

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

May 15, 2024

12:00 p.m.

Councilman Denny Whayne Conference Room (Bush Building, 4th floor)
840 Boonville Avenue

MEMBERS

PRESENT: Heather Hardinger, Chair; Derek Lee; Callie Carroll; and Craig Hosmer.

MEMBERS

ABSENT: None.

COUNCIL

PRESENT: Councilmember Monica Horton.

STAFF

PRESENT: Jason Gage, City Manager; Collin Quigley, Deputy City Manager; Maurice S. Jones, Deputy City Manager; Steve Childers, Director of Planning and Development; Bob Jones, Grants Administrator; Randall Whitman, Principal City Planner; Bob Atchley, Senior City Planner; Hannah Knopf, Senior City Planner; Angela Duran, Associate City Planner; Matthew Schaefer, Senior City Planner; Brock Rowe, Director of Building Development Services; Brad Musick, Assistant Director of Building Development Services; Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement; Jordan Paul, City Attorney; Anita Cotter, City Clerk; Julie Greer, Deputy City Clerk; and Kristina D’Andrea, City Clerk Administrative Specialist.

GUESTS: Isabelle Walker, Blighted Property Work Group; Alice Barber, Springfield Tenants Unite; Michael Rodrigues, Jr., Springfield Tenants Unite; Samson A. Newman, Springfield Tenants Unite; Sarah Barnts, Springfield Tenants Unite; Jai Byrd, Springfield Tenants Unite; Becky Volz, Neighborhood Advisory Council; Brent T. Brown, Springfield Apartment and Housing Association; Katie Anderson, Springfield Housing Authority; Rebecca Pashia, Springfield Housing Authority; and Parker Padgett, KOLR10.

Councilmember Heather Hardinger, Chair, called the meeting to order at approximately 12:03 p.m., and roll call was conducted. Present: Derek Lee, Craig Hosmer, Callie Carroll, and Heather Hardinger.

Councilmember Hosmer moved to approve the minutes of the April 17, 2024, meeting as presented. Councilmember Carroll seconded the motion, and it was approved by the following vote: Ayes: Lee, Hosmer, Carroll, and Hardinger. Nays: None. Absent: None. Abstain: None.

Councilmember Hardinger noted the next item on the agenda was consideration of a new Housing Priority. She asked Jason Gage, City Manager, to provide an overview of the possible language to be added as a priority and noted Councilmember Monica Horton was in attendance and could provide additional information on the request to add this priority.

Mr. Gage referred to the previous Community Involvement Committee meeting regarding the discussion of a potential modification to Section 1 of Resolution 10722 and the ongoing report of citation data of blighted properties, the possibility of lowering the number of property owners listed from 20 to 10, and the impact the list had on individuals who had purchased blighted properties to improve them compared to long-term property owners who had allowed the property to debilitate.

Councilmember Hardinger addressed the Committee and asked about the necessity of the list. Councilmember Lee expressed his concerns regarding the list, the negative impact on good landlords, and his preference to either eliminate the list or reduce it. Councilmember Carroll expressed her concerns the list would discourage developers who wanted to improve blighted properties and were unable to obtain financing due to the property being on the list. Councilmember Hardinger asked how an accountability measure for non-compliant property owners would be implemented. Councilmember Carroll commented the list was created for public-shaming and noted the fines incurred due to non-compliance should help with compliance without the necessity of a list.

Councilmember Hardinger raised the question about the abatement process being a part of public record, and Mr. Gage asked Brock Rowe, Director of Building Development Services, to answer the questions from the Committee members.

Mr. Rowe advised the list was created from a software program and provided a number of properties in violation with corresponding names of property owners. The list did not provide a timeline for when a property was purchased or when it was cited in its blighted state. The list was not published on the Building Development Services Website; however, it could be located on eCity and addresses were available to the public through Greene County's website.

Councilmember Hardinger inquired about the necessity of the list to accomplish the goals and objectives of the City since the public was able to query the blighted property addresses. Mr. Rowe referred to contractors and different organizations which have bought blighted properties, made improvements, boosted home ownership within the community, and still were named on the list because they were the property owners. He further advised that his department

was aware of who were the responsible parties for blighted properties; since the context of the problems were not fully demonstrated in the list, Building Developmental Services did not go by the list. Mr. Gage and Councilmember Hardinger clarified Councilmember Hardinger's inquiry by asking about transparency of the list and ease of accessibility to the public. Mr. Rowe advised the blighted properties could be queried through the Code Violation module on eCity, and any member of the public could contact the Building Developmental Services office, and an employee would assist with the process of locating the list. Councilmember Hardinger requested more information on what type of information could be queried to add context to the list, including when a building was purchased and who purchased it to differentiate between a new owner of a blighted property and an owner who owned property for several years and had been non-compliant. Mr. Rowe advised the Code Violation module was linked to Greene County's system; however, Greene County may not have updated changes in property ownership in a timely fashion which could cause a delay in the list being updated.

