



COMMUNITY HOUSING & NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Committee Members: Golden, Ewing, Alexander and Williams

Chaired by Mayor Pro Tem Golden

APRIL 13, 2016 – 1:00 P.M.

3RD FLOOR LOBBY CONFERENCE ROOM

MINUTES

Present:

Committee Members Chris Williams and Jason Ewing

Chairman Jeff Golden participated by polycom

Absent:

Committee Member Latimer Alexander

Also Present:

Council Member Cynthia Davis

Staff Present:

Randy McCaslin, Deputy City Manager; Mike McNair, Director of Community Development; Richard Fuqua, Affordable Housing Manager; Jeron Hollis, Communications & Public Engagement Officer; Fanta Dorley, Human Relations Manager; Brent Cole, Assistant City Attorney; Terry Houk, Public Services Director; Maria Smith, Deputy City Clerk; and Lisa Vierling, City Clerk

Others Present:

Kim Graziani, Vice President and Director of National Technical Assistance, Center for Community Progress and Tarik Abdelazim, Associate Director of National Technical Assistance, Center for Community Progress; Bill McNeil, McNeil Planning

News Media:

Pat Kimbrough, *High Point Enterprise*

Committee Member Williams thanked everyone who played a role in getting this started and thanked the Center for Community Progress for the grant and for their participation. He also took a moment to thank Chairman Golden who was participating by phone. He turned the floor over to Mike McNair, Director of Community Development. Mr. McNair shared that this is a process that has been underway for a year.

Mr. McNair gave a short review from his visit from Boston and Detroit last year. He mentioned how fortunate he was to have met both Kim Graziani and Tarik Abdelazim with Center for Community Progress. Mr. McNair then introduced Tarik Abdelazim.

Mr. Abdelazim, Associate Director of National Technical Assistance, Center for Community Progress, provided a brief introduction. He noted that they are the only national non-profit organization that focuses exclusively on vacancy and abandonment, helping communities tackle the negative impacts through a variety of measures:

1. Through technical assistance using a traditional fee for service engagement, and
2. Through a program called TASP (Technical Assistance Scholarship Program) which they are currently in their second year.

They also do this through education, training, leadership opportunities (which High Point has been involved in the Community Progress Leadership Institute, as well as in the National Conference for vacant properties) and attended the last one in Detroit and encouraged the city to take advantage of the complimentary registrations as part of the scholarship and join them in Baltimore to continue the dialogue.

He mentioned in the last five years they have helped about 130 communities across thirty states. He shared the reason they rolled out TASP was to find communities that have engaged, committed leaders that are working in cross sectors of partnerships that are also willing to take risks to try something new. He pointed out this is not a financial needs scholarship, but more of a merit-based scholarship.

Mr. Abdelazim shared that before he joined the Center for Community Progress, he spent about eight years in local government and he understood the challenges facing communities, working in a constrained financial environment in trying to tackle some of these serious challenges. He spent four years as Deputy Mayor and four years as Director of Planning, Housing and Community Development in Binghamton, NY. He learned all about blight in those eight years and had to deal with a lot of the challenges. In 2011, he played a role in launching one of the first banks in New York State.

At this time Kim Graziani, provided a brief background. She reported that she oversees their National Technical Assistance work and is based in their Washington, D.C. national office. She advised that she also spent about five years in the Mayor's office in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and before that she spent about ten years doing various sorts of affordable housing and social services in Pittsburgh, Atlanta and New York City. She pointed out it was a very competitive process for the scholarship program and congratulated the City of High Point on being awarded the scholarship.

At the request of Mr. Abdelazim, everyone else provided a brief introduction.

Mr. Abdelazim cited the following reasons why the City of High Point's application stood out and why the city was selected to receive the scholarship from the Center for Community Progress.

1. A commitment of an effort to learn and to act due to the status quo not working.
2. As the City of High Point is looking to re-build their code enforcement program and thought about integrating some interesting elements, how to tackle the challenges of the properties, but being sensitive to the needs of the people.

He explained they like to conduct these preliminary site visits to listen and hear from different constituencies across City Hall, the community, partners and stakeholders. He reported that the scholarship comes with 200 hours of their time and it could just be community progress, but sometimes they do pull in additional consultants that they may need to deliver and meet the urgent need.

A Q & A period followed and feedback was solicited from Council. Mr. Abdelazim and Ms. Graziani posed the following questions.

