Minutes

Housing Committee
Monday, March 24, 2014
6:45 p.m.
Police Training Room, 4th Floor
Municipal Building, Jamestown, New York

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Marie Carrubba, Paul Whitford, Brent Sheldon

MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT: Vince DeJoy, Greg Rabb

Chairwoman Carrubba called the meeting to order.

The minutes from the January 13, 2014 meeting were approved.

Remarks from Community Members

No one appeared to speak.

New Business

Mr. Sheldon: In regards to knocking houses down, I found an article called Can We Demolish our way to Revitalization?

Ms. Carrubba: I should say, as a side note, I did attend the Jamestown Renaissance Program about urban revitalization, about urban gardening.

Mr. Sheldon: Last Thursday night.

Ms. Carrubba: Yes, well I was there Thursday, I couldn't make Friday night.

Mr. Sheldon: I was at the public hearing. I came Friday

Ms. Carrubba: It was very insightful, very helpful, very interesting. Anything you want to comment, since we only have a couple copies, I can pass it around.

Mr. Olson: Do you have extra copies of that Brent? Would you like me to make copies?

Ms. Carrubba: No, I appreciate it because it does give you some ideas and I think that's kind of what they're trying to look at, you know, besides the gardens that they've got going now, what can we do with these lots after they've been demolished. The movie was quite fascinating, some areas, some cities that they had actually fed a number of people that – a number of churches of all denominations had gotten together in a pretty good-sized vacant lot and were actually growing the food and giving it all away and feeding people who were living in an impoverished area. It was all a team effort, there were a lot of people that came in and did it, it was all volunteers, they got a lot of things donated. You could see the people coming through that were actually using it to eat. They showed some of them were actually growing enough food in an impoverished area that they were making money and making a living off of the food that they were able to raise in an urban area. She showed some areas around Cleveland that I guess they have quite a few of these urban gardens. She offered that she would give anybody a tour. I can't think of her name right now, but she said she would, if anybody wanted to go out there.

Mr. Sheldon: Yes, we ran out of time Friday to see the movie. Did you get to see it later, Vince?

Mr. DeJoy: No, I haven't.

Ms. Carrubba: Anything that you wanted to add to that Brent?

Mr. Sheldon: I think there were a lot of good ideas that came out of that and we've started quite a bit of that through the Jamestown Renaissance Corporation, especially the community gardens and I think we're doing a lot more of that with the Landbank. I'm looking forward to more information from them, I believe we're going to have a presentation next month, maybe? From them?

Ms. Carrubba: April 21st.

Mr. DeJoy: Yes. Yes as soon as Gina Peritus the Administrative Director is firmly in place. She came to the forum we had on Friday – it was very well attended by some of the stakeholders that are intimately involved in housing from the Jamestown Renaissance Corporation, Gebbie Foundation who provides a great deal of funding, from the Community Foundation Randy Sweeney was there, we had a sustainability person from JCC, Mark Mirra came, Councilmen. It was very well attended. All of our housing inspectors and our planners, so I was very pleased with that. And the Land Bank people. The one thing I will say, is can we demolish our way to vitalization – probably not. I think it has to be a combination of both demolition and rehab projects in the city. Unfortunately, we don't have enough to do either task right. So, we have to be very selective in where we decide to start demolishing and where we rehab. We don't want to put rehab dollars – scarce rehab dollars in areas where the neighborhood is so far gone that it doesn't make sense. You'll have that one really nice house in an area that you're not going to get investment from the people around it. So, those transitional neighborhoods, those neighborhoods that are still stable.

Mr. Whitford: That are starting down - those are the ones – because they're spotty. The neighborhood is spotty. The neighborhood is generally in good shape, but there are some that before they get that way, it's like preventative maintenance, you have to go in there before the majority of that neighborhood is beyond restoring.

Ms. Carrubba: There's also a tipping point where either you can keep it from going down…

Mr. Whitford: And that's part of what the Land Bank is doing too. They're evaluating which ones are really able to rehab in a decent neighborhood and ones that are condemned.

