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CITY OF UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS, OHIO
COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
APRIL 5, 2022

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Vice Mayor Michele Weiss called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Present were: Councilmen Christopher Cooney, Justin Gould, Brian King, and John Rach; Councilwomen Barbara Blankfeld and Sheri Sax; Mayor Michael Brennan; Fire Chief Robert Peko; Police Chief Dustin Rogers, Finance Director Dennis Kennedy; Housing and Community Development Director, Geoff Englebrecht, and City Engineer Joseph Cuini. Also present was Cuyahoga County Policy Advisor James Boyle

Agenda Item

- 1. Discussion regarding the possible funding for City Council retreat visions above and beyond any administration request. Representative from Cuyahoga County will be in attendance.**

Mrs. Weiss welcomed and thanked Mr. James Boyle, Policy Advisor for Cuyahoga County Council for attending this meeting. Mr. Boyle noted that there are ARPA funds available within certain parameters, noting that Councilwoman Stephens is interested in what municipalities can use funds for.

Vice Mayor Weiss reported that she and Councilman Gould met with Cuyahoga County Councilwoman Cheryl Stephens a few weeks ago and discussed funding ideas. Mrs. Weiss stated that there were many good ideas generated from the recent Council retreat; noting that major concerns are the northwest corner of the City and facilities, including the acquisition of property to expand City Hall. Mrs. Weiss noted that everyone's ideas are needed in this effort to acquire funding and asked for input from all and that many of the ideas generated could fit into this funding availability.

Discussion continued about how funds could be best used. Councilman Gould discussed the city's housing stock and how it could be improved with efforts to help residents. Some of the homes in the Jackson area were cited as an example. Mr. Gould commented that there are homeowners who earn too much money to qualify for targeted grant assistance programs, yet don't make enough to do repairs/upkeep themselves and as a result, the housing stock deteriorates. Reference was made to a March 7, 2022 presentation to Council by Ben Greenberg and Spiro Sintsirmas regarding the Ohio Revised Code and Receiverships created to eliminate residential blight and public nuisance structures. This idea was discussed at length and it was believed that exploring this idea would be not only good for homeowners, but could also generate income for the City as homes were being updated and/or sold, utilizing CIC as a vehicle to receive and disburse funding in cooperation with public entities – a win-win.

Mr. Boyle stated that all requests for assistance from ARPA had to be items incurred between the time frame of March 3, 2020 and December 31, 2024, emphasizing the time frame is important.

Infrastructure costs and facilities would qualify for assistance; written requests for the funds must be provided ensuring compliance with ARPA guidelines.

Councilman Gould further described efforts to improve the housing stock and how the receivership program could work. Mr. Gould suggested that there could possibly be a program where potential foreclosures were identified as well as homeowners needing assistance. This could be accomplished with sustainable investments. He detailed scenarios where targeted homes are identified and in cooperation with public partnership (i.e. Sheriff, banks, CIC) assistance can be provided to save/update homes. A program could be developed wherein a house sells at auction, the funds would come back to the City. Developers could be attracted by the transformation.

Councilwoman Blankfeld agreed that transformation is positive and that such efforts promote health and safety to those affected, often aged homes. It was pointed out that there are many absent landlords in the City neglecting property. Councilman Rach discussed a program in another city where first-time homeowners were encouraged to be landlords living on property and taking care of same.

The method of how CIC would funnel these efforts was discussed, pointing out that public restrictions are not as stringent as if the City would be facilitating the funding/investments.

Mrs. Weiss noted that it is important to do something immediate for homeowners, to determine what is important to residents now and it is important to invest in the city.

Mr. Boyle commented that Councilwoman Stephens stressed that programs must be good for the community, not good for politics and that University Heights should be united in what is being requested.

There were comments from the audience.

Mr. Paul Lindner a long-time resident, stated that the revenue stream idea is a good one. However, he pointed out that streets and sidewalks need to be taken care of – infrastructure needs to be addressed including basins, foundations. Mr. Linder applauded the good points of University Heights, stating that is a “jewel on the hill”.

Another resident, who lives on Jackson Road, stated that the city needs to have decent sidewalks and streets. She mentioned a barrier and/or fence at the end of the street that has been destroyed for years. Among other comments, she suggested that a metal fence be installed so people cannot climb over it. She also stated that there needs to be a police presence in the area, that there are safety issues, and that perhaps there can be police on bikes patrolling. She stated that the area had been neglected for multiple administrations. She was delighted that the western area is now being

considered. She noted that resurfacing on Jackson had not been done since 1996 and that there are also issues on Raymont and Washington.

It was mentioned that crime is a concern for all cities and with reference to vacant or unattended homes, some are being foreclosed and often there are problems with defunct banks, titles being sought, etc. Mr. Gould noted that the receivership program discussed would address these issues. Regarding the fence, Vice Mayor asked Mayor Brennan if he were aware of the fence problem; he stated he wasn't aware that it was currently a problem. Mrs. Weiss stated she thought that a steel fence would be a good idea and suggested that the Mayor check into it; Mr. Englebrecht will investigate.

Regarding comments made about the concern for the elderly walking and safety, Mrs. Weiss addressed same stating that the Cedar/Taylor-Road corridor, was an area that had been considered for benches (as well as throughout the city) for the elderly and others who just wanted to rest while out walking. Councilman Rach stated that the area is our gateway and the city needs to take an active role in harmonizing that area. Meetings had been held to address that, but seemingly the project has been put aside.

One of the comments made by a resident was to fix infrastructure, streets and sidewalks. Make working class people a priority; fix infrastructure rather than putting lipstick on a pig!

Other concerns included refabricating the bus stop at the edge of University Heights/Cleveland Heights on Cedar Road, possibly partnering with Cleveland Heights. The Huntington Bank parking lot, the shopping center status, and concern about the Taylor Road corridor, were all cited as needing attention.

Mayor Brennan stated that before the pandemic, discussions were held regarding sidewalk and curb replacement within the city. He welcomed re-visiting the issue anytime.

Vice Mayor Weiss asked for feedback. Mrs. Sax stated that she believes the program described by Councilman Gould is brilliant and that it would be so beneficial for the city. Mr. Gould stated that Mr. Englebrecht has done a great job identifying areas needing attention and following through.

Next Steps

Mrs. Weiss stated that she viewed the next steps as working with Mr. Gould to make a needs assessment for the County, talking with the Law Director and the Mayor to synchronize efforts. It would be decided whether or not to convene another meeting of this group sooner rather than later.

Motion by Mr. Gould, second by Mrs. Sax to adjourn the meeting. There being no further business to consider, the meeting adjourned.

Submitted by,
Jeune Drayton, Asst. Clerk of Council