Councilmember Hardinger then directed the question to the Committee regarding the necessity of the list since it was part of public record, and if it assisted with attaining the Committee's goals or interfered with future development within the city. Councilmember Hosmer suggested listing only the non-compliant property owners, rather than the property addresses to keep new property owners from being harmed by undeserved bad reputations. Councilmember Hosmer expressed his opinion a more proactive approach to encourage property owners to self-regulate should be considered, otherwise the issues with blighted properties would continue as it had been for the past 15 years. He then asked about the process to place a property owner on the list. Mr. Rowe advised that in the past, a property owner was placed on the list when Building Developmental Services received a complaint. A more proactive approach was implemented, and inspectors patrolled neighborhoods to search for blighted properties and establish a new baseline, although he noted it still may not be a true representation of the Code violations.

Councilmember Hardinger inquired about the the purpose of this list, asking whether it was intended for punitive measures and exposure of noncompliant property owners or to encourage Code compliance, further expressing her opinion if the list did not distinguish between owners who had newly acquired blighted properties and long-term owners who had been repeatedly noncompliant, then it was not an equitable approach to attain the goals of the Committee.

Mr. Rowe referred to a group of blighted properties which were recently purchased from an individual who was known to be a repeat offender of the Code violations, and these properties would continue to be on the list until improvements were made. Both Councilmember Hardinger and Councilmember Hosmer expressed their concern regarding the lack of discernment of new owners of blighted properties, and the properties were considered noncompliant until the new owners made improvements. Councilmember Hardinger noted that a list may be more complicated, not just for City staff to sort through, but for citizens to fully understand what is going on with these properties, as there were no narratives attached to the database. She further noted there were multiple factors to this conversation and asked Mr. Gage what the Committee's options were on this topic.

Mr. Gage asked the Committee members for ideas on what they would like the list to look like and provided an example of modifying Number 5 under Section 1 of the Resolution to show a

list of properties owned by the same owner within a specific time period and highlighting those with the most citations. Councilmember Hardinger answered a list without context does not give the citizens what they were really looking for, and therefore would discourage people from purchasing properties and putting them into productive use. She again suggested building transparency and accountability into the list and noted the list would not be beneficial without these two components. Mr. Gage provided three options for the Committee: One, the list remains the same and a report of ten items is reported to the City Council; two, modify the data in Number 5 of Section 1; and three, leave the Resolution as is.

Councilmember Hosmer suggested creating a list of 10 of the most prolific violators and leaving any new property owners off the list. He also noted the problem was not with the property, but with the property owner and the violations should be attached to the property owners. He further noted the problem with long-term property owners who had allowed their properties to debilitate to the point that either they were demolished by the City or were difficult to rehabilitate when transferred to a new owner. Councilmember Hardinger pointed out there were blighted properties sold to new owners who do not improve the property, then rented the property out as the building was still in the abatement process. Councilmember Carroll advised the goal was to repair the blighted properties and have productive property owners who improved the property. She expressed her opinion the list was not necessary. Councilmember Lee advised he was not in favor of the list and expressed his opinion it might discourage people from buying the blighted properties.

Councilmember Carroll asked Councilmember Hosmer his opinion on eliminating the list and asking staff to find a different way to determine transparency while landlords who remain compliant were not put in the public spotlight. Councilmember Hosmer responded he was not against the list, but historically, all landlords were treated the same whether they were compliant or not, and he believed good landlords should be incentivized, while noncompliant landlords should be penalized. He further noted the difficulty in inspecting and regulating all the rental units within Springfield city limits and referred to Zone 1 violations. Councilmember Hardinger asked Mr. Gage for two or three pathways to consider before making a decision on the modification of the Resolution. Mr. Gage advised he would look at some options for the next meeting.

Councilmember Hardinger referred to the next item on the list and requested Mr. Rowe to provide a quick overview and review of the In-Depth Comparison of the Rental Inspection Programs. Mr. Rowe referred to the handout which was provided to the Committee which included comparisons taken from Lawrence, Kansas; Columbia, Missouri; St. Joseph, Missouri; Des Moines, Iowa; and Fort Wayne, Texas. He noted the main key takeaways were all these cities required a rental inspection program in which each property owner was required to register their property with their respective cities. Lawrence, Kansas, inspected its properties based on the first alphabet of the business and rolled through that cycle every twelve months. The Columbia, Missouri, inspection system was based on historical compliance data, St. Joseph had the same compliance system and performed inspections every five years. Des Moines, Iowa, had 15 inspectors to perform inspections year-round. Mr. Rowe provided some ideas discussed by his department, which included implementing the ABC system that Lawrence, Kansas, utilized,

including a Rental Ready Certificate required every year for the landlord to rent a property and provide assurance to the tenant that the property was in compliance with the City Code.

Mr. Rowe then referred to the handout with the pie charts and graphs. Per the City-Wide Violations of Section 26 in Last 12 Months chart, he noted 254 violations by rental properties in the last 12 months and pointed out there were 19 properties with unknown occupancies. He also noted there were 43,716 rental units in Springfield, which included apartments, condos, single family houses, duplexes, and townhouses, and he compared that total number of rental units to the number of rental properties in violation of City Code and found that .58% of all rental properties were noncompliant within the last 12 months. There were 77,927 total housing units within Springfield. He referred to another handout created by the Planning Department. There were 48,570 single family units, of which 18,782 (38.6%) were renter occupied. For single family plus two family, there were 50,432 units of which 20,459 (40.53%) were renter occupied. For all dwelling units (77,927), there were 43,716 which were renter occupied. He noted these numbers showed the 60/40 split (rent/homeowner) which had been historically known about Springfield.

