

No. 14-100 CITY COUNCIL OF PEORIA, ILLINOIS, IN COUNCIL, ASSEMBLED YOUR COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE to Whom was Referred a POLICY SESSION Regarding BUILDING INSPECTIONS, CODE ENFORCEMENT, and NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION.

A Policy Session was held on Saturday, March 22, 2014, at ROOM, 305 SW Water Street, Peoria, Illinois, at 9:00 A.M., with Mayor Jim Ardis presiding.

ROLL CALL

Roll Call showed the following Council Members were physically present: Akeson, Jensen, Johnson, Montelongo, Moore, Spain, Riggenbach, Turner, Weaver, Mayor Ardis – 10;
Absent: Grayeb - 1.

Others present were: City Manager Patrick Urich, Community Development Director Ross Black, City Clerk Beth Ball, Chief Deputy City Clerk Stefanie Rice, Staff from Building Inspections, Code Enforcement and Neighborhood Development, interested citizens and members of the media.

Request from the City Manager and the Community Development Director to Hold a POLICY SESSION Regarding BUILDING INSPECTIONS, CODE ENFORCEMENT, and NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION.

Community Development Director Ross Black said the main focus of the Policy Session would be on building inspections, code enforcement, and neighborhood revitalization. He commented that building inspections enforced the codes, and the codes were broken into two groups: mandatory codes and locally adopted codes.

BUILDING INSPECTIONS

Director Black reviewed the Building Inspections Division of the Community Development Department noting it currently employed eight full-time employees. He reviewed the permits issued by the Department since 2000 and compared the revenue to value and the single-family permits to the total number of permits issued.

Council Member Weaver arrived at 9:14 A.M.

Director Black reviewed the number of permits issued on an annual basis in comparison to the number of employees who assisted and worked with the permits. He commented that the average revenue generated per employee through the issuance of permits was approximately \$120,000.00. He continued to review the current Staff levels, the role Staff played in the development process, and Staff's public safety role. He reviewed the issues faced by the Building Inspections Department, specifically noting the City utilized the 2006 Codes, and recommending approving and implementing the 2012 Codes.

Council Member Jensen inquired whether the other surrounding communities utilized the 2012 Code.

Director Black said, in response to Council Member Jensen, the County had already implemented the 2012 Code, and East Peoria was working on implementing the 2012 Code.

It was mentioned that the City of Peoria currently utilized the 2006 Codes; Tazwell County recently implemented the 2012 Codes at the beginning of 2014; and Washington decided to delay implementing the 2012 Codes. It was noted that the surrounding communities were equally split between the use of the 2006 Codes and the 2012 Codes; however, more communities were in the process of implementing the 2012 Codes.

Director Black said, in response to Council Member Akeson, the major difference in comparing the 2006 Codes and 2012 Codes, was the requirement for residential sprinklers. He said the City Council would not have to include that particular requirement should they adopt the 2012 Codes. He said the locally adopted Codes could be modified by local jurisdictions in order to accommodate the City's needs. He said the Codes were model codes in order to provide a basis for establishing local codes.

It was discussed that several communities that implemented the 2012 Codes had amended the residential sprinkler requirement by removing it from the locally adopted code.

In response to Council Member Spain, Director Black said an advantage to having four building inspectors, a plumbing inspector, and an electrical inspector was the City was able to inspect and enforce the Codes better than communities with limited staffing. He said the capacity to verify that buildings were being built to code was not equal throughout the Tri-County region.

In response to Council Member Weaver, discussions were held regarding the Energy Code. It was mentioned that the City attempted to reinforce with all the builders that the Energy Code was a State Law, and it was the State who adopted the International Energy Code. It was noted that the International Energy Code had to be met regardless of where development took place, and it was not something the City implemented, but rather it was the State of Illinois, and the City was charged with making sure that Code was met.

Director Black addressed Council Member Moore and said Staff would provide the City Council with a comparison of the 2006 and 2012 Codes and identify the major differences between the two. In order to facilitate discussions and recommendations, he said Staff would provide a summary of the two Codes. He said the International Code Commission did not provide a comparison of the two Codes, but he mentioned other communities had already compiled a comparison. He said Staff would review these other comparisons and make any modifications needed for Peoria's locally adopted codes.