Mr. DeJoy: You know, one of the things that the Land Bank is trying to do is, what happens is, so many of these properties that are In Rem, tax foreclosure, you get somebody that buys it – the property is just a piece of junk to begin with. Somebody buys it with a dollar and a dream, they figure out what it costs to try to rehab it, to do anything to it, and you see how much money it takes to bring it back, to address code issues, and it's going to be worth, once you invest the money, more than what'll be worth. It will cost you more to invest. So what happens is, many of these people either they'll just let it go again. The ones that never got anywhere or the ones that could get it up to at least a level that they can rent it out and they'll just suck every dollar dry and not put another dollar into it, and then let it go again, and there it is again. This auction, we're trying to head some of those really, really bad ones off with the Land Bank and get the County to actually deed them to the Land Bank so that we can demolish them.

Mr. Sheldon: Yes. That was a question I had. Were you looking at the tax foreclosure list and trying to identify properties that could go to the Land Bank.

Mr. DeJoy: We haven't yet, only because the final one won't come out for another couple of weeks. Once that happens around April 15th, there's still a chance to redeem them. Then we go through and our code enforcement officers will go through and do an exterior inspection of every single property and send the report up to the tax department up at the County and identify those that we intend to demolish.

Mr. Sheldon: And if they have pending violations from previous inspections, you'll forward those up to the County as well?

Mr. DeJoy: Oh yes. We give them a whole list of all the violations that are currently on there and we'll identify both the ones that we want to demolish and the ones that we think have a chance for rehabilitation. The County so far has been very good to work with. They've accepted all the ones that we have asked to place in the Land Bank. We're trying to find some nicer properties in some of those stable neighborhoods and some in transitional neighborhoods where an investment by someone, by the right developer can make a difference in that neighborhood. Whereas we're not trying to – and I don't want to steal thunder from the Land

Bank – but we're not, it's not so much how much they give us, but what the project is, the development project so we'll accept a great deal less if they're willing to put a great deal of investment into it. Especially those that are geared towards owner occupied versus adding more to the rental STREAM. What you guys asked for and I'm going to hand out to you tonight are the posted properties. I think I have enough for everybody here. There's a whole list of - not in any specific order – I don't believe. I know what order they're in. They're actually by the inspector. And, I will also hand out the second one and I wish she would have done some kind of header or footer on it. This one is the priority demolition list. Some of these have already been demolished – I don't understand that.

Ms. Carrubba: Well, that makes the list shorter.

Mr. Whitford: Yes, makes it a little shorter, that's all.

Mr. DeJoy: You know, it should be a lot shorter and I apologize for that.

Mr. Rabb: What is the difference between the two?

Mr. DeJoy: One's posted, the other one is priority demolition. This isn't right and I apologize. I had our secretary print it off and it's not what I intended to pass out tonight.

Ms. Carrubba: Are you seeing any pattern of any particular landlord?

Mr. DeJoy: No. Well, yes, there are some of the usual suspects in terms of landlords, but the one thing I will ask is that we keep these to ourselves because many of these properties are still going through the court process and we're trying to work through them. That's another thing to contend with is sometimes it's a long cycle to get a property from the point of being condemned through the court system to get a court order to demolish it. Usually what we'll do is issue a rehabilitate or demolish ticket to the owner and if they don't do any of the renovations in any type of timely manner, then we proceed with demolitions.

Mr. Rabb: Sorry but, I'm still a little confused. Should I – do you want these back, or there's no heading on these. Do you want me to hand these back to you? Just so I know I what I have here. Is one a list that you're recommending for demolition? That's all I'm looking for.

Mr. DeJoy: Yes. If you want to hand it back, it doesn't really matter.

Mr. Whitford: Well, what were you trying to use?

Mr. DeJoy: A list of condemned. A list of priority demolition. Unfortunately…

Mr. Whitford: Well, this is a list for demo, but this in the blue where you have demo list - those are the priority demos and the other ones are being evaluated?

Mr. DeJoy: For the most part. This one where - 102 Wescott is the demo priority.

Mr. Rabb: So these are the properties that your department has identified as priorities for demo?

Mr. DeJoy: Yes. But, I'm just noticing that some of these have already been demolished.

Mr. Whitford: That's not the one that was demolished though, that was a Willard address wasn't it? Willard and Wescott? The one on the corner. The big one?

Mr. DeJoy: I don't know, I honestly don't know what that 102 is.

Mr. Whitford: That was Willard. That might be one of these that you have on Williard. That would be right about where it is too, because the one on the other side which is 224 that one should be on this list. You've seen it – the brown one where the porch is caving right in. But, I didn't see it on here. The other one, I think is already demoed 237, that was the one on the corner.

