

Neighborhood Revitalization Committee Meeting

July 9, 2008

Present: Nancy Moore, chair; John Ball, Chris Hunter, Karen Nordstrom, Robert O’Neal, Lynn Ruffner, Stacey Reed; Mayor Earl Leiken; Jeri Chaikin, CAO; James Ziegler, director of Building; William Hanson, director of Housing Inspection; Kamla Lewis, director of Neighborhood Revitalization; Jayme Lucas, staff

The main purpose of this meeting was to present a mid-year update on accomplishments based on the 2008 action plan by the three departments involved: Building, Inspection, and Neighborhood Revitalization.

Building Department – Jim Ziegler

Mr. Ziegler stated that his department is trying to move quickly on all projects. Same-day approvals of minor remodeling projects occurred in 121 cases (95% of the total). There were 104 residential plan reviews done with a one-week turnaround after being approved by the Zoning Board or Architectural Board of Review. There were 1,188 building permits issued versus 1,333 in 2007.

There were 2,370 inspections as a result of requests from permit holders for commercial, residential, electrical, structural, HVAC, fire safety systems, etc. The department provided customer services for façade improvements at Crescendo Properties improvements (16800 Chagrin Blvd.) and University Hospitals Management Services Center.

The department consulted on 27 nuisance abatement estimates. It has referred residents to the rain barrel project, which is getting more popular, as it makes use of rainwater to water gardens. The Nature Center provides classes in building a rain barrel and can also provide names of places where they can be bought.

Mr. Ziegler indicated that there are some new safety devices on the market now, but because of the poor economic condition of the state, they are not included in the electrical code so new homes are not required to use them; however, they can be purchased if desired. One device prevents children from putting objects into an outlet, and another detects short circuits in breakers. Gov. Strickland repealed the requirement to use these items in new construction because of the state’s economic condition and because the home builders’ lobby was against them because they add about \$800 to the cost of new homes.

Housing Inspection Department – William Hanson

Mr. Hanson indicated that the poor real estate market has created many challenges for his department, and many programs have been affected, but he also listed many accomplishments.

Encourage Reinvestment in Housing Stock. The department has been able to make point-of-sale inspections within 10 business days of application and issue reports within 5 more days. There have been 375 point-of-sale inspections done in the first six months of this year, a 10.5% reduction compared to prior-year levels. There were 840 reinspections, and 108 escrow amounts were reviewed and approved for a total of \$1,850,865 (an average of \$17,137 per property).

Improve Quality of Rental Housing Strategy. There were 186 interior/exterior inspections and 450 reinspections. Landlords are required to complete a certificate of occupancy yearly for each unit. The cost is \$50 and goes up to \$100 after a deadline. Interestingly, this late fee has not been a deterrent, so the city received \$13,275 in additional revenue from those landlords who did not complete the form before the deadline. Mr. Hanson stressed that revenue enhancement was not the purpose of requiring the certificate. The department provides the Board of Education with copies of the certificates as well as a list of recent Sheriff's sales and vacant property information to cross-check against student lists.

The department reviewed 71 units proposed to be occupied by Housing Choice Voucher Program tenants. CMHA has agreed to give the city an opportunity to review requests by landlords to participate in the program, and 43, or 60.6%, were rejected due to one or more of the following: no certificate of occupancy, pending foreclosure or case in housing court, or failure of the owner to make satisfactory progress on violations. CMHA has agreed to accept the city's determination. If participating owners do not renew their certificates of occupancy each year, CMHA will send them a letter threatening to terminate their participation. Currently there are 356 units in the Housing Choice Voucher Program in Shaker Heights.

Ms. Moore asked whether there had been an increase in applications by landlords in this program, and Mr. Hanson replied that there had been an increase in the number of single-family homes used as rentals, and some of these were in the voucher program. Ms. Moore complimented the program for ensuring that tenants in the program live in a well-maintained home.

Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights have a disproportionate share of voucher housing. CMHA has tried to market the program in other areas but with little success.

Improve Quality of Single and Two-Family Homes. The exterior of owner-occupied property is inspected every six years; Moreland has been inspected this year, and the department is starting work on Boulevard. In May Mr. Hanson made a presentation to residents of the Lomond neighborhood to explain the inspection process.

