

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

October 18, 2023

12:00 p.m.

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

MEMBERS

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

MEMBERS

ABSENT: None.

COUNCIL

PRESENT: Abe McGull.

STAFF

PRESENT: Jason Gage, City Manager; Collin Quigley, Deputy City Manager; Maurice S. Jones, Deputy City Manager; Rhonda Lewsader, City Attorney; Brock Rowe, Director of Building Development Services; Brad Musick, Assistant Director of Building Development Services; Duke McDonald, Assistant City Attorney; Anita Cotter, City Clerk; and Lauren Fischer, City Clerk Administrative Specialist.

GUESTS: None.

Councilwoman Heather Hardinger, Chair, called the meeting to order at approximately 12:04 p.m., and roll call was conducted. Present: Craig Hosmer, Callie Carroll, Derek Lee, and Heather Hardinger. Absent: None.

Councilwoman Hardinger noted the September 28, 2023, Community Involvement Committee meeting minutes were still in progress and would be available for consideration of approval during the next Committee meeting. She further noted the meeting would start with Agenda Item No. 3, the continued discussion of Resolution 10722 (Nuisance Properties).

Councilwoman Hardinger provided the Committee members with a summary document of the recommendations from the Nuisance Property Work Group (NPWG) Final Report (Exhibit A). She explained the Committee was tasked with reviewing the feasibility of the recommendations from the Nuisance Property Work Group Final Report.

She asked Jason Gage, City Manager, if there were any updates from staff. Mr. Gage responded there were not at this time as staff were still working to gather the requested information. He asked the Committee for clarification on whether they wanted staff to focus their research on nuisance buildings as it relates to Resolution 10722 and the NPWG Final Report or if the Committee wanted staff to include nuisance site issues.

Councilwoman Hardinger suggested first working to meet the obligations of Resolution 10722. She noted if staff were working to compile the information for Resolution 10722 and find components that contain similar information regarding nuisance sites, it could be included in the Committee's report. She expressed her opinion the nuisance buildings are the focus for the Committee and overgrowth issues are just components that contribute to a nuisance property. She recommended focusing on the elements required in the Committee's report to be submitted to City Council.

Councilwoman Hardinger asked for insight from the Committee members.

Councilman Hosmer asked if it would take staff additional time to make a comprehensive report containing nuisance sites and nuisance building information. Brock Rowe, Director of Building Development Services, responded it would not require additional research, but would require more time for staff to compile the additional information into a report for the Committee members. Councilman Hosmer asked if staff preferred to research information relating to nuisance sites or nuisance building. Mr. Rowe replied staff would work to gather any information requested by the Committee. He explained the software staff were using to gather the nuisance property information was set to focus on blighted building information, but the nuisance site information could be added.

Councilwoman Hardinger suggested the Committee could add a supplemental report to its recommendation that included nuisance site information. She expressed her opinion staff should not make additional efforts to research information outside of the scope of the Committee's requirements due to the short amount of time allotted to complete the charge in Resolution 10722.

Mr. Gage clarified with the Committee that staff should focus on the nuisance buildings. Councilwoman Hardinger responded affirmatively.

Councilwoman Carroll asked if there was any connection between the neighborhoods chosen by Restore SGF and the neighborhoods the Committee has been tasked to address. Mr. Gage responded, based on the objective of the Committee and the programs offered by Restore SGF, some connecting information, such as regulations, could be used by both the City and Restore SGF to help benefit a property owner.

Councilwoman Hardinger noted she is part of the Restore SGF Board. She noted Restore SGF had discussed the Nuisance Property Work Group Final Report and the impact the recommendations could have on the community. She further noted, based on the discussions with Restore SGF, there could be other organizations in the community who are interested in collaborating with the City to help address nuisance property issues.

Councilwoman Hardinger discussed the requirement in the Committee's report. Mr. Gage noted staff would review certain aspects of the NPWG recommendations as they continue researching items such as the cost, the legal barriers, and the operational impact of the recommendations. Councilwoman Hardinger noted the recommendations are direct components for a comprehensive Chronic Nuisance Property program. She suggested researching other

communities, such as Minneapolis, Minnesota, to see how they encouraged their community to be involved in nuisance issues. Mr. Gage noted the first step is for the staff and Committee to discuss all the means the City can take to address the nuisance issues in a neighborhood prior to intervention from the City.

Councilwoman Hardinger noted the first recommendation listed in the Nuisance Property Work Group Final Report (Exhibit B) under the New Direction section was to provide additional support to the top ten neighborhoods with chronic nuisance properties and to engage residents, business owners, and community partners and address their challenges. She noted this recommendation has a funding allocation of \$100,000 for the initiative. She asked for clarity about the \$100,000 allocation.