Mr. Rowe pointed out the 254 violations in the last 12 months were complaint-based, and through their investigations of these complaints, they had found landlords who were hostile towards their tenants. An inspection may be initiated by a tenant calling Building Development Services with a complaint about not having heat, etc. The inspectors experienced situations where they performed the initial inspection and then were not allowed back on the property by the property owner for a follow-up inspection. Councilmember Hosmer advised the inspectors should have authority to inspect any house in the City as there were hazardous safety issues, including electrical, fire, etc., and Mr. Rowe agreed.

Councilmember Hardinger asked Mr. Rowe to draft a program for the next meeting which would outline ideal staffing, resources, and a timeline to implement a program which realistically utilized resources already available, as well as needed resources to address the issues with compliance and costs. Mr. Rowe pointed out some self-funded programs for landlords that might be better programs as they have helped with compliance at minimal fees. Mr. Rowe also pointed out there were noncompliant landlords, as well as bad tenants, and the protection for both should be considered for any new plan. Councilmember Hardinger agreed and expressed her opinion education for landlords to mitigate those issues before they became a problem would help and suggested the collaboration with neighborhood associations. She extended her appreciation to the department staff members for all their work.

Mr. Gage requested the item for housing priority be on the next meeting's agenda as there would be more information available which included a summary of the Comprehensive Plan and components related to housing along with Councilmember Horton's information from the last meeting.

Councilmember Hardinger requested Mr. Gage provide an overview of the items under Unfinished Business. Councilmember Hardinger also advised a summary of the unfinished business items was over 100 pages, and Anita Cotter, City Clerk, could be contacted if someone wanted to review the summary.

Mr. Gage began with the Expanded Alternative Incarceration and Community Work Service Agreements. He provided a brief overview of the process of the work service program through Municipal Court, which referred to individuals who had violations through Municipal Court and had probationary requirements which required work service. Mr. Gage added many entities participated in the work service programs and briefly discussed the need for some type of identifying piece of clothing to be worn by the community service worker, such as a vest, while performing the duties. He also updated the Committee on the status of the workers compensation language that would be added which would relieve the City of any obligation to pay worker's compensation for any injuries sustained while performing Municipal Court ordered work service. He advised the language was drafted and ready for the next legislative session. Discussion of costs would be next. Councilmember Hardinger and Mr. Gage discussed supervision requirements for entities which provided public service options for community events, as whomever was responsible for providing the work option would need to sign off on the completion of work performed so Municipal Court would have a record. Mr. Gage also noted in the Municipal Court setting, there was an expectation of flexibility in the time period an individual on probation would have to fulfill their court-ordered work service and be compliant. Councilmember Hardinger expressed her support for creating a pathway for non-profit groups or groups that did have events, would provide supervision, and submit a request for approval.

Councilmember Lee introduced a new program for the homeless which was brought to his attention by a representative with Victory Mission regarding Genesis Church, a group from Fayetteville, Arkansas, who responded to different areas and cleaned up homeless camps. This group also sponsored a work program in different areas and paid minimum wage to homeless people, and already had contracts with the City to tear up mattresses and take them to the Springfield Landfill. Mr. Gage requested Councilmember Lee submit a referral to City Council to discuss this further.

Mr. Gage provided an update on the checklist for the Sexual Assault Task Force. He advised that the checklist was almost complete apart from Box #3, which referred to the collaboration of Springfield and Greene County for an integrated Sexual Violence Court and implement ongoing education opportunities about victims in trauma center practices. Mr. Gage noted the court would be at the county level and not at the municipal level, and the City was at a standstill on this item. He then moved to the implementation of education opportunities about victims in trauma center practices and advised that the City had received positive feedback from neighborhood organizations for satisfactory progress.

Mr. Gage noted all information requested for the Clean Air and Environmental Protection item had been from Columbia, Missouri; Kansas City, Missouri; and St. Louis, Missouri regarding climate and energy efficiency. Councilmember Hardinger moved to have this item on the agenda for the next meeting to choose one of the following options: 1) a recommendation be made to City Council; 2) the Committee would continue to discuss the topic; or 3) after reviewing all the information received, there would be no further action. All members agreed.

Mr. Gage then referred to the other two items of Unfinished Business which were the adoption of a local business preference program for City contracts and Prevailing Wage on Associated

Projects to the City's Workable Program. He stated there were still conversations regarding the prevailing wage and City's Workable Program, and the topics were still considered outstanding.

Councilmember Carroll moved to adjourn. Councilmember Lee seconded the motion, and it was approved by the following vote: Ayes: Lee, Carroll, Hosmer, and Hardinger. Nays: None. Absent: None. Abstain: None.

The meeting adjourned at 1:06 p.m.

Prepared by Kristina D'Andrea