Tarik Abdelazim: *What do you see as a major problem when you think about blight, vacancy and abandonment? What do you see as the major problem here in High Point?*

Committee Member Williams: *Being that I live very near some of it, for me it's.....you have citizens who own their property and then you have a stretch of homes that are rental and sometimes those individuals have like absentee owners so they let the property go down. So it's kind of hard on the property owners to maintain or have expectations what the quality of life would be if no one is addressing it. They've made the phone calls and we've had.....well we've been able to work with some enforcement, but you still have homes that are just deteriorating faster. We would see homes go down. Like the city would demo a house and you'd have two or three to pop up that would be in the same kind of condition falling below code. So these are my neighbors. These are the ones that are constantly asking me the same question, when are we going to do something about it.*

Tarik Abdelazim: *Chris, are those primarily rental properties?*

Committee Member Williams: *Yeah, rental properties. Typically the ones that.....now you do have some like that are on fixed incomes or elderly individuals that just don't have the income to fix their homes and they do the best they can. Different organizations are working to help to that effect. The city has a hand in that also and assists in that, but you can never address it. I mean it's been bad here, in my opinion, ever since the jobs went away. So as those jobs went away and development happened away from the core, this just kind of escalated. I grew up here and I remember what it looked like and just from I guess from about '86, the difference between '86 and '96 was huge. Then it just got worse from '96 to 2006. That's just my point of view.*

Committee Member Ewing: *A couple of things. The first one, in our strategic planning we identified that we want more aggressive and proactive code enforcement and that's what Mike is working on and undertaking. Part of that is all the houses that we see come across Council agendas for abandonments, demolition or whatever, are all complaint driven. So 100 percent of them are rentals. Somebody that lives in a beat-up house is going to pick up and call inspections on themselves. So there's a lot of houses that are out there that are owner occupied that maybe they were....they got the property through inheritance, they've lost their job, they can't keep up the property anymore so they just let it completely deteriorate around them. Those are the ones I think that we can be more proactive on dealing with. The ones that are renter occupied, the ones that are absentee owned, we're getting those from a complaint standpoint, but still probably ten for every one we get a complaint on needs to be dealt with. There's a good amount of both that need to be focused on that's really a proactive approach to getting out, identifying areas that we want to hit hard with code enforcement and redevelopment and start moving in sort of a grid pattern and addressing that because we can't just say we're going to deal with the entire core city, a couple hundred homes. We've got to do it strategically within certain grid patterns for redevelopment.*

Tarik Abdelazim: *You mentioned what we typically call heir properties. The owner dies and sometimes there is an estate, but it's just not effective so that property can sit in limbo for many years. Is that something that you've also heard or seen frequently in the city?*

Committee Member Williams: *Quite a bit.*

Council Member C. Davis: *Well, for me I would think that where I live and there's a lot of blight off of English and over in the West End area that you have absentee homeowners which we've talked about where people rent those properties. And the lack of accountability for them to be required that which they own, as well as commercial properties that are sitting empty that either the owner of those properties*

haven't decided to do a short sale to somebody to come in and fix up and re-use those buildings or the accountability isn't there for them to maintain them themselves either. So they're just sitting structures, much like the old National Guard Armory on English Road. It's been there for a long time vacant, empty. It could be re-used, refurbished and turned into something. We have a lot of those along English.

The livable wage I think is the most important key that we're not discussing that needs to be discussed in regards to homeownership and renters that rent properties that can work out an arrangement with the homeowner to upkeep that which they're renting, but in order to do that they have to have jobs and we don't have livable wage jobs here with the furniture industry moving out and things going overseas. I happen to own my home. I don't have a lot of money. We don't have a lot of money, but we do the best we can with repairs as they come when they come. And I think that a lot of people that are working, doing the best that they can that own a home. There's a retired police officer that lives in one of the neighborhoods over in the Oakhill area. His house has fell into disarray, but because he's afraid of being evicted and not having some place to go and not having the resources to do what he needs to do, his home is in great distress. But it's his home. So I think the biggest problem we really have in addition to the blight, is the fact that we're not providing jobs for our citizens. We're not attracting livable wage jobs. We're having companies that expand and they expand and create jobs there, but I don't feel that we're actively doing a good enough job to go out and seek employers to look at the vacant buildings and the structures that we have and really being proactive in that. We're more reactive and I know that our EDC is trying to become a little more proactive, but to me it's a conversation I've been having for six, seven, eight years now. That we need to be looking who's growing, who's expanding and sell the assets that we have.

Tarik Abdelazim: *It definitely seems from some of the research that there's some focus on that with the new economic development entities, the High Point foundation or partnership.*

Council Member C. Davis: *Guilford County.*

Mike McNair: *Jeff, do you want to chime in?*

Chairman Golden: *The biggest thing I'm seeing Mike is once we identify a problem, the time that elapses before we can correct the problem. I think we need to come up with a system where we can address problems quicker. Sometimes we spend, you know sometimes we spend between 90 and 100 days knowing that we've got a house that's in disarray that needs to be addressed, but because of the legal constraints we can't move on it. I was hoping that they could do with some of this technical assistance is help us formulate what we need to push to Raleigh to speed up that process. I don't know if that's part of what their plan is, but that's what I was thinking. Does that make sense?*

Tarik Abdelazim: *Absolutely. We're going to leave that all to Brent to figure out and his team. Actually we'll be sitting down with you as well and the attorneys to talk. So we'll be able to dive into some of those issues in a little more detail. So, one of the things that is unique about our approach is we always try to address kind of the underlying systemic causes of blight vacancy. That's why we look at the code enforcement systems. That's why we look at data and information systems, the market which you guys have made a lot of progress on. Also the tax foreclosure system.*

So as councilmembers, do you feel that you have access to efficient data to look about what's happening in your neighborhoods in your districts?

