

MAYOR'S NEIGHBORHOOD ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY

November 10, 2014

Tracy Corr opened the meeting on Monday, November 10, 2014 at 5:30 p.m. in the Mayor's Conference Room, City/County/Building, in Lincoln, NE.

Attendance

Fifteen citizens and four staff attended:

Tracy Corr – 40th & A NA	Jeff Schwebke -- Arnold Heights NA
Anna Eickholt – Country Club	Pat Anderson-Sifuentez – Everett NA & NW-L
Myrna Coleman – Highlands NA	Scott Richert – Indian Village NA
Dennis Hecht – Meadowlane Area RA	William Carver – Near South NA
Mike DeKalb – University Place CO	Bill Vocasek – West A NA
Jon Carlson – Mayor's Office	Wynn Hjermsstad – Urban Development Dept.
Sheree Goertzen – NeighborWorks-Lincoln	Mike Renken – NeighborWorks-Lincoln
Chris Connolly – Law Dept	Christy Eichorn – Planning Dept
Carl Eskridge – City Council	Michael Mota – Surefire Properties, LLC
Leirion Gaylor Baird – City Council	

Welcome & Introductions, Volunteer to Take Notes

Meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Corr. Everyone introduced themselves. Pat Anderson-Sifuentez volunteered to take notes.

Mayor's Comments

Mayor Beutler was out of town.

Land Banks

Chris Connolly, Assistant City Attorney, provided an overview of land banking. Land banking has gained some media attention recently as Omaha is in the process of assembling a land bank.

At present, the tools that Lincoln uses to address problem properties are building code enforcement and the City's new Neglected Property Ordinance, which is just beginning to be implemented. Lincoln is observing Omaha's process, but has no plans at this time to pursue establishing a land bank. The Neglected Building Ordinance (passed in August) with its registration process may effectively take care of many of Lincoln's problem properties.

Land banking is an "industrial-sized" tool for dealing with problem properties. The goal is for properties to be rehabbed or demolished, rebuilt, and then put back into private ownership and on the tax rolls. Historically, larger cities that have a bigger problem with a large number of dilapidated properties have used this tool. For example, Detroit uses a combination of multiple land banks and federal grants to purchase, demo, rebuild, and resell housing.

Land Banks -

- are political sub-divisions authorized to acquire problem (dilapidated, neglected, and/or abandoned) properties;
- can assemble a number of properties on a block or several blocks and sell land to developers;
- are used only for residential properties, not commercial properties;
- cannot own more than 7% of a city's total parcels;
- in some cases, may use eminent domain to acquire property;
- can only be options in cities with populations over 3,000;

- in Nebraska, only used by Douglas and Sarpy counties as is allowed by State law;
- are run by a Board of Directors that must reflect the ethnic diversity of the area and be comprised of a realtor, banker, developer, non-profit and landlord;
- have no power to levy or collect taxes;
- raise money through revenue bonds;
- are usually started using revenue bonds and sometimes grants;
- may become self-sustaining if enough funds are generated through successful sales of rehabbed/rebuilt housing;
- are tax exempt, although there is some question whether the exemption applies to federal taxes;
- can mitigate or discharge tax liens; and
- are allowed to rent properties for a maximum period of 12 months.

Roundtable attendees had questions:

Q. How does land banking differ from the City's current process?

A. The City now waits until fees add up before foreclosing on a property.

Q. What if owner doesn't want to sell?

A. The Neglected Property Ordinance, so far, has influenced some people to choose to sell rather than continue to pay \$500 registration fees.

Q. Wouldn't land banking be a faster way to address problem properties?

A. Depending on how the land bank is set up, the process may be fairly speedy -- once the Board establishes a process for purchasing properties. The land bank may streamline the process of taking care of problem properties for those owners who want to get rid of their property. Some owners may see 'giving' their property to a land bank as more preferable than 'giving' it to the City.

For more information, see LB1137 -- the Nebraska Municipal Land Bank bill -- sponsored by Sen. Heath Mello in the 2012 Legislative session:

http://www.nebraskalegislature.gov/bills/view_bill.php?DocumentID=16105.

Announcements; Proposed Zoning Text Amendments

Christy Eichorn, from the Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Department, presented draft text amendments to the City's wireless facilities regulations; specifically concerning cell towers; and another amendment regarding exceptions to front yard requirements in commercial districts.

Ms. Eichorn and Tracy Corr, as a Planning Commissioner, encouraged those present as well as others from neighborhood associations to respond to the amendments -- whether in support or not -- so commissioners know what their constituents think about the proposed changes. To respond, email Christy at ceichorn@lincoln.ne.gov or call 402-441-7491.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Mayor's Neighborhood Roundtable will be on December 8th at 5:30 p.m. William Carver will report on graffiti abatement.

Jon Carlson and Chris Connolly will report on the Neglected Property Ordinance in about 6 months (May or June 2015) -- enough time to determine how well it is working.

Notes submitted by Pat Anderson-Sifuentez