

MINUTES

COUNCIL-MANAGER BRIEFING

JUNE 8, 2009

The Council-Manager Briefing was called to order by Mayor Ronald A. D'Epifanio at 6:00 p.m. at the Fairfield Community Arts Center, 411 Wessel Drive with the following Councilmembers present Mike Oler, Tim Abbott, Marty Judd, Tim Meyers, Terry Senger, Mike Snyder, and Mitch Rhodus. Also present: Art Pizzano, Dennis Stuckey, Erin Donovan, Rick Helsing, Jim Bell, Joseph Waldmann, Dave Crouch, John Clemmons, Mary Hopton, Dena Morsch, and Steve Wolterman.

Comprehensive Plan Review

Planning Manager Erin Donovan stated the Comprehensive Plan has not been updated in over twenty five years. She explained that the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to provide a strategic long-term vision and basic goals, objectives and policies to help guide the City's future growth and development. She further explained it is an overview; it makes recommendations on how to achieve stated goals, it's long range, and it's outlook into the future. She commented the old one was twenty five years and this proposed one is going to be twenty years into the future. She explained the topics being discussed tonight include housing, economic development, public utilities, services facilities and schools, parks and open space and sustainability. She explained also the plan addresses intergovernmental relationships with the regional agencies in other jurisdictions and it links the recommendations to the Capital Improvement Plan. Ms. Donovan discussed the existing housing listed by type noting the majority of the housing in the area is single family. She stated the housing element provides a framework that the City of Fairfield can use as a guide in providing adequate and appropriate housing for existing and future residents. Ms. Donovan explained in the near future we are going to have a demand for empty nester housing as our baby boomer population enters retirement age. She explained two good examples of those types of housing include Benchway Landominiums off of Mack Road and the Lauryn Meadows duplexes off Pleasant Avenue. She explained that we are more than 80% built out. Ms. Donovan discussed the housing units in Fairfield. She stated it was estimated that we have about 18,150 residential units in Fairfield. She stated we have an objective in the land use plan that strives for a housing mix ratio of 70% housing from your single family and 30% housing from multi-family zoning districts. Ms. Donovan stated we have very little if any buildable multi-family zoned property that is vacant left. She discussed the age of the housing structures. She stated economic development is the cornerstone of the comprehensive plan because it is the central factor in a community's ability to sustain itself and provide services. She further stated there are approximately 1,500 businesses in Fairfield that employ 30,000 workers. She explained there are four business districts primarily that we have including Route 4 Corridor which has an estimated 500 businesses which represents more than 20% of our income tax revenue; the industrial are east of Route 4, the Mack/South Gilmore district and the Town Center area. Ms. Donovan stated we have over 900 acres of industrial zoned land available for development. She further commented we don't have many large tracts of land available for immediate development, which may restrict the city when competing for large scale projects. She further commented there are a lot more frequent redevelopment project and she listed a few examples. She briefly discussed there is plenty of capacity at the water plant right now, but will probably need to do a re-rating study to meet future development. She further explained they will continue to repair, maintain and replace their existing water lines. She stated there is an interceptor line that is in the Capital Improvement Plan to carry large volumes of water from the water treatment plant to Seward Road. She explained wastewater services will continue with the ongoing repairs, replacement and maintenance of sewer lines to eliminate infiltration and rainwater into the lines. Ms. Donovan explained the chapter in the plan for services, facilities and school includes a general overview of the police and fire services, municipal court, solid and green waste collection, telecommunication facilities, gas/electric services and educational facilities. She stated it discusses the state's program to replace the outdate school buildings and the process the school must go through to receive this funding. Ms. Donovan stated Fairfield has a very diverse parks system that is still growing despite the little land that we have left to dedicate for parks. She briefly explained the existing parks, future parks and the open space. She discussed the future project for the expansion of Marsh Lake and Black Bottom. Ms. Donovan gave a definition of sustainability and listed the keys sustainability factors as listed in the chapter. She discussed the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system for green buildings. Mr. Bachman explained the private sector is starting to look into wind turbines. Ms. Donovan discussed the City's benchmarking of the ecological impacts of green house gas emissions related to city operations. She further explained the City's development of a computer based database to convert electricity and natural gas usage to greenhouse gas equivalents that will allow us to compare our future usage to track our energy conservation efforts. Ms. Donovan discussed sustainable initiatives that we are looking into or that are in the pipeline include having a hybrid vehicle, having received an energy grant from the federal government for about \$187,000 that has to be used to be used towards energy saving improvements to local government facilities, HVAC upgrades at the City building and light upgrades at the Justice Center. She discussed an upcoming project to use the generator at the water plant and take the main system off the grid the money saved can go toward maintenance of the generator. Ms. Donovan explained the city will look into reducing the amount of oil changes, reducing lighting at Village Green and possibly of installing insulated roofing materials. Councilmember Abbott stated there is a national ranking for sustainability for communities and it would be nice to know where we stand once we are ready for that.

