

Housing Policy Workgroup Meeting Thirty Day Report July 28 – August 25, 2010

Stemming from months of advocacy and coalition building, a workgroup was formed with community members and City staff to meet at City Hall to discuss and strategize detailed policy recommendations regarding rental inspections and vacant property issues.

Group members include: Tyler Nickerson and Janay Brower, Coalition to End Homelessness; Kym Spring, Foreclosure Response; Deb Eid, Creston Neighborhood Association; Connie Bohatch, Virginia Million and Phil Schaafsma, City of Grand Rapids; Jeremy DeRoo and Darel Ross, Lighthouse Communities; Frank Lynn, Disability Advocates of Kent County; Ruth Kelly, City of Grand Rapids 2nd Ward Commissioner; Lee Nelson Weber, Dyer-Ives Foundation; Paul Haan and Lauren Baker, Healthy Homes; Jamie Zamora, Grand Rapids Urban League

Meeting #1 – July 28, 2010

The first meeting largely served as an introductory session. The group formally agreed on the concerns of sub-standard single-family rental units and the detrimental effects of vacant properties, along with the overall purpose, agenda, and plan of the workgroup. Seven meetings were scheduled over the course of ninety days ending on October 31, 2010. Data that will be needed to make future decisions was identified and City staff provided an update to the work of the Code Compliance Department.

Meeting #2 – August 11, 2010

Much of the second meeting focused on analyzing the data from the City and other parties regarding housing issues. Data presented included:

- Number of rental units and parcels broken down by type
- Principle Resident Exemption totals of single-family units
- Active rental certifications
- Registered Rental List
- Vacant properties list
- Blighted properties list
- Relevant sections of the Housing Code Chapter 140
- City water shut-off list
- Demolition case notes and statistics
- USPS vacant property data
- Basic financial data of the Code Compliance Department

The group also noted the letter from the Rental Property Owners Association addressed to the City Commission and began a broad conversation regarding vacant property solutions.

Meeting #3 – August 25, 2010

The meeting focused on two main issues: vacant property registration ordinance and demolition. The group recognized the negative impacts of vacant properties on neighborhoods, along with the need for a proactive vacant property registration and encouraging the reuse of these properties in the community. They discussed the need to support the cost of maintaining the list of vacant properties, in addition to the need for renewal of the registration and providing local property management contact information. Suzanne Schultz, Director of the Planning Department, and Code Compliance staff spoke about the process of demolishing a structure. The group was not concerned with the demolition policy as written, but more with the administrative process and implementation. Some group members felt

like there should be a greater degree of citizen participation and openness to diversity in the type of development that occurs after the structure has been razed. It was noted that the City has recently applied the lean principles to the demolition process to both the planning and housing departments to shorten the time and cost. Discussion regarding demolition also included the value of dense neighborhoods, a strong tax base, the best strategies for improving the quality of housing and the work of the upcoming Kent County Land Bank.

Upcoming

The following four meetings will address single family rental inspections, vacant property registration, and vacant property monitoring.