Council Member Williams: *To an extent. I mean for me it's more knowing what to ask for as opposed to what can be effective or how we can be effective. We've just got to know what we need, what information can be effective instead of just asking for a bowl of everything and trying to sort through it. I think the*

smartest thing we've done as a Council is that we had an early understanding that we have to be strategic on everything that we do—especially with the amount of resources that we have. So I think it's just finding out exactly what we need to know and how.

Council Member C. Davis: *You know, I think being strategic has its benefits and I'm not opposed to that either. But I also feel that when you've got neighborhoods that you've got houses sitting in part of them that have trees and vines growing out of them, that doesn't motivate. That says that we're uncared about. It's not necessarily to address our area, so all those strategic and taking a block or two blocks or whatever it is that you want to do, if you pull back attention from those areas where there is hope if you remove that house and then they see that they're being cared about because you're addressing the blight that's there. And then the other homes start to pick back up because you've addressed the eyesore in their neighborhood. So once you remove that eyesore, I'm going to fix my house up. That eyesore is gone, so I don't feel like I live over here in this area. I feel like somebody cared enough after 20-30 years to take that house down.*

Committee Member Williams: *Jeff, do you have something?*

Chairman Golden: *I'm good.*

Tarik Abdelazim: *You raise a great point, which is no matter what.....I love one of our senior fellows, Adam Malik, he always talks about no matter what code enforcement ultimately comes down to economics. Is there somebody going to put money into a home where there's no confidence in the market and everything is declining? Are you going to be able to recoup that investment. You're absolutely right.*

I want to ask a question then. So that market segmentation analysis that was done, I mean how does the Council interpret that? What do you see about that and how is that going to inform some of your decisions? Or do you still need to better understand how to use that?

Committee Member Ewing: *Was that the report that we got two weeks ago?*

Mike McNair: *Well you got an overview of it, but the study came in in December. We still haven't gotten the final, clean draft yet from the university. So we will still probably re-visit that again with you when that comes out because it hasn't been posted on the website or anything like that.*

Committee Member Ewing: *So what we've seen of it so far, I think like Chris said there's a lot of data there. It's just identifying what you're looking for out of that data and when we get it cleaned up, I think it will be a great resource and tool to utilize with the other tools that we have access to as well.*

Council Member C. Davis: *Is that the same report where you had the green, the yellow, the orange? Well, I'll be the elephant in the room. What bothered me with the report is that everybody has the desire to work in the yellow to get it to the green and to touch upon some of the orange areas and some of the areas that they want to bring tourism or what-not into the city, which is perfectly fine. I get it. But here's my rub. With the people that I represent and you've got a section that's been neglected since the 1960s and when that report revealed that and I asked the question and it was confirmed back here, that you've got people that have been underserved and neglected. And to me, that's deliberate neglect. That's gross negligence. I don't understand and I'm heart driven so you'll have to forgive that a little bit. But, you know, the thing about it is that you've got people here that have been neglected since the 1960s and their neighborhoods are the ones that we're talking about being a blight. Not only are their homes a blight, but the commercial industry that had the furniture manufacturing and things also helped contribute to that blight. So, for me, I would rather see us look at some areas where the land is cheaper in the red or the orange, opposed to the yellow and the orange. I know that you want to build on what's*

already growing and I get that too. But I believe that these individuals deserve attention and they've gone decades without it. So at what point do we say that we're going to say we're going to start over in this area and tie into something that's growing over on this corner and help this come into an orange versus it staying red for another sixty, forty, fifty years. You know? For me, that's my rub. I get what my fellow colleagues say and I understand the approach that some want to take, but it doesn't rest well with me and those people that I know are desperate for work and they're desperate for their neighborhoods to look like the neighborhoods that are in the yellow and the green sections. Even some of the orange sections don't look as bad as the red sections. And that bothers me because we want to start where everything looks all great and just sort of bump into it. But that leaves these individuals down here at the bottom of the totem pole still. And how long are they going to have to wait?

