

**Blighted Property Review Committee**  
**Tuesday, June 3, 2008**  
**Minutes**

**Members Attending:** L. Olsen, W. Bealer, M. Candelario

**Staff Attending:** J. Khokhar, L. Kelleher, J. Conway

**Others Attending:** Alan Shuman

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Mr. Olsen called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m.

**Public Comment**

Alan Shuman stated that he appeared before the BPRC to bring some problem properties to their attention.

- 212 S. 8th Street - Optical Industrial Building, building in deteriorated condition
- 15 North 5th Street - barbershop on first floor, windows boarded up 2nd and 3rd floors, \$214,000 in delinquent taxes
- Knoblauch Building in the 500 block of Penn Street, extremely deteriorated building, roof damage, stairs to upper floors removed
- 433 & 447 Penn Street (between the Callowhill bldg and the Aetna bldg), deteriorated interior and roof damage
- 754 N 9th Street (southwest corner of 9th and Douglas), deteriorated condition
- 625 Cedar Street, deteriorated condition
- 243 North 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, deteriorated condition

Mr. Shuman noted the extreme blight these properties bring to neighborhoods. He stated that the condition of the properties on Penn Street present a detriment to the redevelopment of the City's commercial core. The Committee and Mr. Shuman discussed the condition of the listed properties.

Mr. Olsen described the information obtained from the Harrisburg VPRC and BRPC. He noted that over the course of 20 years, their effort reduced the blighted properties in Harrisburg from 5000 to 1200. He also noted that the reduction of blight attracted new residential and commercial development.

Mr. Bealer stated that the Penn Street properties are not currently on the list of blighted properties produced by Greater Valley. Mr. Olsen asked Mr. Khokhar when the buildings were last inspected. The Knoblauch building has not been inspected for some time. The properties in the 400 block of Penn were inspected a few years ago. He suggested a full scale inspection (property maintenance, trades and fire)of these properties.

Mr. Shuman and Ms. Kelleher repeated the history of the buildings in the 400 block of Penn. These properties were owned by Greater Berks and were part of the transaction that transferred the Whitner's, Farr's Waco's, and, Mumma's buildings as well as the Trexler Mansion. Ms. Kelleher stated that she turned in several complaints about the interior conditions of these building at the same time the City took possession of the Trexler Mansion. At this time Greater Berks Development Corporation sold the buildings in the 400 block of Penn Street to Honest Realty. While the facades are in good condition, the interior is falling apart.

When discussing the 212 N 8th, Mr. Bealer noted that the Giannasca's are seeking the construction of an interchange that would move traffic off Canal Street and move it to South 8th and South 9th Streets.

The BPRC thanked Mr. Shuman for bringing these blighted properties to the Committees attention.

### **Approval of the Agenda and the April Meeting Minutes**

Mr. Olsen asked the BRPC to consider the agenda for this meeting and the minutes from the May meeting.

Mr. Bealer asked Ms. Kelleher to check the location of properties eligible for the City's facade grants and adjust the minutes if necessary.

Mr. Bealer moved, seconded by Mr. Candelario, to approve the agenda for this meeting and the minutes from the May meeting as corrected.

### **Blighted Property Forum**

There was a discussion on the information obtained from Harrisburg.

Ms. Kelleher stated that the format with Allentown would be similar. The visit

would start with some site visits. Afterwards, our group will sit in at the Allentown BRPC's meeting. At the completion of the meeting we will meet with the Allentown BPRC and staff.

Those going to Allentown are: Mr. Olsen, Mr. Bealer, Mr. Candelario, Ms. Wolfe, Mr. Pick, Mr. Miller, and Mr. Khokhar.

Ms. Kelleher explained that due to a Council meeting she and Mr. Fuhs are not be able to attend. She asked those present if they wished to relay any additional questions to Allentown. The responses from Harrisburg and Allentown were reviewed. The committee decided not to issue additional questions.