Mr. Gage noted staff would need to explore the details regarding the \$100,000 allocation. He noted the NPWG Final Report states the allocation would be used to engage teams of residents and business owners from multiple perspectives to compile their own data. He noted the objective to prioritize the most significant challenges for the neighborhood could be addressed using a neighborhood agreement. He further noted staff would need to clarify the objective to mobilize community partners to work alongside the City to affect change. He noted the NPWG Final Report was unclear which partnering organizations are referred to in its recommendation.

Councilwoman Hardinger explained the recommendation regarding the top ten nuisance property neighborhoods prompted her to explore other communities, such as Minneapolis, Minnesota, which has multiple sections dedicated on its city website with city and community resource information. She expressed her opinion implementing a resource, such as a website, could help benefit the City by bringing awareness about neighborhoods with chronic nuisance properties.

Mr. Gage discussed the benefits of coordinating with certified neighborhood groups. He noted creating a formalized community resource would be beneficial to the City. He further noted the \$100,000 allocation is a recommended amount to help fund the resources needed to address the top ten neighborhoods once a plan is put into place.

Mr. Gage and Councilwoman Hardinger discussed the benefits of providing information regarding nuisance properties to the people who live within those neighborhoods. Mr. Gage suggested the City could use technology to gather data about the nuisance properties in the top ten neighborhoods. Councilwoman Hardinger expressed her opinion it would be beneficial for the neighborhoods to receive information, including the number of nuisance properties in the area, and how the City and other community organizations plan to address the issues. She noted this would also inform the neighborhood the City is aware of the issues and is actively working to remedy the situation.

Councilwoman Hardinger discussed the recommendation to explore ways to remove barriers for neighborhoods to become more active in nuisance abatement, including securing insurance policies for registered neighborhoods to mow overgrown lots, and offering Clean Green vouchers. She noted the Committee previously discussed ways to proactively engage neighborhood associations and encourage the neighbors who want to intervene with nuisance property issues.

Mr. Gage noted he would need to work with the Risk Management Department and the Law Department to clarify if it is feasible to allow an organization such as Community Partnership of the Ozarks to secure insurance policies to mow lawns in registered neighborhoods. He noted it is unusual for one entity to secure insurance for another entity unless they have a contractual agreement. Duke McDonald, Assistant City Attorney, expressed his concern about a Missouri Constitution provision which states City funding cannot be used for a private entity. He noted the Law Department would be able to further analyze the legal aspect of securing an insurance policy once input is received from the Risk Management Department.

Brock Rowe, Director of Building Development Services, noted the insurance policy provision was intended for a specific company to have a contract with the City to mow overgrown lots for elderly or disabled individuals. He noted the Neighborhood Advisory Council is working to encourage citizens to talk with their neighbors who have overgrown lawns to see if they need assistance instead of waiting for the Building Development Services Department to intervene.

Councilwoman Hardinger expressed her opinion a person going door to door to offer their services, such as lawn cutting and snow shoveling, should not require an insurance policy because they are acting as an individual.

Councilwoman Carroll asked if a public service announcement could be used to help encourage people to talk to their neighbors. Mr. Gage responded decades ago people wanted to spend time on their front porches and socialize with one another but with modern amenities, such as air conditioning, it has become more challenging to encourage people leave the comforts of their home to talk with their neighbors. Councilwoman Carroll expressed her opinion finding a way the City could encourage people to get to know their neighbors or to join a neighborhood watch group could be beneficial when addressing issues such as public safety.

Councilwoman Hardinger asked for clarification about the Clean Green vouchers. Mr. Rowe explained lower-income neighborhoods tend to have large items, such as couches and chairs, sitting on the curb because they cannot afford to dispose of them properly. He noted the idea was to encourage the use of the Clean Green vouchers to help provide an opportunity for those items to be removed from the neighborhood.

Councilwoman Carroll asked about the process to remove a couch from a property. Mr. Rowe responded if the couch or large object is in the public right-of-way, Public Works would be contacted to remove the item or items, but Clean Green provides vouchers and dumpsters for citizens to properly dispose of those larger items.

Councilwoman Hardinger discussed redesigning neighborhood teams and nuisance abatement listed in the NPWG Final Report. She noted this objective would conduct an evaluation of the current situation and determine changes needed for more effective nuisance abatement. She noted this may involve increasing enforcement staff, expanding strategies, and studying successful approaches from other cities. She further noted this objective recommended hiring a nuisance property residential consultant.