Mr. DeJoy: I can tell you that many of these on this list starting at 102 are the priority demos. Some of them may have already been demolished, so at worst we've got some of them that have already gone through the demolition. Nevertheless…

Mr. Whitford: And these are the ones that are just, these are condemned or posted. And actually you have the actions over here, being rehabbed, sale pending, tax sale, bank owned.

Ms. Carrubba: Well, unfortunately there's a larger list than we would like to see.

Mr. DeJoy: Unfortunately there's probably more.

Ms. Carrubba: I was going to say, I'm sure it's not all…

Mr. DeJoy: That are out there that are abandoned, vacant, and in deplorable condition.

Ms. Carrubba: Oh no, I completely get it because after listening to that woman and showing, I mean, did you see the part with the map where she had Cleveland and showed all the… I saw it the night before, you all saw it on Friday, but I'm saying even in those areas you could see where they were just taking over neighborhoods.

Mr. Whitford: Well, I liked the program that they had where they would deed for $5,000.00 with the stipulation they already had it listed, what had to be done to the house and that was part of the agreement.

Mr. DeJoy: We actually have something very similar. We don't call it that but…

Mr. Whitford: Is it the land bank?

Mr. DeJoy: With the land bank, right. What we do is, they give us their proposal – their development proposal and we have an escrow that a certain percent, I think it's somewhere around $5,000.00 per property and if they don't perform all that they promised that they were going to do, we keep the escrow and we don't sign over the deed to them. So, it's very similar.

Mr. Whitford: Okay, but is your department involved with that as far as code violations and I mean certainly someone has to go in and-

Mr. DeJoy: Absolutely, I mean permits are necessary for a lot of work that they're doing.

Mr. Whitford: There's a lot of cosmetic stuff that they probably want to do.

Mr. DeJoy: Cosmetic, but there's permits necessary and Certificate of Occupancy after. Especially if they were condemned - even the ones that aren't condemned. We still will look at and make sure that all code violations are addressed. Something I wanted to throw out, that I've been – as I drive around town – that really makes me mad when I see it, and perhaps it's something that this committee can change. All the treated wood porches, the ones that are not stained, they're basically left or maybe they put some Thompson's clear seal on it and think that that satisfies it. It's my opinion that and I think I speak for the staff too at the Department of Development that we should probably change the code that any of these pressure treated porches that within 30, 60 days, or whatever maybe we'll find the right period needs to have a sealant protectant, a solid color stain applied because you drive around town and number one, I believe that it ruins the architecture of so many of these houses to see these crappy looking…

Mr. Sheldon: Yellow-green looking wood.

Ms. Carrubba: What about the ramps, though because a lot of the ramps that have treated wood, would we want to paint that.

Mr. DeJoy: Well, I think that that should also have a stain too.

Ms. Carrubba: Well, I'm just saying, because I don't know.

Mr. Whitford: They do and they have a special rough coat that they can put on there so that you don't have those issues, especially with handicap, I don't know why they wouldn't do that anyway.

Ms. Carrubba: Because sometimes they put, it's almost like - I can't call it tar paper, but it's a rough coated paper that you use so that the person doesn't slip because even when they're painted and sealed they can be very slippery.

Mr. Whitford: Well, they have a paint that does that now.

Mr. DeJoy: Well you could still have both.

Mr. Whitford: I know what you mean, I was at a house today of a real good friend and her children just put in, you know George Elder, and Rose Marie, well, it's beautiful and she was talking about just getting a clear coat on it and I kind of told her that it takes away from the aesthetics because they have a beautiful home on the corner of Camp and Juliet. She said, well, why don't you come back up and let me know what you think when you have time because obviously she's not capable of doing that, but the kids did a beautiful job for her with the rails and everything. But, you're right – it does – it takes away from the continuity of the houses around it and it happens a lot in a lot of neighborhoods.

Mr. Sheldon: I've been told by a couple contractors that that pressure treated wood is supposed to age out, that they actually put up the cheapest degree.

Mr. Whitford: A lot of them now are using…

Mr. Sheldon: But, if it was put out last fall, they can do it this spring.

Mr. DeJoy: I'm not suggesting that you do it the same time that you construct it.