Kim Graziani: *so one way of looking at a map, the segmentation analysis, the various versions that we've worked on across the country that are similar to it. But I can tell you in my personal experience of doing a similar type market study when I was working in local government five plus years back, is we made a very conscious effort to say that this is not a tool to say No to. It's to figure out what's the right Yes. Every neighborhood deserves an investment from the city regardless of what color you may be and your market. I think one way of looking at it is what is the right investment thinking through what the market is. So instead of a No, I think it's just really what is the best tool that's going to make the most sense there. And I know that taking that approach I think really puts people in a place that they do feel they deserve investment and the city isn't saying No and turning their backs. So that's just one thing to keep in mind.*

Tarik Abdelazim: *Two things. One, I was hoping she would say every neighborhood deserves a Yes. It's perfect. But there's also that investment, and this is the national debate. Investment and pledge, but also providing opportunity to move to high opportunity neighborhoods and now I think with the new Fair Housing regulations that were passed last year, a lot of communities are going to have to start figuring this out about how they're supporting opportunity for those stronger neighborhoods. And I know that there's option here in High Point. So there's multiple strategies.*

*So I would ask **how are citizens being engaged in the process?** The city is committed and you certainly have willingness to go through education, but you're putting resources on the table. I mean Council has bumped up code enforcement from two to six, half a million dollars for this effort. So how are you engaging the citizens and inviting them to be part of this project?*

Committee Member Williams: *Actually for myself and Jeff Golden, it's been more direct. We're connected with our local community and our neighborhood associations and watches and I've been attending as many of those as possible. And then every two months, we have a town hall meeting and we'll just invite the citizens and try to give them an update.*

Tarik Abdelazim: *All council members?*

Committee Member Williams: *All at some point have them in different parts of the city. So, yeah, I would say all. Then, you know, some of us....I don't know if all of us do this, but some of us do go to churches and ministries and they give us a few minutes to express some information and share some and we've been consistent on that I would say. So it's a lot of foot work. And then we've also been directing a lot of people to the city's website and I know Mike's probably getting tired of me sharing that number for the Community Housing Department. But I've done that tons of times, everything from just talking about the code enforcement changes, but also for the down payment assistance. I mean you just name it. That's just been a more direct connection with the best that we can.*

Council Member C. Davis: *Something we really need with the Fair Housing aspect of it is to change the mileage from the grocery stores and the amenities. Right now it's a mile. So we need to push that out to two to three miles so that....and then to have the consideration for grocery stores to also be acceptable through Walgreens and CVS that provide food as well as fresh produce. So that's another obstacle that we have within the immediate core is the lack of the grocery store. But if we could find alternatives, then expand the mileage away from those areas if they're on a bus route, that would help with some of the housing needs that we have, but that's something we need to change higher up.*

Tarik Abdelazim: *So didn't you recently get one of the food grants, one of the few communities in the country that did?*

Mike McNair: *Yes, the Urban AG folks got one.*

Tarik Abdelazim: *So let me ask you another.....and then I kind of want either Kim to jump in or turn it back to you, is tax enforcement and foreclosure. I know a lot of that happens with the county.*

How does that contribute, if at all, to some of the challenges you see in the neighborhood?

Committee Member Ewing: *We've had a number of properties we have liens on or have the ability to put liens on due to taxes. Conversations we've had in the past with the city attorney is that the process to go through enforcing those liens.....*

Tarik Abdelazim: *Are you talking outside of tax liens, so whether it's code liens or utility liens?*

Deputy City Manager McCaslin: *Both.*

Committee Member Ewing: *The process to go through to enforce those, we were told a number of times in the last few years that it's not conducive to just go out unless we have a plan in place that we identify an area that we want to redevelop, then we can go out and start enforcing those liens in those areas. But just to do it because we have the liens on the properties is not conducive to spend the manpower.*

Tarik Abdelazim: *Does the city enforce, or does the county?*

Deputy City Manager McCaslin: *It depends on the lien. If it's a nuisance, code lien, then it's the city. Then if it's a tax lien, it's the county in conjunction with the city.*

Tarik Abdelazim: *So does the county take direction from the city in regards to enforcement of tax liens?*

Deputy City Manager McCaslin: *We have a contract with the county and part of that contract is for the placement of liens or the foreclosure due to the tax liens.*

Tarik Abdelazim: *So they basically won't move forward with a tax foreclosure unless the city.....*

Deputy City Manager McCaslin: *No, they have the county taxes in addition and in most cases they're not paid. Either one are paid, so they will move forward in some cases on their own. They've been very slow, but they are becoming more aggressive because they've got so many on the books.*

Tarik Abdelazim: *When you say other liens, is it basically through demolition liens?*

Deputy City Manager McCaslin: Demolition, lot mowing, boarding up, it's a number of different kinds of liens.

Kim Graziani: So if I were a property owner and I received notice that my lawn had to be mowed and I didn't. And the city, I assume, uses a third part to go out and mow and I assume you calculate the cost for that. You notify the property owner to pay for that and if they don't then obviously we can get a little bit more into this with Council tomorrow or later today, but then there's that lien that's filed against the property. Not against the person, but against the property and it's too costly to enforce that lien.

What's going to prevent from not mowing my lawn again if I don't have to pay the city for that?

Council Member C. Davis: It's supposed to be added to your electric bill. Isn't that right, Randy?

