

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

August 29, 2024

2:00 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: Brandon Jenson and Monica Horton.

STAFF

PRESENT: Jason Gage, City Manager; Collin Quigley, Deputy City Manager; Steve Childers, Director of Planning and Development; Martin Gugel, Interim Director of Building Development Services; Brad Musick, Assistant Director of Building Development Services; David Holtmann, Director of Finance; Bryan Loughrige, Public Grounds Maintenance Supervisor; Jordan Paul, City Attorney; Anita Cotter, City Clerk; and Kristina D’Andrea, City Clerk Administrative Specialist.

GUESTS: Brandon Griesemer, Restore SGF; Isabelle J. Walker, Blighted Property Work Group; Mindy McDonald, Victory Mission; Jason Hynson, Victory Mission; Carol Hutcheson, citizen; and Jack McGee, *Springfield Daily Citizen*.

Councilmember Heather Hardinger, Chair, called the meeting to order at approximately 2:01 p.m., and roll call was conducted. Present: Derek Lee, Craig Hosmer, Callie Carroll, and Heather Hardinger. Absent: None.

Councilmember Lee moved to approve the minutes of the June 26, 2024, meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Carroll and approved by the following vote: Ayes: Carroll, Hosmer, Lee, and Hardinger. Nays: None. Absent: None. Abstain: None.

Councilmember Hardinger noted the topics of discussion were Councilmember Lee’s request for recommendation of creating and funding a program to remove trash from City property by working jointly with non-profit organizations who provide jobs to the underprivileged, housing priorities objectives, and rental inspection program update. She turned the meeting over to Jason Gage, City Manager.

Mr. Gage introduced Jason Hynson, who was present to discuss Victory Mission’s employment program for poverty-stricken people.

Mr. Hynson explained Victory Mission's mission to assist people with rejoining the workforce and some of the challenges underprivileged people faced. He noted there were six people who had been staying at Victory Mission's shelter and had submitted applications at various businesses that required a two-week background check. He described the frustration of waiting to hear back from employers who may or may not provide a job offer and the continuous cycle of job searching. Victory Mission's role as an intermediary for willing participants included housing, mental health counseling, substance abuse rehabilitation, and the WorkReady BootCamp program. He highlighted the mattress program already in place with the City which involved the breakdown of mattresses for the landfill.

Councilmember Hardinger asked how many people would participate in the trash program and if this would be a pilot program. Mr. Hynson responded he had budgeted for five participants to work 32 hours per week for 45 weeks at minimum wage. He noted this would be a pilot program and described Victory Mission's goals to provide job history, instill the ambition to gain job skills, and help these individuals become productive members of society.

Councilmember Hardinger discussed "clean green" and the cost to the City to mow lawns at vacant properties or properties in the abatement process. She asked if this program could include these types of jobs and if progression into more skilled jobs would be considered. Mr. Hynson responded affirmatively. He discussed opportunities Victory Mission had extended to individuals who were in the work programs and showed interest in supervisory roles, as well as the successes others had in starting their own businesses or obtaining careers outside of Victory Mission.

Councilmember Lee asked if these participants could be employed to pick up litter on the city's streets. Mr. Gage answered affirmatively. Councilmember Lee asked how Victory Mission would find individuals for the program and if the City would need to provide referrals. Mr. Gage responded Victory Mission would utilize the people in their program. Mr. Hynson advised Victory Mission had enough individuals in their facility to work in the pilot trash program with the City. He discussed the expansion of outreach to other organizations and programs to recruit individuals once the success of the pilot trash program was determined, as well as selecting people who had shown improvement and proven to be responsible workers.

Councilmember Hardinger referred to the handout which outlined funding for the trash program and asked if Victory Mission had researched grants through the State or Workforce Development. Mr. Hynson responded they had not. He advised the costs listed on the spreadsheet for Victory Mission were readily available for this program, and the City would fund salaries for participants of the program and their team leader.

Councilmember Hardinger asked Mr. Gage if the City could explore grant opportunities and next steps for a future Community Involvement Committee meeting. Mr. Gage responded funding sources and purchasing options could be researched by staff, as well as the necessity for an amendment to the existing agreement, and a report would be prepared for the next Community Involvement Committee meeting.

Councilmember Hardinger provided a brief overview of the housing priority discussion from the last meeting and the organization of priorities. She noted the next step would be to confirm the housing priority objectives. Mr. Gage discussed the City Council priorities and asked Steve Childers, Director of Planning and Development, to provide feedback on the housing priorities.

Mr. Childers asked for clarification on questions the Committee members had on housing priorities. Councilmember Hardinger clarified the objectives for the housing priorities needed to be defined and aligned with City Council priorities and the Forward SGF Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Gage discussed three items of information to review. The first was the goals and objective information previously handed out to the Committee from Councilmember Horton. The second item was housing objectives currently in the priorities. The third item was the Economic Vitality objectives in the Forward SGF Comprehensive Plan, which included addressing the quality of affordable housing stock.

