....

Mr. Szwejbka: Hopefully, they're a catalyst for other groups around the City.

Mr. Dolce: I'd like to see them come to, or they may be inviting us, to one of their meetings so that the neighbors can come too. I think they planned it to have different people come – they're going to have CHRC come in, they're going to have some other people come at different times. But they don't want it all at once.

Mr. Peterson: Yes. Different organizations will have different ideas, different strategies, different thoughts and they can only deal with that definitely on the one agency presentation at any single time because the ?????will be very free flowing and that's part of the

Mr. Dolce: Well, it's interesting too about that area – it's a unique area because when you walk through there and you look at the homes and you see a vintage 1850, 1840, Beck and Tinkham next to an abandoned house. And you have such a wide variety of architectural – it's really, they're nice neighborhoods, and there's just these pockets of houses here and there, for whatever reason, have been left to go and then of course, you have the issue of the rentals and multi-dwellings.

Mr. Peterson: Well, we've told them again, if you have specific complaints about a property, first of all – make a complaint. In some cases though, we'll be asked "well, what are you doing with that particular property?" Well, it may not be anything because nobody has ever picked up a phone, honestly, and said "what's going on with this house – what's the status?" And, they've educated themselves well, to put together a document like this even, is an awful lot of legwork and a lot of time and effort to get that together and if we know again, we have to drive around in a lot of cases, and I had to learn this the hard way, you have to drive around with your blinders on because you'll see things that annoy the daylight out of you but you really can't do anything about them until somebody formally says "listen, I'm filing a complaint about this particular property," and then you can start the mechanism in motion for citing them obviously for the violations following an inspection – make sure the violations are valid. Sometimes they're not valid. But, most of the time they are; and, then giving the individual time to make the corrections and then going through the process if they fail to, then obviously we can bring the Court into play and we've had great success in the Courts especially over the last several months, really having impact on absentee landlords especially in remedying their deficiencies and saying "we're going to have you here again and many times we'll go to Court on a Friday and we'll see the same people repeatedly for different properties that are being brought in. It's comical at times, the message is finally getting to them, "we're really going to start asking for even more significant times than what we're getting."

Mr. Dolce: The other thing that came up at that meeting too is, the Mayor brought it up and I think Chuck Cornell mentioned it, that the legislation about the sight unseen, buying these homes without going through them, you've spent a lot of time talking about that where a lot of these times the properties are auctioned off and people buy them for literally nothing and putting some sort of legal bite into the ability to have this property has to be up to a certain level before you can be...

Mr. Peterson: And that's happening right now because your County Tax Auction's due on November 20th – that's going to come up – the list was in the paper on Saturday and you just can't go to the internet – look at one picture and say, "gee I want to buy that house," without going out and I've sat at some of the Board of Appeals meetings and listened to the stories of these folks who went out and spent \$5,000 – saying, you know,

we're going to renovate this house and suddenly they realize they have to spend \$45-50,000 to do that, and then they just simply either throw up their hands and walk away...

Dr. Ney: Well, along those lines, it was mentioned at this meeting by John Murphy who had just been to this national conference that Pennsylvania has developed a whole new set of laws and new tools so that they can get the property very quickly as compared to kind of the roadblocks that we have in place – it takes a lot of time. And they're working with Catherine Young and she has come to our meetings too in order to try to introduce legislation such as this in New York State, which I think will be a great benefit.

Mr. Taylor: That's kind of along the lines of something I wanted to say about New York State, and I was going to mention that last month when we didn't have the meeting was, I was watching a poll report on the Buffalo News where they had this whole portion on the news regarding the absentee landlords and the problems that they have with the properties. They started talking about certain steps they were taking in order to clear that out, certain things in the law that they wanted. This was on TV. So, what I did for my own...I wanted to make a report and make this a gesture at the last meeting – is I talked to some of the Judges out of Buffalo that I know through the system and those who deal with housing issues and things. They were telling me people that they know involved in housing, certain things that they want to do, and they wanted to meet with me again, and I said I was going to talk to this Committee just to find out – take it outside the box – obviously, they have similar problems – the same problems, but bigger – what exactly they're doing to really deal with some of these issues and problems. Now, the thing that happened to really slow this down was the storm; because obviously everyone's attention is now diverted towards the storm, the cleanup, things like that. So I haven't really been in contact over the last month. They said around December or so talk to us again and we wanted to set something up where we can really help each other and see what on a larger scale in the big city, what they're doing that we could trickle down to help ourselves possibly.

Mr. Dolce: Well, it says here what they do is “people who buy property at the City's foreclosure auction must sign an affidavit that prohibits them from selling acquisitions for more than 120% of the bid price for at least six months. The affidavit also commits buyers to fix all housing code violations within six months.”

Mr. Scalise: Well, they've obviously put that already in their Code. I mean, we could do something like that.

Ms. Fiore-Nieves: I thought we had that.

Mr. Dolce: We had that before, now the County needs to do that because they're running the auctions.

Mr. Olson: We always had that as the last paragraph when we were selling a property?