Deputy City Manager McCaslin: No. No we don't add it to any utility bills. It's all a lien on the property. I think Jason kind of hit it on the head a while ago. The position that the city has taken in the past has been we haven't executed on a lot of the liens because we either have to tear the building down, so you'll have an additional cost and then if somebody hasn't maintained it in the past, they're probably not going to maintain it in the future, so then we're maintaining the property on an on-going basis and we just haven't had a plan as Jason said that would allow us or motivate us to move more aggressively. I think now we're in the process to develop that plan that will allow us to strategically look at these properties and we have done so. We've contacted the tax office and we have a good list of the properties that they've already foreclosed on that they currently own, as well as the ones that are in some pending status and waiting for further action. We've done some mapping associated with that. Again, looking at it from a strategic standpoint, where can we put our efforts.

Tarik Abdelazim: I think you may be able to find it on-line as well with Guilford County. They had a map of those pending and those that they had completed the foreclosure on. So I've now heard a couple of folks mention what they'd love to see with engagement of the scholarship. So let's ask this question.

What does success look like to you? I mean we're at six months. We come back and present a report, we leave. **What would you define as a success?**

Committee Member Ewing: I think a success would be to have a fully implementable plan ready to roll in six months. Something that we can lay the groundwork down and when you guys leave, Mike, Randy, staff can implement it and we can start moving forward with reducing the amount of blight, helping all the neighborhoods that have issues, but then also moving towards redevelopment and more of a strategic goal.

Tarik Abdelazim: Is there anything....I just wanted to drill down a little farther. When we say fully developed plan, I mean that could be huge and when we talk about systems and we work with communities and work with the tax enforcement foreclosure system.

How do we change processes internally, breakdown the silos? How do we choose vacant land just as a re-use. I'm just asking, is there something that really stands out to you? Does it focus around code enforcement in trying to take care of some of these substandard properties?

Committee Member Ewing: I think code enforcement is the biggest piece of it, but it's also identifying from a redevelopment standpoint where we want to look at large pieces of property to potentially be redeveloped and increase the tax base. So part of it is helping the neighborhoods that are dilapidated and their morale is in the ditch because their neighbors houses are all in a wreck. The other part of it is identifying core block within the city that have a lot of development potential where we can go in and

increase code enforcement, force tax liens, force some things to happen that we can take some ownership within those areas and look to redevelop and increase the tax base.

Council Member C. Davis: *And creating those.....removing the hindrances that prevent us from doing those things. So getting those things taken care of up in Raleigh or wherever we need to, to allow us to do the very thing that we're talking about. There are those cumbersome things that prevent you from doing certain things that you should be able to do to bring things where they need to be.*

Tarik Abdelazim: *Do you have anything in mind in particular just as an example? I mean in Raleigh....we'll just put that out there, the State Capital.*

Council Member C. Davis: *And Mike you may have to help me and Katherine's not here, but in past years there have been houses that you know there are issues inside, but you have to have somebody report those issues, or there has to be five people that know the condition of the home in order to get someone through the door. You know, those kinds of situations that hinder you knowing that there's an issue with that house, but on the outside it may look like the best cake you ever had. But inside it's salt and sugar. You know? It's not what it ought to be. So getting past that and having that knowledge and figuring out how you can get those inspections done in situations like that where you know the inside isn't fit for man or beast.*

Committee Member Williams: *Instead of just repeating what they were saying, I think the turnover time for a normal every day citizen to get on the phone and report it to execution—a system in place that shortens that. Instead of them feeling like they've been given the run-around. When they call they know. And even, and I don't know what you would call it, an absentee owners deterrence or something, but something to the point that they know that if a call goes in for their property in High Point that I've got to do something or if I don't do anything it's going to go away regardless. What that system would look like I'm not sure, but I think that's key for the citizens to know that High Point is taking it serious. Because I still get the eyes and I get the heads. When we talk about what we've tried to do so far, it's still not enough, but I think if they can see the difference there, that's the biggest part for me.*

Committee Member Ewing: *One thing that's really more on our shoulders than this thing that you guys are working, in the past Council has been very lenient for some investors and landlords in continuing to delay demolitions, delay, delay, delay. Giving them the benefit of the doubt. They say they're going to take out a permit and they say they're going to do these.....case-in-point; we had an apartment complex that had been delayed for what two and a half years Randy?*

Council Member C. Davis: *It was longer than that.*

Committee Member Ewing: *Two or three years. So it had been delayed for years and we finally said a year or two ago let's just knock it down. Let's stop giving them the opportunity. I think the more we do that, and as soon as it comes across the dais we say demo. We don't give them an opportunity. We don't do anything. If we start do that where we show zero tolerance and we take action as soon as it hits us, they start getting serious about we need to fix this if we really want to keep these properties.*

Kim Graziani: *It's amazing how much we've seen that exact thing happen in the communities we have worked. How behavior changes, what kind of follow through is there and that word spreads very, very quickly in terms that the city will take "x" action. Yeah.*

Council Member C. Davis: *We need the same thing with some of the commercial properties too, though. You know? We have the same scenario with some of the commercial buildings that are owned that people don't maintain where the roofs fall in or whatever. You could use the Kilby or use could use a warehouse*

over on Prospect that was like that when Mike Pugh was on. The roof had caved in, but the walls were still standing. Well you can't use the building if you're not....you know. And we've got one over off of Eastchester and Kirkwood. But you know, the roof is good and the walls are stable or whatever, but there's no roof. So do you doze it or do you leave it standing? And getting in to inspect those buildings is impossible too. You know, to find out which buildings are stable and which buildings aren't before they get out of control. We have no authority to do that.