Mr. Sheldon: I don't know what that time period, if it's 60 days or 90 days maybe that it should be…

Mr. DeJoy: And that's something that we need to research, but…

Mr. Whitford: Well, those timeframes are always flexible. When they did the quadrant sweeps, I had some people in my neighborhood come over and talk to me and ask how do they expect me to get it done by this time and if I have the money and the time. I would tell them, I'm not going to resolve that for you, but I do know if you work with DOD and you explain it to them, as long as they're seeing improvement, they don't come back and bug you. They'll give you that extra 30 days or 60 days as long as they see that there's improvement on that property, you know that's your focus to get it completed because they have to put something in there, they can't just leave it open-ended. If you don't communicate with them they don't know you're having a hardship or whatever the problem is that you can't complete your porch being repaired and painted, you have to talk to the DOD. Whoever's on that…

Mr. DeJoy: I know from our rehab projects, we will not complete payment if we have that situation where they used pressure treated wood on a porch and didn't stain it. We'll hold back money. In fact, I just did recently.

Mr. Sheldon: Same with the ramps then, too?

Mr. DeJoy: The ramps we haven't and I believe we should.

Mr. Sheldon: CHRIC does most of the ramps?

Mr. DeJoy: Yes.

Ms. Carrubba: I know the ones that I've seen in fact, because there's one down the street from our office and it's a pretty extensive ramp and I can't recall when they put it in, but it's pressure treated and I know it's not…

Mr. DeJoy: In a couple years, if you don't do the right thing, it's all going to be gray and it takes away.

Ms. Carrubba: But, I don't think that they have anything in their – that that's part of what they'll do, I think they put the ramp in and use pressure treated wood and once they're done, they're done. I don't believe that…

Mr. DeJoy: Well, I think if we had something in the city code then they would have to.

Ms. Carrubba; Maybe they would, but at this point I don't think they do, I don't think I've ever seen any of them be put up that way and painted. But again, that's something we can look at, but I'm just saying.

Mr. DeJoy: I can have my department do a little more research. See if I can find any other cities that have a similar type of ordinance.

Mr. Sheldon: Currently, it says you can't have unpainted wood basically, is that what it says?

Mr. DeJoy: Right now it's unprotected wood.

Ms. Carrubba: So does that count Trex for people that use Trex that kind of, you know, the Trex is…

Mr. Sheldon: For the most part it's a color, though, isn't it?

Ms. Carrubba: But it depends. Some of it still fades, but you can't really paint it.

Mr. Whitford: Well even paint fades I mean it just…

Ms. Carrubba; But I'm just saying, with that with the Trex it's…

Mr. DeJoy: I don't know if that would qualify.

Mr. Sheldon: It's not solid color all the way through anymore because I just had my porch redone a couple of years ago. The ends were gray, so I had to get a matching stain from Home Depot to match it and I'll probably have to redo it in a few years.

Ms. Carrubba: I don't know, but we got Trex and we put it in and the color did change, but there was nothing we could do. We were one of the first ones to use it, so it's been on there for probably 15 years.

Mr. Whitford: There's a lot of people that are using the composite, but it is really expensive. Most people can't afford that. I was at a house today, I'm trying to think what street it was, Bob and Linda Downey, they have it on their porch and their deck and it's beautiful. He told me what it cost them, I said…

Mr. DeJoy: What were you out inspecting houses today or something? You made your rounds today.

Mr. Whitford: I was visiting some people because I hadn't seen Rose Marie since George passed so…

Ms. Carrubba: Does anybody else have anything else for the Housing Committee?

Mr. DeJoy: I'll have a better list next time for the demos. There should only be 20 houses on there. That's what we have.

Mr. Sheldon: Yes. The last 4 pages I think I counted 21 that were listed there. Because all the other ones that say demo list.

Mr. Whitford: I think the majority, the highest percentage, are in my ward. Tower, Barrows, Allen, Willard, I mean look at how many…

Mr. DeJoy: You wouldn't think to look in Ward 6, but you're right. Just Allen Street alone.

Mr. Whitford: Even Foote.

Mr. Sheldon: Some on the numbered streets.

Ms. Carrubba: I didn't see too many on my section, but there are a few. The west side's not so bad.

Mr. Sheldon: Yes, there's one on Pershing, one on Francis.

Ms. Carrubba: Yes. As I said, there's a few.

Mr. DeJoy: Well, the Pershing one's come down.

Ms. Carrubba: Yes, that one came down very early. The neighbors were extremely happy. That one was really bad. They said they couldn't even, the smell was horrendous.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

James N. Olson
Director of Financial Services/City Clerk