

**Housing and Third Ward Revitalization Task Force
Minutes
October 16, 2023
6:30 p.m.**

The Housing and Third Ward Revitalization Task Force held virtually on Monday, October 16, 2023 at the Heman Park Community Center. The meeting commenced at 6:30 p.m. and adjourned at 8:57 p.m.

Voting Members Present:

Byron Price – Chair
Linda Peoples-Jones
Patricia McQueen
Christina Dancy
Susan Murray
Mayela Zambrano
Christopher Flood
Ariel Gardner

Voting Members Absent:

Craig Hughes

Staff Present:

Brooke A. Smith, Deputy City Manager/Dir. of Economic Development
Dr. John Wagner, Director of Planning and Development
John Mulligan, City Attorney
Ed Sharrer and Kevin Wright, Yard & Company

Public Comments

Patrick Fox, 1309 Purdue

Mr. Fox said he was glad to see that attendance was growing for the task force meetings. He stated to Yard & Company that the expectations for this initiative is high and they need to perform. He said he understands it's a slow and considerate process, noting that he understands that they want to make careful and considerate decisions but that something needs to be done. He suggested starting with smaller projects once they have some data available. He said he knows they are further along in the journey but there is still a ways to come.

Chair Byron Price clarified that Yard & Company would not make a decision, noting that the Task Force will make a recommendation and the City Council will ultimately make the final decision.

Flood Information – Dr. John Wagner, Director of Planning and Development

Dr. John Wagner presented information on the July 2022 flood that was requested by the Task Force.

Dr. Wagner answered various questions from the task force members. Discussion was had on how the information was obtained, information available from SEMA and FEMA, and the actual number of people affected by the flood.

Christina Dancy asked about media reports of the funding awarded to the city. John Wagner provided information to the best of his knowledge. He discussed the applications that were submitted and the projects they were submitted for. Christina asked if John is the contact for residents who are impacted and may have questions. John confirmed that he is the contact.

Chair Price asked if the buyout on Wilson was on the north side of the street. John Wagner said the homes on the east side of Wilson were bought out in 2009 and the red dots are the west side of Wilson are the ones proposed to be bought out now. Further discussion was had.

Susan Murray asked why all the houses on Wilson aren't being bought out. John Wagner said there are there are empty lots that were previously bought out and there are no houses on those lots. He said there was another property he would have liked to include and he will try to find a way to get it on the next application. Further discussion was had about properties on Birch Lane.

Patricia McQueen said she was looking at the list that was sent out and asked if it was an excel list. John said it was. She said she highlighted all the third ward properties and asked about a property in the second ward and plans for it after the buyout. She also asked if there was a plan for the third ward properties that were on the list and not part of the buyout. John said he would continue to work with those residents to find solutions. Patricia asked if the Stormwater Commission was providing advice. John said they were.

Christopher Flood asked how the city chose the applications they did. John Wagner said they worked with Public Safety, specifically the Fire Chief, to identify properties that flood on a regular basis, noting there were a lot of properties affected. Chris asked how the city process worked, asking if it was the staff that proposed the best fit (John said yes) and if there were criteria that are within the FEMA grant process that favored one type of property over another (John said not that he was aware of). Further discussion was had on this.

Chair Price allowed questions from the audience at this time. John Wagner answered those questions.

Eminent Domain for Single Family Homes – John Mulligan, City Attorney

John Mulligan provided background information on this agenda item. He explained how acquiring dilapidated structures in need of renovation or demolition or clearance is a public purpose and that allows the city to acquire a property by eminent domain. He explained the eminent domain process according to state statute. John Mulligan explained that the city intends to identify properties that are appropriate to initiate this process to acquire. He said the hope was that if the letter is provided to the owner that the city intends to take the property by eminent domain, the owner will either bring the property into compliance or the city will move forward with the eminent domain process. He said the TIF funds would be used to acquire the property and the property, once acquired, can be sold to a development to bring into compliance.

Councilmember Stacy Clay who was in the audience, provided additional information on this initiative and the thinking behind it.

Linda Peoples-Jones asked how this would apply to seniors on fixed incomes that have a hard time maintaining their properties. Councilmember Clay answered that the focus is on vacant properties.

Members from the audience were allowed to speak on this topic.

Christina Dancy asked how the city can be sure they aren't working with developers that will turn around and sell the house for an excessive amount that current residents of the third ward cannot afford. Further discussion was had on this topic.

Additional discussion was had with the members of the audience on the eminent domain process and how it would work, if approved.

Discussion was had on the importance of community engagement and hearing from the residents is important in order to advocate for the community and make the appropriate recommendations to the Council. Audience members were encouraged to continuing attending the meetings and providing their input.

Chris Flood said he was not sure of the purpose of this, asking if it was an informational item or if something is being asked of the task force tonight. Deputy City Manager Brooke Smith said it was information and for input as the City Manager does intend to present this item at the next City Council meeting. Smith said the City Manager would like to hear the task force's thoughts on this matter. Chris said he is extremely uncomfortable with the proposal, noting that the city has so far been unwilling to spend the TIF money until a plan is in place and currently there is no plan. He said eminent domain is controversial and that he does not think something so controversial should be used first and prior to a plan being in place and not in advance of other tools that can be implemented.