Committee Member Williams: *Not to interrupt, but Jeff we keep forgetting you or at least I have. I'm sorry. Do you want to chime in on this?*

Chairman Golden: *No, not right now.*

Kim Graziani: *So just looking through my notes and just going back to the first part of the conversation which was about the problem, which is really one of the most important things for us to walk away with, right? And figure out how we can best serve you all and what are the greatest needs. I'm surprised that....maybe I'm just not listening well enough, but I heard your concern about vacant commercial structures, but it seems like **on terms of the residential side, these all tend to be occupied properties. Is that correct or incorrect? Are there also vacant residential structures that are also absentee owned that may not be occupied?***

Council Member C. Davis: *There's one right across from me.*

Committee Member Ewing: *And many of those are that inheritance type deal where somebody inherits it. They are an absentee owner, out of state. They don't see it. They don't worry about it and it just sits vacant and trees start growing through it and all sorts of crazy stuff.*

Council Member C. Davis: *Or, you still have those foreclosure situations. The house at the end of my street was purchased by someone that hadn't paid their taxes in four or five years and they came in and they worked with the bank and they worked with the tax department and they were able to purchase the property, but they really had to gut the house and start from scratch. So when people move out, they leave the property behind.*

Kim Graziani: *And if you could think of one property that keeps you up at night, right? That your constituents keep on calling you about. Can you tell us why it continues to be a problem? Sort of what has happened that hasn't worked or what hasn't happened yet?*

Committee Member Williams: *One of the big ones...well it's not now as big of a problem, but it was an apartment complex that once....and they had to take it down in phases. Part of it passed and part of it didn't and we finally got the other one down, but it was like five years or something before we got a chance to take it down. Then what ends up happening, the section that passed before didn't but people started using the back part, that open lot, as a dump. So you had trash mounding up and I'm talking about plenty of it. But that's kind of typical of what happens in the properties in the areas in which we're discussing. If the people knows that no one lives there, oh it's a nice little dump spot and that's what they do. You know the grass sometimes grows past where trash is visible, but that's a common issue.*

Kim Graziani: *So what does the city do in that situation? For that specific apartment complex?*

Committee Member Williams: *Once we were able to, we demoed the remaining and we removed the garbage. Now, you know, everything is just starting to somewhat get warm again. So as long as we can keep the grass down, it should be okay. It's just a big, open lot.*

Kim Graziani: *Who owns it?*

Mike McNair: *Schwartz.*

Kim Graziani: *So it's still.....*

Deputy City Manager McCaslin: *That's an heir situation, but it's being looked. Somebody is looking at it for redevelopment purposes right now.*

Council Member C. Davis: *There's a house on my street that has.....they had scaffolding up for years to do siding on the corner and I think that they have done some of that now. The front yard and back yard, mostly the back and the side of the house looks like Sanford & Son. So if you ever watched Sanford & Son growing up you know what I'm referring to, but the whole back yard is occupied with stuff. And it has moved around to the front, so what's been done on my street is the house has just been emptied for the second or third time now. They had all kinds of stuff. So when they moved out, somebody came in and cleaned that up. But then you've got this house in the corner that's been that way....I've been on the street twenty years, and that house has been able to do that and it's been reported numerous times.*

Kim Graziani: *Why?*

Council Member C. Davis: *It's the enforcement, the enforcement. I mean somebody will go out. It's like....we have an ordinance that you're not supposed to park in your yard. Okay? So staff went out and looked. So instead of telling them to move their vehicle, the advice given to the individual was to put gravel in it and you can park there. Well now they're parking in the front yard and there's no grass. So was that the right advice to be giving them to continue that look that they've got going on that isn't conducive to what's in the neighborhood. You know we see it everywhere and it's like now they're older and they don't have the ability, physically, to move it or to discard of it over time in a proper manner. So do we provide them with a dumpster? Do we....what do we do? Do we go out and help them? Do we get something else? And I was told it was a church scenario where you could get volunteers from churches to come in and clean up that mess. But at some point you have to recognize that we have HUD houses on this street too. There's a nice, brick HUD house next to this one. Then the house directly next to it is vacant, which had trash in it when people were living there. It's cleaned up, but now it's vacant. But then you've got people that are starting to break other ordinances along with parking in their yard and adding more gravel so that they can park in their yard.*