In response to Council Member Jensen, Director Black said Staff would seek input from developers and the business community prior to introducing the 2012 Codes to the City Council for adoption.

Director Black said, in response to Council Member Akeson, there was a City Construction Commission, with very specific membership requirements, who represented the building community at large. He said any proposal to adopt a new set of codes would go through the Construction Commission first; however, Staff would conduct an outreach to the building community in addition to meeting with the Construction Commission.

In response to Council Member Spain, Director Black said there were 2012 versions of all the 2006 Codes. He noted that the 2015 Codes were almost complete; however, he recommended that the City stay within the same cycle as the other surrounding communities within the Tri-County area for consistency.

Council Member Spain emphasized the importance of educating the developers that most regulations came from the State versus the City, and he said it was important to let them know it was the City's obligation to enforce those regulations. He also stated the importance of informing the developers that the City's Codes paralleled the surrounding communities' Codes.

In response to Council Member Spain, Director Black said the main difference between the City of Peoria and the surrounding communities regarding building inspections related to the enforcement of the Codes. He said this was because the City had more personnel available for inspections of new constructions.

Council Member Moore left the meeting at 9:30 A.M.

Council Member Riggerbach asked if Staff informed developers that the Codes were State standards.

It was mentioned that a large component of a building inspector's position was not only to enforce, but to educate the developer as well.

Director Black reviewed the issues faced by the Building Inspections Department. He provided various examples of plans tendered to the City for issuance of building permits.

It was discussed that the City Building Inspectors' first priority was to work with the developers rather than to issue "stop work" orders.

Council Member Spain commented on how the City was perceived when it came to building inspections. However, he commented that national firms that came to Peoria to consider development were complimentary about the City's permit process. He said the issues were mainly with the small developers who were not knowledgeable of the process and were reluctant to contact the City. He recommended offering smaller developers an advocate to act as an intermediary between the regulatory functions and the inspection functions.

Council Member Weaver commented that there were times when contractors were resistant to getting building permits because the additional requirements would increase the cost of the bid. He commented that some of the Code requirements were not necessary for certain projects. He remarked that additional Code requirements had the potential of negatively impacting a contractor's bid by greatly increasing the bidding costs.

Director Black continued to review issues identified in the building inspections process.

Council Member Akeson recommended initiating a type of pro bono program for the small businesses to obtain guidelines when trying to submit plans to the City for permits.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

Community Development Director Black reviewed the City's Code Enforcement Department. He provided an overview of their duties, staffing levels, Code enforcement districts, and Code enforcement activities.

In response to Council Member Weaver, Director Black said 70% of Code enforcement issues were identified by the Code Enforcement Officer while enroute to the original complaint. He said these additional issues were within the same vicinity of the original call.

Code Enforcement Director Joe Dulin remarked, in response to Council Member Jensen, the Code Enforcement Officers took a systematic approach to inspecting properties known to have issues. He said the Code Enforcement Officers were aware of problem locations.

Director Black reviewed the issues faced by the Code Enforcement Department.

Discussions were held regarding vacant lots and foreclosed properties and who was responsible for the upkeep of these properties.

Discussions were held regarding illegal dumping. It was mentioned that more dumping was coming from small businesses trying to avoid the EPA requirements. It was noted that most of the illegal dumping took place on the south side of the City where old tires were dumped in alleys and vacant lots. It was discussed that there were issues with PDC refusing to collect couches, dilapidated furniture, and mattresses. It was mentioned that the majority of the issues took place south of War Memorial Drive, and there were no issues north of War Memorial Drive.

Director Black said, in response to Council Member Spain, that the illegal dumping of old tires was a national problem. He commented that any City would attract tire dumping if there were locations that accommodated dumping. He remarked that there was currently no financial benefit to shredding and recycling tires. In response to Council Member Akeson, he said shredded tires could be mixed in with asphalt for streets; however, this was not a cost effective plan.

Director Black continued to review the issues faced by the Code Enforcement Department.

Director Black said, in response to Council Member Spain, neighborhood turnover was a measurement of neighborhood stability. He remarked that the data collected was done every three years.