Mayela Zambrano asked if there was an estimate or budget for this initiative. John Mulligan said no budget has been set and it would be up to the City Council, noting that the value of the properties would have to be determined first. He explained why. Mayela said if she understood correctly, the city does not have the funds to move forward unless they allocate some TIF money. John Mulligan said that it would be up to the City Council to allocate the funds, noting that \$3 million is available from the TIF and other sources may be available as well. Councilmember Clay provided additional input.

Christina Dancy asked how many properties are they talking about. Councilmember Clay said there were two that had been identified. Councilmember Smotherson, who was also in the audience, added that the task force has to understand that before the task force was formed, this was one of the tools that was intended to be used for vacant properties. He provided additional information on this matter. Discussion was had.

Susan Murray said she had a number of a questions. She said the task force has been meeting for a year and a half and this is the first they are hearing of this being part of the plan. She said it sounds like a pretty flushed out plan that is ready to go to Council and she finds that disturbing as she does not want to feel like she has been wasting her evenings once a month for a year and a half. Susan also said that she agrees that eminent domain is a useful tool and sometimes the best tool, but this feels like the cart before the horse because currently there is no plan, priorities have not been identified, and the task force has not identified the areas that can benefit the most from intervention. She said she would

hate to see the money scattered around. Susan also voiced her concerns about spending the money, underlying policies and support systems, with her focusing on the policies for using eminent domain. Susan said everyone wants to improve the quality of life for the homeowners, but stated that she would much prefer to use the funds to assist those that were affected by the flood or seniors that are unable to repair their homes. Susan further discussed why having policies in place is important, stating that she does not think it is time to make decisions yet.

Chair Price clarified that the task force does not make policy, noting that it does not have the legal authority to do so. He stated that the city can move forward regardless. Discussion was had on this.

Patricia McQueen said that she has been very concerned about vacant buildings. She referenced two vacant properties near her own resident and the code violations on those properties. She said there used to be a list of vacant properties kept by the city. She said this might be a good recommendation to make, reinstating the list of vacant properties. She said the timing of the eminent domain request is concerning for a variety of reasons. Patricia said there is a lot to consider but something does need to be done about vacant housing. She stated that vacant houses are ripe for crime and provided examples. Patricia said she is glad to hear the administration and City Council are concerned and noted that they will probably move forward regardless of how the task force feels.

Councilmember Clay stated that the Council wanted the task force's input and they will consider it along with the input of the residents that have been dealing with the derelict properties for years without relief.

Susan Murray said she does not disagree; she just has concerns.

Christina Dancy asked if this was going to Council soon. Deputy City Manager Brooke Smith stated that it would be going to Council at the next meeting on October 23rd.

Susan Murray asked if at that meeting will it be recommended to spend the TIF money on this. Smith answered yes. Susan asked how much, Smith said she did not know the number and Councilmember Clay said they will take into consideration.

Chair Price said both Council members that were present have heard the input. He said he does agree with Susan Murray that this may be premature for the Task Force to consider.

Patricia McQueen stated that they are dealing with this in St. Louis City and she referenced their program.

A member of the audience asked a question and task force members responded.

Chris Flood said for the sake of clarity, he thinks a recommendation should be provided to the Council.

Motioned by Chris Flood, seconded by Ariel Gardner to recommend to the Council that they not use TIF funds for eminent domain to acquire vacant properties.

Chris noted that the task force is not necessarily against it, but that it is premature.

Chair Price called for a roll call vote.

Christopher Flood	Aye
Susan Murray	Aye
Ariel Gardner	Aye
Craig Hughes	Absent
Christina Dancy	Aye
Patricia McQueen	Nay
Mayela Zambrano	Aye
Linda Peoples-Jones	Aye
Chair Byron Price	Aye

Motion carried.

Yard & Co. Update

Ed Sharrer of Yard & Company briefly introduce himself and gave background on Yard & Co. to those present. Kevin Wright introduced himself to those present as well. Ed then presented the DRAFT Summary of Understanding which he said encapsulates everything learned during Phase I. He said this document is intended to present what the consultants think they heard and get feedback from the task force. He said they would also discuss emerging themes and ask the task force to let them know if they are on the right path.

Ed and Kevin went through the presentation and answered questions on the contents with the task force members and those in the audience.

Task Force members were told to submit additional comments on the document to Deputy City Manager Brooke Smith.

Discussion was had on moving forward with this initiative and ensuring that the word gets out about the planning process.

Task Force Member Comments

Christina Dancy thanked those in the audience for coming to the meeting and asked about how the meetings will evolve to have dialogue with those in the public. She asked if there should be separate conversations that allows for the audience to engage with the task force. Deputy City Manager Smith said that should be a separate meeting and not the regular meetings where business is handled. Further discussion was had on this topic and the logistics holding regular meetings versus listening sessions versus regular meetings.

Next Meeting – November 13, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

Adjourn

Motioned by Linda Peoples-Jones, seconded by Susan Murray and carried by voice vote to adjourn the meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 8:57 p.m.