

MINUTES

COUNCIL-MANAGER BRIEFING

FEBRUARY 9, 2009

The Council-Manager Briefing was called to order by Mayor Ronald A. D'Epifanio at 6:00 p.m. at the Fairfield Community Arts Center, 411 Wessel Drive with the following Councilmembers present: Mike Snyder, Marty Judd, Mitch Rhodus, Terry Senger, Mike Oler, Tim Abbott, and Tim Meyers. Also present: Arthur Pizzano, Dena Morsch, Dennis Stuckey, John Clemmons, Mary Hopton, Tim Bachman, Rick Helsinger, Janette Matala, Gail Scherff, Brian Jump, Erin Donovan, Greg Kathman, Dave Crouch, Dave Butsch and Carol Mayhall.

Property Maintenance Enforcement Plan: Progress Update

Building and Zoning Department Superintendent Rick Helsinger introduced Zoning Inspector Janette Matala and two new inspectors, Gail Scherff and Brian Jump. Development Services Director Tim Bachman gave a recap of property maintenance inspections from 2006, 2007 and 2008. He noted the increase in percentage of inspections conducted each year and reviewed the number of property maintenance violations. City Manager Pizzano clarified that the number of violations does not mean that conditions have deteriorated at that rate, what it means is we have additional people out there conducting inspections and finding those violations. Mr. Bachman discussed the number of vacant structures and the number of homes that have been absorbed and how quickly that has happened. Mr. Bachman discussed the changes being made to the vacant home maintenance. He stated there is currently a bid package in the marketplace for grass cutting to be opened on February 20, 2009 in which a contractor will take a more active role managing properties. He further stated they will be required to send digital photo before and after the maintenance activity and will be required to keep an entire cutting history by address digitally to be sent in weekly for review. He further stated the accounting duties will now be handled by a clerk internally. Mr. Bachman discussed the following property maintenance goals discussed in October, 2008. He explained that building inspectors are now conducting follow ups of last year's violations to handle repeat offenders. He stated currently 62 follow up zoning inspections have been performed by building inspectors and have resulted in 12 violations for a 19% rate. He explained all three building inspectors are performing these follow up zoning inspections. Mr. Bachman discussed the neighborhood enhancement program which will involve proactive inspections and other services. He further discussed various ways that property maintenance hotline is being publicized. He stated the hotline is answered by live people during the day and voice mail at night. Council asked to be briefed at a future meeting on the number of individuals using the hotline and website. Mr. Bachman discussed data management and the need for consistent data input. He further explained the code information used for vacant homes foreclosures, and follow-up zoning cases to assist with analysis. He stated the software being used has modules in it which will improve efficiency. Mr. Bachman discussed the statistics regarding multi family inspections noting more inspections were conducted in 2007 than 2008. He explained in 2007, we wanted proactive inspections under our belts. He explained there were 400 violations in 2008 and only 126 violations in 2007 of which only two resulted in court cases in 2007 while 85 resulted in court cases in 2008. Mr. Bachman explained that the inspections conducted in 2007 were more proactive inspections and therefore fewer violations were found. He explained that much time has been spent in the Heritage Glen complex and all 212 units are to be inspected and brought up to code. Law Director John Clemmons clarified that under Ohio law the landlord is allowed to go into the apartment, to inspect the property, but must give twenty-four hour notice. He further stated the landlord in cooperating with the city gives notice and the inspectors go in with the landlord to do the inspection. He clarified this is a court supervised arrangement that they have agreed to cooperate with us on. Mr. Bachman explained the timeline for this complex to be inspected and brought up to code. Zoning Inspector Gail Scherff explained that tenants from this complex initially contacted the city requesting inspections of the inside of the buildings. Mr. Bachman discussed the neighborhood initiative in which a geographic area of approximately 250 homes will be chosen. He explained that a survey will be sent asking a few questions about the neighborhood including any issues with crime or utilities. Mr. Bachman stated the area will be reviewed proactively for property violations. He further explained that Public Works and Public Utilities will review the area for routine maintenance elements such as, public signs in the right-of-way, curb maintenance, high grass in the right-of-way, and fire hydrant maintenance. Councilmember Meyers expressed his concern with the possibility of overwhelming comments resulting from the survey. Mr. Bachman stated the goal is have 2000 homes finished in a one year period and with this goal in mind, it should take approximately five years to touch each single family home. Mr. Bachman presented two ideas for an acronym to be used and is still being considered one is Fairfield FAST - Fairfield Action and Service Team and Fairfield NEAT - Neighborhood Enhancement Action Team. Mr. Pizzano stated this is an interdepartmental program. Councilmember Meyers asked what the mark of success will be for this program and what will be the return on investment. Mr. Bachman stated a success can be shown when violations have been identified and remedied. Councilmember Abbott suggested having the neighborhood crime watch groups to take ownership and survey them to see how we are doing with property maintenance. Mr. Bachman discussed the change in the process which reduces the property maintenance violation time in court. He further discussed the changes for second offenders. Mr. Bachman updated Council on the number of court cases from 2005-2008. He noted the significant increase in cases in 2008 is partially due to multi-family properties. He further discussed the number of case management days and the increase for

2008. He noted part of the increase was due to a change in personnel and part was due to the grass cutting maintenance over the summer. Mr. Bachman discussed the 2009 work plan which includes continuing the "FUZ" program, starting and implementing neighborhood enhancement, delegating more routine task to grass cutting contractor, reducing average days per case by 10%, meeting the mandates as set by the court for Heritage Glen and continuing proactive multi-family inspections. Steve Barrett, 1605 Parliament Court, suggested the information be communicated to local Realtors to let them know we are doing everything we can to make our community a desirable place to live. He further stated since one-third of our population lives in apartment building, he asked Chief Dickey if there is a measurable correlation between property maintenance standards and enforcement of that and crime. Keith Davis, 1853 Vernon Place, questioned what the actual costs have been for the past three years. Mr. Bachman discussed the costs previously discussed in August 2008 and the way costs were recouped from the grass cutting.

Adjournment

The Council/Manager Briefing adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Angela Johns
Deputy Clerk of Council