Council Member Montelongo and Council Member Weaver requested Staff to calculate the cost to the City of collecting and disposing of dumped tires, inclusive of labor costs.

Director Black said Staff would track the cost of collecting and disposing of tires for one month in order to provide a cost summary to Council.

Regarding property foreclosures, Council Member Montelongo recommended addressing the banks for the dilapidation of foreclosed properties. He inquired what it was costing the City to address the issues of foreclosed properties.

Code Enforcement Director Dulin commented that when a bank owned a foreclosed property, they generally worked with the City towards a demolition. He said the bank would approach the City and ask them to take the property. He said the foreclosures with deeds that were in limbo had more Code enforcement issues.

Council Member Moore arrived at 11:00 A.M.

NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT/GRANTS MANAGEMENT

Community Development Director Ross Black reviewed the Neighborhood Development Department and Grants Management. He commented that the major funding sources came from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnership and

Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG), and he reviewed their purpose. He reviewed the historic HUD funding levels and provided an example of a HUD Budget.

In response to Council Member Weaver, Director Black said the City did not have enough funding to address the needs. He commented that the City's HUD funds have dropped from assisting 80% of adjusted growth to 50%. He noted that the funding was capped at the low-income households, and the City could only impact a fraction of those households.

Director Black reviewed the programs offered by the City, and the number of residents who received these types of programs.

In response to Council Member Moore, Director Black explained how the City contracted with various contractors in order to ensure the needed work or repair was done appropriately.

Council Member Turner left the meeting at 11:20 A.M.

Director Black reviewed the City's approach to offer various programs, and he reviewed various projects that were completed by the City through these programs.

Council Member Moore recommended the City obtaining ownership of some of the homes in the foreclosure process prior to the home's deterioration. She said there needed to be a solution on a bank-owned property to prevent the property from becoming dilapidated.

Council Member Akeson recommended imploring the assistance of local bank representatives to formulate a solution for homes undergoing the foreclosure process.

Council Member Montelongo left the meeting at 11:30 A.M.

Director Black said the City had good relationships with most of the lenders processing foreclosures. He said the City had been successful working with lenders on homes needing demolition. He commented that the majority of the homes needing demolition were not foreclosures, rather they were properties home owners had abandoned. In response to Council Member Moore, he said the reason why a homeowner would walk away from their home was that there was little economic benefit in the upkeep of that property.

Council Member Akeson suggested a quantitative and qualitative matrix that would allow the City to focus its resources, particularly in the First, Second and Third Districts.

Council Member Moore said in response to Council Member Akeson that Staff was already implementing that process in working with her on the South Side.

Council Member Riggerbach requested updates on dialogues with the banks regarding foreclosed properties and whether there were still problem areas where the Council could assist in the process. He remarked that the Attorney General Grant the City received came from a lawsuit that was brought by the State of Illinois against five national banks. He said the City of Peoria was awarded \$3 million from that settlement. He said Staff worked to draft a grant application using the East Village Growth Cell. He said a lot of the focus for those funds was towards new construction, rehabilitation, demolition. He said this provided an opportunity to put some of the principles discussed today into practice.

Council Member Weaver said the City had too many houses in housing stock. He said if there were not enough people to fill the houses, they would decrease in value. He said people could

not buy homes in these neighborhoods and expect to get a return. In this case, he said it was more feasible to rent than to buy.

Director Black reviewed issues faced by the Neighborhood Development and Grants Management.

Discussions were held regarding the limited resources the City had in order to positively impact the community. Council Member Moore said there was no comprehensive design to address these situations. She said a comprehensive design would provide some coverage for the City Council in order to better address the citizens when they called.

Council Member Spain said there should be a basic level of service available to all neighborhoods and perhaps a more focused or enhanced level of investment.

ACTIONS

Community Director Black reviewed proposed actions for Building Inspections. He distributed a guide entitled "Guide to Development."

Director Black said the City's Development Guide would be updated and made available electronically. He said there was universal positive feedback from the "One Stop Shop" Program offered for potential business owners. He said Staff could enhance the "One Stop Shop" for people who had more technical questions and those questions could be addressed.