Mike McNair: *Cindy, what's the address of that house that you're talking about? Send it to me.*

Committee Member Ewing: *For me, there's not a specific property per se' that keeps me up at night. In my part of town, I represent the north part of the city where there's not nearly as much blight. There's the occasional vacant house that the grass gets grown up. But one of my biggest issues that I see is sort of a mix of what Cynthia was talking about from a personal standpoint. It's properties that are on our main thoroughfares in and out of the city. Eastchester, Main Street, Centennial, Johnson, where there's old residential structures that many of them have been rezoned to commercial because they're in commercial districts, but they sit there. They're maybe used as rentals or they're vacant. It just brings down the overall appearance when we have visitors coming into our city that they see a shopping center, a business park, and then here's a string of three to four, 60-70 year old houses that look like they haven't been touched in years. That's probably one of the things that keeps me up from the overall aesthetics and appearance standpoint of people coming into the city and seeing properties like that.*

Committee Member Williams: *I thought you were going to say Green Drive.*

Committee Member Ewing: *The main thoroughfares like Eastchester and Main Street are two main ones, but you get on 74 and get off at any of those exits and head towards downtown and you're going to find those examples.*

Kim Graziani: *Jeff, is there any property that keeps you up at night that you'd like to share with us?*

Chairman Golden: *I can't think of addresses off the top of my head, but what I find more often than not that all of the complaints are being driven by the citizens. I think if we can transition to where we are initiating the complaints because the people don't know to call and that property sits vacant for an awful long time. Then by the time I get the call or one of the other council people get the call, it's been there for years. I would just like to see us have it where we initiate the calls versus the citizens because right now I'm compiling a list of addresses. I happen to have two citizens in my neighborhood that's retired and don't have a whole lot to do and they've been riding around looking for code violations. Which is good for me, but I don't think that's how the system should work.*

Council Member C. Davis: *You see, but then you've got your.....*

Chairman Golden: *I've got a lot of addresses. I just don't have them in my head.*

Council Member C. Davis: *Then you've got your trash vehicles that go down these streets at least once a week to pick up trash.*

Chairman Golden: *I didn't hear that, I'm sorry.*

Council Member C. Davis: *I said, then you've got your trash trucks with the city when we provide that service for trash removal that can certainly notate that this house doesn't look to be conforming which would provide Mike's department with a list now that Mike's in charge of this. When they go to pick up trash, when they see an obvious structure that is questionable at best or becoming that Sanford & Son home if you will, then they can mark those homes and we can be proactive. You know, it's utilizing the tools that we already have on the ground. It's just as important as us figuring out how we're going to go out and look at each property because we've already got city staff that sees these properties once a week every week when they pick trash up.*

Chairman Golden: *I don't know about that though because they can be cash driven. I don't know if they want to take the time or if it's even feasible for them to take the time out and start documenting what the code violations are.*

Council Member C. Davis: *Well it only takes once a week.*

Committee Member Ewing: *I think with technology, there's apps out there that you could geocode properties. You can just drive down the street and pop, pop, pop, and it locks that GPS coordinate in. So that data can then be sent to code enforcement and they can break down those GPS coordinates and go out and deal with it that way.*

Public Services Director Terry Houk: *Public Services actually has that capability, but we're only tracking that as it relates to us as far as trash piled up in different areas and people not conforming to our sanitation requirements. We're not looking at, for the lack of a better term, houses. But we do have the capability. We would have to, for the lack of a better term, would have to know exactly what we're looking at.*

Deputy City Manager McCaslin: *I think the long-term solution is that we've got to get our code enforcement positions filled—the new ones that Council has authorized. Because then each one of those will have a set section of the city to cover and they're going to be out there on a weekly basis covering that whole section. They're going to be able to see the changes from week-to-week what's occurring there because they'll all have a section that they'll be responsible for once we get up to speed.*

Council Member C. Davis: *You see, my train of thinking was that if we've already got the man in the truck....just beating another dead horse because the conversation has come around full circle. But say that you had a clip board for week one or week two or week three and you just took a highlighter and you marked that address if it looked questionable. I mean we all have a different opinion of what questionable is, but that's what you've got code enforcement to do. So you just turn that sheet in. If you highlight the address, then they just go out and look and if there isn't anything, no harm, no foul. But you're using the resource already on the road.*

Tarik Abdelazim: *You speak to something that we see, obviously, in a lot of communities just improving coordination between departments. I remember myself when we were first starting and putting together a blight task force. Just to begin talking about it. How do we identify all these vacant properties and the water meter supervisor said I can have my folks tell you in a month as they go out and read the meters. They're like, you know, why didn't anyone ask....I know this place has been vacant for at least two months now. So you're right, there's certainly opportunities and the more you continue this dialogue I think you're going to find strategies that work here in High Point.*

*We're getting close to the 2:00. So the last question is, **is there anything that you're surprised we didn't mention or get to talk about during this conversation?***