Mr. Olsen suggested having those going to Allentown meet at his business on Route 183, near the airport, at approximately 2:30 p.m. on Monday the 9th.

## **Updates**

### **GIS**

Mr. Bealer stated that he will begin working with Mr. Chapman to add the additional information in about 2 weeks.

### **Blighted Property Revitalization & Reclamation Act**

Ms. Kelleher stated that Ms. Mayfield told her this afternoon that she was unable to attend tonight's meeting but would have the requested information prepared at the July meeting.

Ms. Kelleher stated that the letters to the state and federal legislators will be prepared after the receipt of the brief from Ms. Mayfield.

### **Rehabilitation Programs**

Ms. Kelleher and Ms. Conway distributed the list of programs available to assist property owners with rehabilitation and repair. The list includes grants and loans from public and private institutions. The majority of the available programs focus on owner-occupied homes. The City's facade program and the loan program offered by Citizen's Bank are available to all property owners.

Ms. Kelleher explained that the City's CHDO money is allocated to NHS. Ms. Conway offered to speak with NHS to find out how this money is used.

Ms. Kelleher stated that Harrisburg CHDO money is controlled by their CD Department. She noted the challenge here in Reading as the City's CD Office is severely understaffed. It was suggested that Mr. Miller from NHS come to a meeting to discuss the use of the CHDO funds.

Ms. Kelleher suggested sending this rehabilitation information out with all Codes citations.

### **BPRC Responsibilities**

Ms. Mayfield was asked to draft a list of "Do's and Don'ts" that defines the ability of the BPRC to undertake certain activities. This list will be presented at the July meeting.

### **Home Builders Assoc. Programs**

Mr. Khokhar reported on his conversation with the HBA President Ron Rohrbach about assisting with the rehabilitation of the City's blighted properties. Mr. Khokhar suggested inviting Mr. Rohrbach to the July meeting.

### **New Business**

The BPRC reviewed the list of blighted properties suggested by Mr. Shuman.

Mr. Candelario moved, seconded by Mr. Bealer, to declare the following properties in blighted condition and order complete codes inspections at the following properties:

- 431 & 437 Penn Street (between the Callowhill bldg and the Aetna bldg), deteriorated interior and roof damage
- 212 S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street – building in deteriorated condition
- 15 North 5<sup>th</sup> Street – barbershop on the first floor, windows boarded up on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors, \$214,000 delinquent taxes
- Knoblauch Building – 530 & 532 Penn Street, extremely deteriorated building, roof damage, stairs to upper floors removed
- 431 & 437 Penn Street (between the Callowhill bldg and the Aetna bldg), deteriorated interior and roof damage
- 425 North 3<sup>rd</sup> Street – deteriorated condition
- 625 Cedar Street – blighted property being restored without permits.

The motion was approved unanimously. Ms. Kelleher was asked to prepare the order and submit it to Mr. Khokhar. Mr. Khokhar explained the process used to initiate property inspections. The Committee requested monthly updates.

### **Other Business**

No issues were raised.

No further business was brought forward. Mr. Bealer moved, seconded by Mr. Candelario, to adjourn the meeting. The next BPRC meeting will occur on Tuesday, July 1st at 6 p.m. in the City Council Office.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher, City Clerk

### **Recap of follow-up issues**

- Update on the inclusion of ADD, community gardens, OCR rehabbed properties, parking lots and demolished properties in the program provided by Great Valley - Mr. Bealer
- Review & Brief of Federal Blighted Property Revitalization and Reclamation Act and legislation proposed by Senator Rhodes - Ms. Mayfield
- Letter requesting amendment to Federal and State legislation - Ms. Kelleher
- List of BPRC "Do's and Don'ts" - Ms. Mayfield
- Meeting with President of HBA - Mr. Khokhar
- Updates on properties ordered for inspection
- Report on use of CHDO funds - meeting with NHS - Ms. Kelleher