Ms. Fiore-Nieves: ...there would be no refund of any money that they had paid out?

Mr. Olson: Right. Based on the report that would come back from Housing if they didn't fix all the violations that were listed as of the date of the sale.

Ms. Fiore-Nieves: Right.

Mr. Dolce: So, now it's up to the County to do that because they're in charge of that. So we've kind of...one of the downsides of transferring it over is we lost control of...

Mr. Taylor: I would suggest, if you're going to suggest to the County, to put that in the County Code, and maybe you might think I'm unreasonable, but even to lower the six months to maybe three or four even. I mean just for in the case that if that property just sits there for six months and is all torn down and wrecked, it won't be that much of an eyesore as long for the different people living around that property.

Mr. Szwejbka: I invited two County Legislators to the meeting, but neither one made it. I was hoping they would be here to discuss this housing issue, but we'll try to get them both at our next meeting. I think that's a good idea Michael to try to emulate what's working in other communities – take a look at what Buffalo's doing. I've been following the paper, but not the newscast so I would say, Lillian, would you concur we can take a look at what they have to offer?

Dr. Ney: Absolutely.

Mr. Szwejbka: Anything else on what Mr. Peterson had to present?

Dr. Ney: Well, the things from the commission are very similar. This is a good time. As you probably know, one of the sort of the goals of the Commission is neighborhood revitalization and housing – more and better housing – promote the Urban Design Plan, cultivate sustainable job creation, champion job preservation and enhance regionalism and shared services. The Commission has decided from the membership that they wanted to concentrate on neighborhoods. I'm just going to give you the main points of the meeting. One of the things that they suggested was doing an overall analysis on neighborhoods. An analysis similar to what happened to the downtown area, design plan that would give you an assessment of what we had. You have a lot of that information obviously already because you provided for the Grant Street. They were very complimentary of the Country View Estates and wondered how we could get more of that type. They suggested, and it turned out we did not know this until now all of a sudden, you mentioned it, I think, and CHRC mentioned it to us – that there are CDBG funds available for neighborhood revitalization strategic focus areas. That's a very valid use of CDBG funds. So that a neighborhood could be designated, such as whatever it is, the Prendergast or the PRIDE group and that could be designated, as you mentioned, as a neighborhood revitalization strategic area. Amanda was at the meeting and mentioned that the Department had that in consideration over the next year or two, but I would say, the sooner the better; especially if we have a receptive audience that is ...you know when the next cycle comes along, I would hope that that group can be, or whatever group it is, one of the areas would be that developed group. They talked about needing kind of, even a professional evaluation, of neighborhoods. I just took notes here. It took 5-10 years to address the neighborhood – it may take 5 year planning to really get your arms around it, and I believe that probably would be true. And then someone said Jamestown has the oldest and the worst housing in New York State. Taxes are too high – I'm just the reporter here. One thing that was brought up that seemed like a very good suggestion was now that Jamestown is at 100% valuation, that the City of Cleveland has developed a large number of condos and townhouses in the area of the Cleveland Clinic that had been a very run down area, and Peter had mentioned earlier, the apartment houses are taxed, not by us, but must be by taxation law from New York State at about a 1/3 of the price of a house. Therefore, from a developer's point of view and from a person who wants to live in that kind of a setup – a townhouse or a condo – the taxes would be considerably less. And, if you put those developments adjacent to or near the downtown, some people like to use the amenities

downtown, it would support the Urban Design Plan, give housing that the Urban Design Plan that Sarah from VHA said – actually there's a market need for apartments and townhouses – and than that would increase the tax base. So all these things would seem to be working together towards a better economical thing for Jamestown. And the suggestions were these were great neighborhoods to sustain the City would be on 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th Streets. Somebody also said that where the Family Video is, it has an incredible view of the lake and that was a loss in the sense that they may not have been considered for, you know, townhouses, etc. because...they didn't say it was a "good view of the lake," they said it was a "great view of the lake."

Mr. Dolce: I remember when they took that down, it was really like a shock to everyone...

Dr. Ney: Yes. So they suggested the group maybe get some foundation funds to go visit that area and talk to the developer there who did those townhouses or apartments, or whatever they are, and they said it was a community commitment – Cleveland totally got behind it. And then John Murphy from CHRC had gone to this conference that he was extremely excited about and he talked about Pennsylvania's new laws and new tools to more rapidly get titles for abandoned properties that you mentioned, and then the tax credits that they have for historic preservation and we know that Catherine Young has worked on that and that is going to become effective on 1/07. Then, they have such a thing called "The Endangered Properties Fund" in a particular city and that was foundation funded as well as the use of some CDBG fund. This Endangered Properties Fund was just a bunch of money that was preserving historic buildings and rehabbing things and then as they sell, than it would replenish the Fund; so they must have gotten some seed money from foundations and than added some CDBG to it. And then they talked about the incentives from CDBG monies used in Dunkirk to reduce the density from 3 to 2, is what they said – a \$5,000 incentive. So the follow up items the Commission decided to do was to look into this Cleveland business – that was an idea brought forward by someone who has been elected to office in the past and who is retired from it and who has an office in Jamestown. The other one was a consideration of strategic plans for the neighborhood. The other one was the Endangered Property Fund. The other one was a condo or a townhouse development, especially near downtown to support the downtown and the other one is to review the old study – apparently there was an old study done of neighborhoods by Harvard. I'm not familiar with that – that must have been years ago. So that was their information and then I'm just bringing forward this which was an evaluation of the properties in Jamestown. This is just a draft and not anything that's talked about – either no data, poor property, fair, normal, good and excellent... The message here in case anybody didn't get it was to have a plan for neighborhood revitalization and not do it willy nilly which is what we have a tendency to do.