The department instituted a pre-prosecution process to elicit compliance without going through Housing Court. It also trained new police recruits on housing standards and how the two departments can collaborate on quality-of-life issues.

Enhance Tax Base. The city bought eight HUD-owned properties through the Dollar Program and met with brokers and representatives from Deutsche Bank to discuss potential donations of property. The department collaborated with Neighborhood Development to identify potential land-bank acquisitions and held a meeting with rehabbers to discuss ways the city can collaborate with them to encourage more quality rehabs in Shaker. It also conducted inspections for the first time of Shaker Gardens and Sunrise Assisted Living to ensure compliance with code requirements.

There have been 125 foreclosures so far this year, a 23.8% increase from the same period last year.

Eliminate Housing Blight. The department sent letters to owners of all vacant property to inform them of their responsibilities and inspected all vacant properties monthly to make sure they are secure and maintained. It declared 27 residential properties public nuisances in March and issued emergency nuisance abatement orders on 26 properties. When there is an issue of safety or security, the city can replace broken or boarded windows, remove mold or demolish the home. Of the 124 cases referred to Housing Court, 60.5% involved rental properties.

Mayor Leiken commended the department in its efforts to keep the neighborhoods stable and pointed out that Shaker Heights is the only inner-ring suburb where houses had declined less than 10% in value.

Ms. Lewis said that there are no homes currently available in the HUD Dollar Program, and that several of those already purchased are being demolished.

Ms. Moore said that the first demolition was taking place in the Sussex area. She said that banks that buy foreclosed homes often don't know what condition the houses are in. She stressed the importance of neighbors' being vigilant and calling police whenever they see questionable activity. Ms. Lewis said the city is looking at ways to secure property against theft of copper and other items.

Neighborhood Revitalization Department

Ms. Lewis said that the issues for the department vary from year to year, but it is positioned to adjust to changes in the housing market.

Community-Supported Code Enforcement. The department has provided grants for exterior maintenance and painting as well as technical assistance to 52 homeowners.

Reinvestment in the Housing Stock and Neighborhoods. The delivery of the Go Green program is being re-evaluated because there are new resources available that may be more effective. Ideas for expanding this initiative include technical assistance for rehabbers, a renewable energy demonstration, and encouraging deconstruction as an alternative to demolitions (salvaging usable materials from a home).

There have been 13 energy audits performed, resulting in \$6,000 of private investment. Ten participants have received HELP loans, and one has received a Heritage Loan.

In addition to the purchase of HUD properties, the city acquired a property on Kenyon Road for economic redevelopment as part of the larger south-side-of-Chagrin project. The city has received one donation of a house from a bank and has indicated its interest in receiving donations from other banks. The staff has developed land-banking protocols, criteria and procedures to move that program ahead. Council appropriated \$500,000 for acquisition, demolition and landscaping associated with land banking.

Fight Blight. \$491,454 of work was awarded in April to three contractors for nuisance abatement; work is under way by the city on three properties and by owners on seven properties; one property was demolished by the owner (National City Bank).

The city has demolished four city-owned properties under a contract with OBO Construction, and it has another five slated for demolition. The city has partnered with three organizations to salvage items from properties prior to demolition: Habitat for Humanity, A Piece of Cleveland and the Botanical Gardens.

Highly Competitive Rental Housing. Currently there are 1,184 certified units, comprising 27% of the rental housing stock. There are 56 rental home units and 1,128 apartment building units (29 buildings). This is a decline from last year, partly because some properties were decertified because the owners did not apply for re-certification after their one-year certification had expired. Of the 56 rental home units, all but nine have tenants, indicating that there is a demand for them. The demand for Certified Shaker homes has been greater than the supply. The department conducted several types of marketing procedures as well as educational work with new landlords.

There is a healthy reinvestment in apartment buildings; five additional apartment buildings representing 85 units have completed or have investments under way.

The city website was revamped to include revised procedures and criteria for buying city-owned lots and to list city-owned lots available for infill homes and/or side lots.

The Winslow Road incentive program has been launched, wherein owner-occupiers of two-family homes will receive \$5,000 if they remain in the house for two years.

There has been a 70% increase in the number of landlords using the tenant screening program.

In the next six months, the department will focus on nuisance abatement and land banking as well as new ideas for programs.

Nora Kancelbaum, 283-2562