

COMMUNITY HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Committee Members Golden, Alexander, Ewing and Williams

Chaired by Council Member Golden

July 14, 2015 – 10:00 a.m.

Parks & Recreation Administrative Offices

MINUTES

Present:

Committee Chair Jeff Golden and Committee Member Chris Williams

Absent:

Committee Members Latimer Alexander and Jason Ewing

Also Present:

Council Member C. Davis

Staff Present:

Randy McCaslin, Deputy City Manager; JoAnne Carlyle, City Attorney; Mike McNair, Director of Community Development; Michelle McNair, Community Resource Manager; Richard Fuqua, Affordable Housing Manager; Wendy Fuscoe, Core City Administrator; Alisha Doulen, Community Resource Specialist; Eric Olmedo, Budget & Performance Manager; Lisa Vierling, City Clerk

Others Present:

Jerry Mingo, Chairman- Citizens Advisory Council
Myra Clodfelter, Member- Citizens Advisory Council
Ross Lackey, Urban AG Short-term Consultant for city

Discussion- Neighborhood Gardens/Adopt-a-Lot Program

Randy McCaslin distributed copies of the proposed *Adopt-a-Lot Operational Guidelines for Community Gardens on Public Land* and reported that some neighborhood groups and individuals have contacted the city regarding interests in using vacant city-owned property to grow gardens and shared that Jerry Mingo, who resides in the Burns Hill Neighborhood area, has also expressed an interest in planting a community garden. Mr. McCaslin reported that Mike McNair, Director of Community Development and Housing has identified several city-owned properties (individual lots or groupings) with no immediate need for which could be used for community gardens. He noted that staff needs some clear direction from Council regarding guidelines.

City Attorney JoAnne Carlyle agreed that staff needs some clear direction from Council as to what they would like the guidelines to look like for things such as:

- Liability Insurance (dollar amount, amount of exposure, whether or not to even require it, etc...
- An approved list of city-owned properties that can lease out for this purpose (and whether this is going to be determined on size, location, etc....);
- What would be included in the lease
- Duration of the lease (and whether or not the lease would be renewable)
- Any other special considerations

Ms. Carlyle advised that the city could reduce the amount of liability coverage that is required and noted the City of Baltimore requires \$2,000,000 in liability insurance, but High Point generally requires \$1,000,000. She further explained that it would be entirely up to the City Council as to whether or not to require the liability insurance and if so, what amount it would be while keeping in mind the exposure aspect of it. She advised the liability insurance requirement would not prevent lawsuits, but would give the city something to go against in the case of a lawsuit.

Council Member C. Davis was surprised to see this topic in the Community Housing & Neighborhood Development Committee when it started out in the Prosperity & Livability Committee. Mr. McCaslin explained it is appearing in this Committee because of an idea that emerged in one of the conferences that staff and committee members attended.

Ms. Carlyle advised that Council could also delegate leasing of these properties to the city manager, once the properties are identified by Council, and the manager could determine the usual considerations such as:

- time limits
- whether or not to allow any structures on the property
- how the property is to be used
- where personal items used can be stored
- insurance requirements

Council Member C. Davis asked staff to address playgrounds and how a playground might impact these community gardens. Ms. Carlyle noted this would definitely be something to consider and advised that some questions have surfaced with regards to playgrounds relating to the West End Ministries lease that was approved by the City Council on June 18, 2015. She explained there was not a whole lot of discussion on this, but it was in the plans that they would build some kind of playground equipment and place it on the property that is being leased. She admitted it may result in a little more exposure to the city from a legal standpoint, but she could protect the city as much as possible by putting appropriate language in the lease. Ms. Carlyle stressed the importance of clear direction to staff as to if Council wants to allow structures on the leased property such as playground equipment, trellises, benches, etc.... She noted it has more to do with Council's vision than the legalities involved and reiterated that she could draft something to protect the city.

At this time, Wendy Fuscoe, the Core City Administrator, recognized Ross Lackey, the Urban AG short-term consultant for the city, who provided some background information. She advised that Mr. Lackey is on a short-term contract to help staff identify areas that can be used for community gardens and to assist the city in preparing plans for the gardens. She reported that Mr. Lackey has been working on the plans for the garden in the southside area and advised that the plan was presented to the Greater High Point Food Alliance's executive committee and they are asking them for \$20,000 in funding to assist with the plantings.