Committee Member Williams: *I'm glad we're on the track we're on. I'm very pleased with it.*

Committee Member Ewing: *I'm happy too. I think it aligns perfectly with one of our strategic goals that we identified a few weeks ago. Hopefully we can use your resources and with our re-focus on addressing it, we can really make some things happen over the next 12-24 months.*

Council Member C. Davis: *I guess the one I would say that I'm a little disappointed in was the impact of land banking on our tax base because that's how we operate our city. So when we start land banking these properties, it does a couple of things. It removes it from our tax base unless they're playing taxes. But, you know, let's say that they're not delinquent or they end up needing to be torn down because of health hazards or whatever—that impact on our tax base revenue. And....I lost the other thought.*

I guess that's it. You know the risks involved in keeping other businesses from using some of these parcels that were accumulating. That's the second part of that. It came to me, so the way that impacts our tax base revenue for the operation of the city and the holding of these properties if somebody wanted to come in and utilize them so that we've got a strategic plan out there. It might be five years down the road, but somebody comes in and who owns the property? Oh well, you can't have this particular property because this is our plan for it. But maybe that plan never comes to fruition and we miss the boat. So those things concern me a little bit.

Tarik Abdelazim: *Excellent point. On the first one, we can certainly provide some really good cost-of-blight studies to show that you own the problem. It's impacting you fiscally in so many other ways and in your own operations and then the negative impacts it has on the property. So I would say when you look at it net, it's still very helpful to be strategic and if you develop a holding and baking strategy as part of a larger, more comprehensive approach, it's very beneficial. But it's good to have those questions, right? And that's some information that we can share with you.*

Committee Member Ewing: Part of that with banking, too, would be identifying what the overall tax value of the bank is going to be and how long it could take to develop out and then what it will be. You know, so will long-term ten years from now, it being worth \$3,000,000 where it's worth \$100,000 now. Will that gap in loss of property taxes be realized as it's developed?

Kim Graziani: I would also say that any solid land banking program, whether it's an entity or a program, I would say there's two things. One, is taking inventory of properties that are currently not paying taxes. Right. They're tax delinquent. They're dead. So they're not....it's not taking any more tax base away. But, two, to your second point and I think to both of your points, it's creating a very flexible system of this position according to community goals. Right? So if there was a program that is restrictive in terms of getting these properties back on the tax rolls which is really the ultimate goal, then I think that would not be a very good program. So those are two very key attributes that we always strive for in any community that we work in who is interested in bolstering, creating or advancing a land banking strategy.

Council Member C. Davis: So if it becomes restrictive to where the land can't be developed, that's not....

Kim Graziani: Yep because you're taking properties that are essentially are, for the lack of a better term, are dead to the market, right? There is some barrier by which somebody cannot access that property, right? Or else why would you create a land bank? You don't want to create a whole other program or entity if there's a way that somebody else can acquire that and redevelop it. So it's taking those properties that are stuck and opening it up for, again, responsible, transparent re-use.

Committee Member Ewing: It seems right now if it's the highest and best use, it doesn't make sense for us to try and bank it.

Tarik Abdelazim: Just to clarify, the distinction between a land banking program and a land bank. So a lot of the modern day land banks are pass-through, state enabling legislation that gives them those particular legal powers that helps them address properties that are dead to the market and removing those financial and legal barriers, right? A lot of municipalities still develop land banking programs usually through involuntary acquisitions such as tax foreclosure goes into there. They try to auction it off. No one wants it, so they end up having to develop a program around that. So I just wanted to make sure that there's this distinction. We often say that if you can't get those kinds of powers through state enabling legislation, one, you just want to be very careful about what you think you can do with a land bank because those powers is the key. So, Jeff was there anything that we did not touch on?

Chairman Golden: No, I was thinking more about code enforcement stuff. But I do have a question or comment about some kind of strategic plan for all these properties that we already own. We don't need to start a land banking program right now.

Tarik Abdelazim: **What is that number?**

Council Member C. Davis: Was it 1,400 properties?

Committee Member Ewing: Three hundred some I think.

Mike McNair: We have a lot of properties that we have liens on. We don't own them, but we have liens on. Probably actually ownership is probably a 100 or so.

Tarik Abdelazim: *And who is responsible for kind of maintaining those right now?*

Mike McNair: *It depends on who acquired it. So, for instance, if we acquire property and we're going to redevelop it, so we cut it. Right-of-Way acquires property for right-of-way, so they keep it up. So it depends on who got it.*

This concluded the Q & A period. Mr. Abdelazim advised that they would be available to all the stakeholders and available for any future questions if needed. He noted that he would be serving as the Project Manager to make the communication more effective. He stated that there had not been many communities that he had worked with where the Project representative and the person in the Executive Branch spoke so highly of his partners in the Council.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 2:04 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Maria A. Smith
Deputy City Clerk

Jeff Golden, Chairman