Councilmember Hardinger noted Councilmember Horton reached out to her regarding the land bank bill. Mr. Childers discussed his staff's research of the land bank bill and how it could be utilized as a tool for the housing initiatives, including the establishment of a recommendation Board. Councilmember Hardinger referred to the June 26, 2024, meeting discussion regarding the drafting of legislation to present to City Council on the Committee's recommendation to move forward with the recommended projects that were prioritized.

Mr. Childers offered to present a PowerPoint presentation at the next meeting to update the Committee on projects the Planning and Development Department had been working on related to the housing initiatives. Councilmember Hardinger and Mr. Gage discussed a timeline for the presentation and whether it should be presented to the full City Council. Mr. Gage explained the housing initiative was a City Council priority and stressed the importance of obtaining direction from City Council as soon as reasonably possible. Councilmember Hosmer expressed agreement with having the full City Council hear the presentation. Mr. Gage recommended the Community Involvement Committee make some decisions at the next meeting on items to bring to the full City Council. He suggested staff prepare a summary of programs, a list of priorities, land bank resources, and a resolution of property abatement. Councilmember Hardinger expressed agreement with Mr. Gage and pointed out the Committee members could then review these items and vote on what they would like to take to the full City Council.

Councilmember Lee expressed his agreement with identifying one priority and have staff present it at the next meeting for the Committee to move forward with any changes. He advised he did not have a preference for which priority to consider. Councilmember Hardinger noted they could start with the rental inspection program since it was the next item on the agenda.

Mr. Gage introduced Martin Gugel, Interim Director of Building Development Services, who was presenting regarding the rental inspection program.

Mr. Gugel advised they had been researching other communities, such as Lawrence, Kansas, Columbia, Missouri, and St. Joseph, Missouri. He also advised they were reviewing the scope of the types of homes, such as single-family or duplexes, and to how to legally approach inspections. He discussed health and safety inspections versus code inspections and the

frequency of the inspections. He discussed other considerations, which included how to handle the refusal of occupants to allow inspectors to enter a property and noncompliant property owners. He noted these items were included in a PowerPoint presentation for the Committee and was being completed by his staff. Councilmember Hardinger inquired about the timeline for the presentation. Mr. Gugel responded they should have a presentation for the next Community Involvement Committee meeting.

Councilmember Hosmer discussed some considerations for the inspection program. This included the frequency of inspections, the age criteria of the dwelling to be inspected, a grading system, geographic location within the city, safeguards to ensure the safety compliance, and a penalty system for noncompliant property owners. He also recommended a third-party certified inspector to assist with the inspections to offset costs and workload for Building Development Services.

Councilmember Carroll referenced two active groups in town and recommended a member from each group address concerns and present ideas to the Committee. Councilmember Hosmer expressed agreement, but recommended some parameters be set first. Councilmember Carroll suggested a special meeting for citizens to be able to speak. Councilmember Hardinger expressed agreement and advised Mr. Gugel the Committee would wait to hear his presentation at the next meeting before presenting anything to the full City Council. Mr. Gage responded in agreement with Councilmember Hardinger and noted a step-by-step approach was necessary as this would have an important impact on Springfield's neighborhoods.

Councilmember Hosmer inquired about a pilot project to focus in a certain area where inspections were performed on a voluntary basis. Jordan Paul, City Attorney, responded he would have to research to ensure this could legally be done. Councilmember Hosmer expressed his opinion regarding the benefits of testing a process to work out the problems before presenting it to City Council.

Councilmember Lee expressed agreement with obtaining feedback from citizen groups. He requested Building Development Services' PowerPoint presentation include a slide of the pie chart from a previous meeting. He expressed his concern the City's rental inspections may invade citizens' privacy and suggested considerations be set to qualify a residential dwelling for inspection. He listed some items to consider such as a violation seen on the exterior would be probable cause to enter the home for an inspection, a property's blighted history, or property owner's reputation for not maintaining their properties. Councilmember Hardinger requested Councilmember Lee's considerations be included in the presentation for the rental inspection program. She expressed her opinion there was a need for rental inspections as safety precautions and to ensure the homes were Code compliant.

Isabelle Walker, Chair of Community Partnership of the Ozark's Blighted Property Work Group, discussed meetings with Building Development Services and expressed understanding of the time and resources involved with handling blighted properties and implementing a rental inspection program. She invited stakeholders to attend the Blighted Property Work Group meetings to provide feedback. Councilmember Carroll expressed agreement and noted the best policies were made when perspectives from all sides were heard.

Councilmember Hardinger asked about the possibility of holding a special meeting to allow stakeholders to speak about the rental inspection program. Mr. Gage answered affirmatively. Councilmember Hardinger recommended City staff be allowed more time before the next meeting to meet with these groups to obtain different perspectives. Mr. Gage expressed his agreement. Councilmember Lee expressed support for Councilmember Hardinger's recommendation.

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 2:56 p.m.

Prepared by Kristina D'Andrea