Ross Lackey then shared and reviewed the plans for the Fairview Food Park in the southside area and pointed out that many of these properties could have multi-functional uses. He called attention to the fact that the Greensboro-High Point MSA is number one in food hardship in the nation and these lots could be used to produce food for the community. He advised the goal is to create communal spaces where people can congregate, spend time together and be used to produce food for the community. Some of the plantings proposed for this area are chestnut trees, hazel nuts, pecan orchard, etc..... with a soft path that would connect to the park, as well as sidewalks that will connect to the school, benches, etc....

He then shared the plans and design by the Bountiful Harvest team at West End Ministries for their community garden, which is also multi-functional. Proposed plantings for this garden are trees, blueberries, brambles, grapevines, etc.... The plans do include installation of a playground. Council Member C. Davis noted she has no problem with the playground and explained the only reason she mentioned the playground earlier was because the playground was not discussed when Council was considering the West End Ministries lease although it should have been and she felt it should have been clear on what was voted on by Council. Mr. McNair offered his apologies and noted it was merely an oversight.

Mr. McCaslin pointed out the large size of the property being leased to West End Ministries lends itself to multiple uses, whereas most of the other lots would be smaller in size so the multi-functional aspect might not apply. Council Member C. Davis suggested staff could possibly come up with a generic contract with check-off boxes for options instead of having to draft a contract for every one of the community gardens. Ross Lackey shared that he completely respects the city's need to protect and reduce any risks, but asked if the city would not require the \$1,000,000 in liability insurance because it would be a hindrance and most individuals do not have access to large amounts of capital.

Mr. Lackey also mentioned that he did meet with Lee Tillery, Director of Parks & Recreation regarding the possibility of developing some installations along the greenway. He noted that the funding has already been lined up for this and he is ready to move forward and identify certain spots in the greenway that could be used for planting trees, a couple of blueberry bushes, maybe some strawberries, etc.... He felt this would create a safe, edible route along the greenway that could help in solving the food crisis in High Point. Council Member C. Davis asked about the maintenance responsibility for the plantings. Mr. Lackey explained that very low maintenance would be needed to keep the plantings healthy and to make sure that the investment of time, energy and capital is sustained. He pointed out the person putting in the plantings would be responsible for maintenance and shared that the Urban AG group has also volunteered to help in this endeavor.

Jerry Mingo briefly reported on the site located at 1208 R. C. Baldwin Avenue where he is interested in planting a community vegetable garden. Council Member C. Davis asked Mr. Mingo if he plans to secure the site to keep people from coming in and mangling up the garden. Mr. Mingo replied that the members of the neighborhood association are not concerned with people taking things out of the garden, but hopes vandalism will not be an issue. Mr. Lackey felt this would be an awesome site and noted it already has a pecan tree and mulberry tree on it.

Discussion- Proposed CAC By-Law Amendments

Michelle McNair, liaison between the Citizens Advisory Council and the Community Development & Housing Department, reported that the CAC By-Laws have not been amended since 2000. She distributed copies of two documents: one is the existing By-Laws with the recommended revisions highlighted and incorporated into it; and two, a reformatted copy of what the amended By-Laws would look like. She introduced Jerry Mingo, CAC Chairman, and Myra Brown Clodfelter, a member of the CAC. Mr. Mingo briefly reviewed some of the changes being proposed by the CAC.

Chairman Golden asked if the terms would be aligned with the city's election cycle which now takes place in the odd-numbered years instead of the even-numbered years. Mr. Mingo pointed out this is addressed in Article 4. He shared one of the major changes with the proposed By-Laws is the terms of office for the CAC members; currently they serve two-year, concurrent terms, but the CAC feels it would be better to stagger the terms so all CAC members are not rotating off at the same time. Council Member C. Davis questioned whether the CAC could call for a vote to have a member removed.