Code Enforcement/Distressed Property Update

Development Services Director Tim Bachman gave a recap of property maintenance inspections and violations from the first five months from 2006 to 2009. He discussed the spike in inspections is due to the new programs, the follow-up inspections, the NEAT program inspections and the multi-family unit to unit inspections of Heritage Glen. He explained the multi-family unit to unit inspections resulted in an increase in property violations in 2008. Mr. Bachman discussed the breakdown of vacant structures beginning with 2002 and ending with 2008. He discussed that only four have remained vacant for two years and 19 from 2007 with 86 new vacant structures in 2008 for a total of 109 total vacant structures. He further explained as of May 31, 2009 there are 66 vacant homes and businesses, with 61 of those are homes and five are businesses. He explained that 37 of the vacant homes are new and two of the businesses are newly vacant. He stated he thinks we are starting to see that curve come up with regard to vacancies. Mr. Bachman discussed that 36 structures are maintained by the City with vacant lots not counted. He explained that there are 157 ongoing cases of foreclosure as of May 31, 2009. He further explained foreclosures are reviewed daily with weekend inspections to make sure they are being maintained. Mr. Bachman discussed the property maintenance elements including the process for handling repeat offenders. He explained the follow up zoning "FUZ" goal is to touch every 2008 offender twice. He commented we are on target to have 456 addresses reviewed by June 30 and as of May 31 we have done 409. He further explained that of the 63 FUZ inspections, 15 percent were a violation. Mr. Bachman discussed ways in which property maintenance is being publicized including a hotline which has received 143 calls from February 9, 2009 to May 29, 2009. He explained that the numbers spiked when featured in the newsletter. He explained next year they are considering tagging properties with a placard to let people know the property is already in our system and to reduce several people calling on the same property. Mr. Bachman discussed the NEAT Program stating the goal is to have 2000 homes done a year and we are going to make that. He noted that 1011 are complete in three different areas and area four is underway with 371 homes. He stated it is lower than anticipated that of those thousand so far complete inspections we had violations in 77 or 7.6 percent. Mayor D'Epifanio commented he has had numerous calls from those that have lost their job and are trying to keep their homes, but can't keep up with repairs. Mr. Bachman responded it is a tough time for a lot of people and there is that balance of who is trying to work through the process and is genuine and who is not. He explained as part of the NEAT Program surveys are sent out that comes back. Mr. Bachman discussed for the breakdown of topics by survey respondents and the longevity of respondents. He discussed for multi-family in 2008 for the first five months there were 897 inspections compared to 587 inspection in 2009, 167 violations in 2008 and 902 violations in 2009 and seven court cases in 2008 and zero new court cases in 2009. Mr. Bachman discussed the court activity noting there are greater court cases in 2008 and 2009 than the previous three years. He explained Judge Campbell is using the tool that if second offenders plead no contest or are found guilty and violation remedied, the defendant will be convicted with non-reporting two year probation as a requirement. He further explained to date, this year, the judge has imposed this penalty seven times with probation violation three times. Mr. Bachman explained the case management noting the average number of days has been reduced from 56.74 in 2008 to 30 days in 2009. He reviewed the 2009 work plan which includes continuing the "FUZ" program, starting and implementing neighborhood enhancement, delegating more routine task to grass cutting contracts, delegating more routine task to grass cutting contract, reducing average days per case by ten percent, and meeting the mandates as set by the court for Heritage Glen and continuing proactive multi-family inspections. Councilmember Abbott stated it sounds like the hotline is working. Councilmember Abbott asked on foreclosed properties where the house is vacant why do the banks wait so long to try to do something with those properties and is there anything we can do to be proactive with those banks and try to get them back in use. Law Director Clemmons explained the difficulty in reaching banks that often have corporate headquarters located elsewhere. Mr. Bachman explained if a home is vacant and we send the due process notice we go ahead and move forward with the maintenance.

Adjournment

The Council/Manager Briefing adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Angela Johns
Deputy Clerk of Council