

Neighborhood Revitalization Committee

May 14, 2008

Present: Nancy Moore, chair; John Ball, James Brady, Chris Hunter, Karen Nordstrom, Stacey Reed, members; James Ziegler, Building Director; Lisa Gold-Scott, Assistant Law Director; William Hanson, Housing Inspection Director; Kamla Lewis, Neighborhood Revitalization Director; Robert O'Neal, ex-officio; Norman Bliss, Council member; Joyce Braverman, Planning Department Director; Jayme Lucas, staff.

The meeting was devoted to the second part of the discussion on land-banking that began at the last meeting. The committee was asked to comment on the recommendations presented. No Council action is needed to implement these recommendations.

Ms. Braverman stated that the city had acquired new properties, mostly from the HUD \$1 program, and decisions need to be made regarding landscaping, disposition of vacant lots, and use of side lots by current residents.

The houses will be demolished in May, and the city will bid out for landscaping. The cost will be \$3,000-\$4,000 per lot. Fencing will also be considered in addition to landscaping.

Options for Disposition of Lots

1. Sell to neighbors to use as a side yard, patio, garage or for other improvements or additions. There is no set price for these sales. The idea is for neighbors to increase the value of their property. The Neighborhood Revitalization Department would be responsible for making the deals.
2. Build new single-family homes
3. Land-bank for future use

According to Ms. Lewis, the city already owns 12 buildable vacant lots, which will be marketed through the city's website. Land is considered a valuable asset to the city. The city will sell only if there is benefit in the form of capital improvement. As part of the application process, the applicant will need to submit plans for the use of the property. If conditionally approved by the committee, the application will then be presented to the Architectural Board for its approval.

City Council has approximately \$500,000 to use for the land-banking program. It presently owns five HUD properties and will close on another three next week and a possible fourth fairly soon. The Public Works Department will be responsible for maintaining the properties; presently it is maintaining 18 lots and will have 10 more at a cost of \$300 per year to cut and maintain.

The county has allocated \$600,000 for the first-ring suburbs to help with the process, and foundations have shown interest as well. Another strategy would be to talk to lenders about donating their properties, because banks make little by holding on to them.

Mr. Hanson said that his department looks at the properties, and if it is not cost-effective to repair them, they will be demolished. An example would be a home that has been badly vandalized. The cost of demolition averages about \$10,000 per property.

Ms. Reed asked about whether any thought had been given to salvaging parts of houses that might be of architectural interest. Ms. Lewis responded that the city has an agreement with Habitat for Humanity to go into the homes and take what they want before the homes are torn down. This, of course, also keeps some material from going to landfills.

Ms. Ruffner asked about the possibility of an Adopt-a-Lot arrangement whereby a neighborhood would take responsibility for improving a lot. Ms. Braverman was not sure this could be worked out, but Ms. Gold-Scott indicated that the city could enter into a licensing agreement with a community group for a community garden.

Ms. Nordstrom said there was a need for more green space in the south Shaker area. Ms. Lewis said that her department and Community Life are looking at a lot to be used for T-ball practice and indicated that this was indeed one of the purposes of land-banking.

The committee was asked to approve two recommendations (no action is needed by City Council):

1. If the lot is marketable for infill or redevelopment, or if it's needed for community use or other strategic purposes, the city will retain the lot in the land bank and maintain it.
2. If the lot is not marketable for infill, the city may sell to a neighbor to do capital improvements. The city may implement a modest landscaping at the building line, if appropriate.

The two recommendations were approved by the committee, and the meeting was adjourned. There will be no meeting in June.

Nora Kancelbaum, 283-2562