Councilwoman Hardinger expressed her opinion there may not be time to hire a nuisance property residential consultant before the Committee's report goes before City Council. Mr. Gage noted it would be helpful to hire a consultant to gain an outside perspective on nuisance properties, but it would take time to hire someone for the position.

Councilwoman Hardinger and Mr. Gage discussed the feasibility of hiring a nuisance property residential consultant. Councilwoman Hardinger noted the Committee could recommend not hiring a consultant at this time but could add the suggestion into the report as something to consider in the future. Mr. Gage noted if the Committee would like to pursue the hiring of a nuisance property residential consultant, staff could research the estimated cost and possible funding sources for the position. He further noted the Committee could send a recommendation to City Council, prior to the submission of the Committee's report, to begin the process of hiring a consultant.

Councilman Lee expressed his opinion hiring a nuisance property residential consultant would add an extra expense to the City. He expressed his opinion the intent of Resolution 10722 was not to add additional expenses to the City by creating a new department with additional staff.

Councilwoman Hardinger discussed using an alternative approach to review the recommendations in the NPWG Final Report. She noted the Committee was tasked with reviewing the feasibility of the recommendations and could recommend whether it is a priority for the City. She suggested the Committee could add a rationale to the items they consider a non-priority. She noted some of the recommendations listed in the NPWG Final Report do not pertain to dangerous buildings.

Councilwoman Carroll expressed her opinion a nuisance property residential consultant is not needed because the City is aware of the nuisance property issues based on citizen surveys and staff recommendations.

Councilman Hosmer noted there was a trash study previously conducted in the city using a consultant. He noted the consultant's report was received by the City, but the recommendations were not implemented. He noted many people do not have trash service which helps contribute to the nuisance issues around the city. He expressed his opinion the City should review the report completed on the trash study and recommended implementation strategies before looking into hiring another consultant.

Councilwoman Hardinger reiterated the question of whether the Committee should focus on the trash nuisance issues or building nuisance issues. She noted any information regarding the trash nuisance could be added at the end of the Committee's report as supplemental information, but the focus should be the dangerous buildings. Mr. Gage explained the intent of Resolution 10722 was to address dangerous building nuisances. He noted the Committee's report could include other nuisance issues, such as the overgrowth and yards, but the focus of the report would be the nuisance buildings.

Councilwoman Hardinger asked if the City has enough staff to address the dangerous building element of nuisance properties and if there were any additional resources needed. Mr. Gage responded staff is always needed. He explained once a strategy is put into place, it would be more apparent what type of resources would be needed to address nuisance property issues.

Councilwoman Hardinger recommended providing educational resources to specific groups of property owners based on the information and recommendations reviewed by the Committee. She noted it would help the community understand the different methods they could use to become involved in mitigating nuisance property issues.

Councilwoman Hardinger discussed the City's chronic nuisance property enforcement philosophy. She noted the NPWG Final Report suggested the City Codes used to enforce chronic nuisance properties are large and complex. She asked if the City had an adequate philosophy regarding chronic nuisance properties. Mr. Rowe explained the Building Development Services Department uses the property maintenance guideline outlined in Chapter 26 and Chapter 74 of the City Code as the defining chronic nuisance property philosophy. Mr. Gage explained the City's philosophy question also depends on the enforcement approach. He noted if the City was aggressive in the enforcement approach, there may not be enough non-for-profit resources available for those who do not have the funds needed to repair their property. He suggested reviewing the effectiveness of the enforcement methods used to address chronic nuisance properties.

Councilwoman Hardinger noted the NPWG recommendation to adopt all new nuisance-property-related codes including but not limited to City Code 26 and 74 as well as updates to the adopted International Residential Code and Property Maintenance Code. She asked if there was any context regarding the reasoning behind the suggestion. Mr. Rowe responded he is unsure of the context because the City adopted the 2018 International Residential Code and the 2019 Property Maintenance Code, which were both modified to fit the City Charter. He noted the . recommendation could suggest the City adopt a more updated version of each code.

Councilwoman Hardinger noted the NPWG Final Report recommended improving the process for addressing dangerous buildings. She noted the Committee had previously discussed ways to streamline the current process used to address dangerous buildings. She asked if staff had any recommendations in response to this section. Mr. Rowe responded the City is limited in ways to properly board a building. He explained to board a building properly, the City would need to have access to the inside of the building. He further noted it costs the property owner \$5,000 to \$8,000 each time the City boards the building. He noted unless the Property Maintenance Code has a provision explaining the proper way to board a building, it does not work.