Mr. Dolce: That's wonderful. The only concern I've ever had was with ...the Urban Design Plan and what they put in there about downtown housing, townhouses and apartments etc., my only concern is in a city this size. The goal is we need to bring more people into the City, population wise. The other problems you always hear from people that are in the business of properties, landlords and realtors, is that what's caused a lot of the housing issues is the fact that you have declining population and many people find it more favorable to leave the neighborhood and go to the development – the high rise, the townhouse, etc. and in effect, what it does, is it creates more of a problem in the neighborhoods because the houses are more difficult to maintain, so I would love to see that, I guess we'd have to figure out...you get people, particularly older people, who give up on their house and say I'm going to move into the townhouse...

Dr. Ney: Well, this of course, was a market analysis, had nothing to do with anything...according to her, this woman who did it, there is a real need and an interest and a lot of it is from young professionals, teachers who have just gotten tenure who want to live, but don't particularly want to build a new house right now or whatever, maybe they don't have kids – I have no idea – I don't know where this market analysis ...this is an absolute, top notch evaluation...

Mr. Szwejbka: Todd, is there any kind of incentive for us – someone who we're talking about – to purchase a home – low interest loans for first time home buyers?

Mr. Peterson: There are various local agencies, Chautauqua Opportunities, can provide opportunities...

Mr. Szwejbka: What about New York State...isn't there a New York State program that has incentives for first time home buyers?

Mr. Peterson: I don't know that there's one specific program. Banks and lending institutions will offer incentives sometimes to first time home buyers in terms of a reduction, perhaps, in the interest rates they're going to pay. That's on an individual basis. I don't think there's one sweeping piece of legislation that deals with that.

Mr. Cosgrove: I'm from Chautauqua Opportunities – I run the rehab for the department, my name's Ed Cosgrove. A lot of this stuff you're talking about we're working on too. I finally found out when this meeting was going on, so Mr. Weeks called me so I showed up. That map there is from the GIS, I believe, that the County has. We're trying to do what you're asking is meet with the community and develop something similar to what you're doing already. We're here to answer or help. Our housing rehab has really expanded in the last couple of years. I've got like 18 programs.

Dr. Ney: Like I said earlier, I think it's so important that everybody works on this together and on the same page because there are a lot of things that can be brought together to help. That's what the point is of having a plan and strategic focus in the neighborhoods so that this is the priority of the City in this area, this is the second priority, ...

Mr. Cosgrove: Part of that blighted plan that John was talking about also states what they're talking about if you have a blocked area, you just purchase them, make it all green space because of the ratio of people vs. housing stock. Sometimes, it's just better to make it green space until later when you might be able to bring in interest or something to where you could...but there's a lot of different theories going all over, but no matter what you do, it's a long process. It's not going to happen within a couple of years. You're right – you're talking about a five-ten year process with the communities and the agencies getting together and working.

Mr. Peterson: I think what we want to see too is neighborhood pride is you want them to fix these. You want to put them on a task so they are going to succeed. Because if they succeed, that way it's providing a roadmap for another group to get started. They say "well they've been successful, let's follow what they're doing." PRIDE's doing that now by maybe looking at other plans in other areas to help.

Mr. Dolce: One of the things they were thinking about was some of the homes up there that if they could take them down, they'd have some space.

Mr. Szwejbka: What I'm concerned...and maybe it's not even a valid concern, I don't want this Committee to get into a position where we're helping one group compete against another group.

Mr. Peterson: Right. You don't want that at all. You want them working together as a...

Mr. Szwejbka: I think it's very important that we work in a harmonious way with everyone here because I know after one meeting, I got some nasty emails from a person from another agency, which I won't...being very negative on our whole committee thing...why are you doing this – we already do this in the City – you shouldn't be sticking your nose into this - ...

Dr. Ney: We shouldn't be sticking our nose into...

Mr. Szwejbka: Right. Into looking on how to improve neighborhoods – when they're already doing this. So again, it was kind of an eye opener for me...

Dr. Ney: Well, I think it's back to the point again of getting everybody together in kind of an open forum setting. I think in the first quarter of '07 we should do that. Todd, I want to compliment you before you go on the housing article. You did such a marvelous job on that. Thank you.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

James N. Olson
Director of Financial Services/City Clerk