Ms. Carlyle pointed out there were a number of things that the CAC could not do due to it being in the City's Code of Ordinances and advised that the CAC could not change the ordinance without it going to the City Council. Mr. McCaslin expressed appreciation to the CAC for bringing it forward, but felt a more thorough review was needed. He suggested this be delayed for 30 days to give everybody a chance to review it. Chairman Golden asked Ms. Carlyle to identify items that are contrary to the ordinance, then Council could decide if the ordinance should be changed. Once the proposed changes to the CAC By-Laws are reviewed by the city attorney, then it will be forwarded to the CAC, and will be brought back to the Community Housing & Neighborhood Development Committee.

Discussion- Proposed Program to Provide Financial Assistance to City Employees to Live in the Core City

Mr. McCaslin explained this concept morphed from a program that was presented at one of the recent conferences that staff and some of the Community Housing & Neighborhood Development Committee members attended and noted the City of High Point actually considered a similar proposal in 2004, but it was not approved.

Council Member C. Davis asked if it might be possible to obtain a copy of any of the pertinent information because she was not privy to the discussion and was not able to go on the trip.

Mike McNair, Director of Community Housing & Neighborhood Development, reviewed some of the 2004 proposal for Public Safety Residence Assistance Program. He proceeded to give an overview of similar types of programs other agencies offer: District of Columbia Employer Assisted Housing Program; State Employees Credit Union: First Time Homebuyer's Mortgage; Baltimore City Employee Homeownership Program; Drexel University Home Purchase Assistance Program; University of Kentucky Employer Assisted Housing Program.

He shared inspirations and outcomes for employer homebuyer assistance programs:

Inspirations:

- down payments are still a barrier to purchasing single family homes;
- some employers desire to assist their employees to help purchase their primary homes;
- some agencies desire employees to live closer to or in the areas they serve;
- some employers have found such programs enhance their appeal to new employees

Outcomes:

- helps close the homeownership affordability gap for employees;
- encourages employees to live closer to their workplaces;
- can help stabilize neighborhoods;
- encourages longer employee tenure; and
- reduces greenhouse gases and commutes

He explained these agencies are looking for several objectives, some of which are consistent with the objectives that have been articulated in High Point and pointed out there is an opportunity to help stabilize neighborhoods, as in the Core City Homebuyer's Assistance Program the objective is to attempt to stabilize neighborhoods by diversifying the incomes.

Chairman Golden asked how the City of High Point is doing in recruiting public safety employees. Mr. McCaslin replied that the police and fire departments have done a great job in recruiting and are pretty well fully staffed. He further explained the rationale behind any programs of this nature is to get more middle income people living in the core city and to encourage renovation of existing housing stock that was built in the 50s, 60s, and 70s. Chairman Golden inquired about whether or not EMS employees would be eligible because they are county employees. Mr. McCaslin noted it would be entirely up to the City Council to determine eligibility for the program.

Committee Member Williams asked how many residents have taken advantage of the Core City Homebuyer's Assistance Program and Mr. McNair replied none have, and this was a little puzzling. Chairman Golden shared that he runs into people in the community who have no idea these types of programs are out there and questioned the advertising vehicles the city is using to get the word out. Council Member C. Davis expressed concerns regarding the budgetary impact and whether it would be funded with federal dollars, general fund dollars, what the cap limit would be, how many would take advantage of it, if there will be limits on the total dollars available, etc....

Mr. McCaslin explained that Council would have to decide whether or not there is an interest in a program of this type, come up with the funding for it, and if a decision is made to pursue it, staff could help with the design.

Council Member C. Davis felt her questions were very valid because she did not get to go on the trip and pointed out that no one that went on these trips has shared any information, and the Council has not been briefed. She expressed concerns that staff and Council are not communicating very well and felt those attending meetings should bring information back to colleagues. Chairman Golden reminded Council Member C. Davis that this was for discussion purposes only.

Prior to adjournment, Mr. McCaslin reminded everyone that the main topic for the Manager's Briefing on Monday, July 20th would be the topic of dog tethering. Council Member C. Davis pointed out several residents had contacted her that thought dog tethering would be discussed at today's meeting and expressed concerns that they would not be given an opportunity to speak on the subject due to it being a Briefing Session. Mr. McCaslin advised that there would be an opportunity for them to participate and speak regarding the issue during the public comment period at the City Council meeting at 5:30 p.m.

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m. upon motion duly made and seconded.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lisa B. Vierling, MMC
City Clerk

Jeff Golden, Chairman