Councilwoman Carroll asked about the barriers that prevent the City from properly boarding a building. Mr. Rowe explained the City cannot enter a property without the owner's consent because it would be considered an illegal search seizure unless there is a search warrant.

Mr. Gage noted boarding a building alone would not prevent squatters from entering. He explained vacant buildings need constant observation to fully secure the area and ensure that the

activity happening on the property is by the owner. He noted if the owner of the property provides the City with a letter of enforcement, it would save time when intervention is needed by the police.

Councilwoman Hardinger noted the NPWG supports the extension of a boarding requirement across the City for vacant properties. She asked if this was a needed recommendation since the City does have a legal process for boarding buildings. Mr. Rowe noted the extension request referenced in the NPWG Final Report was for boarding in historical areas in the City that have vacant buildings.

Councilwoman Hardinger asked if boarding was an effective way to keep people out of unwanted buildings. She expressed her opinion boarding sends a sign to squatters that a building is vacant.

Councilman Lee expressed his opinion the City should not invest any additional funding into the boarding of vacant buildings. Councilman Lee and Councilwoman Hardinger discussed whether boarding is a deterrent to squatters and vandals. Mr. Gage noted finding a way to demonstrate the building is in use, such as additional street lighting or perimeter lighting, would be a better deterrent than a boarded building. Councilman Lee expressed his opinion if a building is vacant and requires boarding, the City should find a way to provide financial resources to limit the number of vacant buildings, such as creating incentives for the property owner. Councilwoman Hardinger noted looking for grants and other means of addressing boarded buildings is part of the NPWG recommendations and is something that could be discussed further.

Councilwoman Hardinger asked Mr. Gage if there was anything in the nuisance property policy that should be addressed. Mr. Gage responded anything that could streamline the process needed to address the nuisance issues would be helpful.

Mr. Rowe noted BDS is working to find ways to make the process faster. He noted the overall goal of the process is to have the property owner abate the issue. He further noted the City wants to help the property owner keep the homes as part of the housing stock, but the City's only option if the owner does not have the funds or the means to correct the issues is to demolish the home. He expressed his opinion the more the process is streamlined, the higher the potential for a home to be demolished because the property owner does not have the means to abate the issue.

Councilman Hosmer asked if an owner were in jeopardy of having their home demolished, could a program like Restore SGF purchase the home. Mr. Rowe responded the homes are usually not for sale. Mr. Gage responded that could be an option if the owner was open to meeting with agencies such as the Land Trust or Habitat for Humanity. Mr. Rowe explained some homes are purchased within hours of demolition, but the cost incurred by the City also must be paid with the sale of the home. He further noted it would be helpful to create a process to link the homeowner with the other agencies.

Councilman Hosmer expressed his concern many of the properties in Springfield are rental properties that are poorly maintained and have helped contribute to the challenge of knowing your neighbor. Councilwoman Hardinger noted part of the recommendations for discussion

include reviewing the feasibility of rental registration, rental inspections, and the barriers preventing the enhancement of those types of programs. Mr. Gage clarified the charge to the Committee includes comparing and reviewing three communities with successful rental registration programs. He explained many municipalities will have ordinances in place for rental registration programs but are not successful. He noted staff would work to research different programs deemed successful using state associations and national associations to find communities that are similar to Springfield.

Councilwoman Hardinger asked Mr. Gage about the next steps for staff and the Committee. Mr. Gage noted the next steps would be for the Committee to continue to review the recommendations and provide feedback to the staff as they are working to complete the charge in Resolution 10722.

Mr. Rowe asked for clarification on whether staff should focus on trash nuisances or blighted buildings. Councilwoman Hardinger responded some of the NPWG recommendations are outside of the scope of the charge to the Committee listed in Resolution 10722. She expressed her opinion the Committee should focus on the building element. She noted if there is any additional information or recommendations staff find helpful during the research process, it could be added as an addendum to the Committee's report.

Mr. Gage noted once the elements of the Resolution are satisfied, the Committee can draft a resolution to go before City Council for additional nuisance property issues, such as overgrowth and trash, to be explored.

Councilman Hosmer asked for staff to send a copy of the recent trash survey. Mr. Gage replied he would send the requested information to the Committee.

Councilwoman Hardinger suggested adding a status summary from the recommendation for each Committee meeting to ensure the Committee stays on task. Councilman Hosmer asked for staff's recommendations of what can be done differently to assist BDS when they are investigating properties. Mr. Rowe responded staff are currently working on possible implementation strategies and would provide that information to the Committee.

There being no further business to come before the Committee, Councilman Lee moved to adjourn. Councilman Hosmer 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 was adjourned at approximately 1:10 p.m.

Prepared by Lauren Fischer