Director Black said, in response to Council Member Spain, a commonly adopted Code for the entire Tri-County area, with a common set of interpretations, provides for no Code advantage to building in one location versus another.

Director Black said, in response to Council Member Moore, the Development Guide and Checklist would address both new development and repurposed buildings. He commented that there was going to be a shift of Building Inspectors being assigned geographically as part of a team approach. In response to Mayor Ardis, he commented that there would be back-up inspectors when an inspector was unavailable.

Director Black said in response to Council Member Spain that a developer could obtain all the necessary permits from the Development Center. However, he commented that anything to do with the Fire Department, permits had to be obtained there, and anything to do with Public Works, permits had to be obtained there. He said payments were made at a completely different location. He said permits could not be applied for or paid for online.

Council Member Spain said in response to Director Black, this was a conversation the Council and Staff needed to have with the City Treasurer. He said the City needed to be more customer friendly, and he remarked on the importance of accommodating various forms of payment. He said the Development Center should be able to accommodate all of these issues.

Mayor Ardis said there was a concern with checks and balances when it came to payments being accepted at various locations or even electronically. He requested City Manager Ulrich to schedule a meeting with the City Treasurer to discuss the issue and to invite interested Council Members.

In response to Council Member Akesson, Director Black said the goal of the Development Center was to allow for permitting within the City. He said there were communities who had a

representative from various departments located within the same area to assist with permitting. He said this would allow for the bundling of a project, which could be done electronically. He said a potential developer should be able to conduct all the business necessary within one location versus multiple locations. He said there should be the capability to apply for a permit online.

City Manager Urich commented that the Development Center should be able to handle the permitting necessary for the Fire Department and the Public Works Department without having Staff from each Department relocated to the Development Center.

Council Member Spain said the City should be able to communicate more efficiently with its customers and be able to clearly explain what needs to be done when it comes to permitting and inspections.

Director Black said he had been working with the City Manager to make some administrative changes to address these issues.

Director Black reviewed the proposed actions for Code Enforcement, and he explained the quality first.

Discussions were held regarding vacant lots and how to address these issues. On average, Director Black reported that the City spent approximately \$220,000.00 per year on vacant lots.

Mayor Ardis said it would be nice to incorporate or incentivize with some form of beautification such as paint, trees or flowers. He said the cleanup was important, but beautification was just as important. He said this should be discussed as part of the overall program.

Council Member Jensen said she would like to see more targeted sweeps such as in the West Bluff, Central Bluff, East Bluff, and South Side.

Council Member Moore commented that the shortened time in response to an abatement notice would affect properties being dumped on by a third party. She recommended being cautious implementing this proposed action.

Director Black reviewed the Neighborhood Wellness Plan. In response to Council Member Weaver, he said he was looking for consent from the City Council to develop this plan. He explained the level of service that should be provided to different areas within the City. He said Staff would review this plan more thoroughly and bring back to the City Council for continued discussion.

Council Member Jensen expressed her appreciation for the proposal that offered a targeted strategic approach.

Director Black said, in response to Council Member Akeson, that Code Enforcement currently worked with the Police Department. He said there was a good informal working relationship.

City Manager Urich said there have been discussions with the Police Department and the Fire Department on how they could assist in the neighborhoods when not responding to an emergency.

Council Member Akeson said there should be a more formal process in working with the other departments.

Discussions were held about the homeownership within the area, specifically noting that the homeownership in the East Bluff had decreased to 50% ownership and 50% renters. It was noted that ownership stabilized a neighborhood, and that problems occurred with landlords who would not care for their properties nor screen their renters. However, it was noted to be careful of expectations and that it was not necessary to increase home ownership, but rather to improve property ownership.

City Manager Urich said there was an increase in property rental.

City Manager Urich said Staff would make a direct connection between entitlement dollars received and where those dollars were applied in order to see how those monies were utilized.

Mayor Ardis expressed his appreciation for the presentation and format. He requested using this model format going forward for continued discussions on issues that come up.

Director Black welcomed the City Council to ride with Code Enforcement and Building Inspections to see what their duties entailed.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Ardis closed the Policy Session at 1:56 P.M.



Beth Ball, MMC, City Clerk
City of Peoria, Illinois

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