
Blighted Property Review Committee

Thursday, June 19, 2014

Update Meeting Report

BRPC Members Attending: L. Olsen, Chair; M. Wolfe, D. Luckey, H. Urena

Others attending: L. Kelleher, T. Butler (via phone), J. Varghese, T. McMahon

Mr. Olsen, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. and announced that a quorum was present.

Public Comment

Mr. Olsen opened the floor for public comment. As no one stepped forward to speak, the comment period was closed.

Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Mr. Olsen called the BPRC's attention to the April Certification minutes that were distributed electronically and the agenda for this meeting.

Mr. Luckey moved, seconded by Ms. Wolfe, to approve the agenda and the minutes as distributed. The motion was approved unanimously.

Acquisition Handbook

Mr. Varghese stated that he has taken the time necessary to become familiar with the acquisition techniques in the Acquisition Handbook that was prepared in late 2012 and reviewed and approved by the Law Department. He stated that the City learned that using eminent domain is not necessarily the best or most efficient way to acquire property. He stated that he is now actively seeking out properties that can be used to test each approach. He stated that at this point in time, he believes that Conservatorship may be the most efficient approach as it does not require the City to be a party under the required court action.

Conservatorship is a tool authorized by Act 90, 2012. Mr. Varghese, Ms. Butler and Ms. Kelleher explained that the process begins by a developer (defined in the Act) petitioning the court for right of entry and a rehab plan. Notice is provided to the

property owner and if there is no objection the court allows the developer to begin to rehabilitate the property. At the end of rehabilitation, the developer goes back to court showing the judge the rehabilitated property with the cost of rehabilitation. The property owner is informed that he needs to either repay the developer for the rehabilitation or lose title to the property.

Mr. Varghese stated that several target properties are being considered and that he is meeting with Ms. Kelleher and Ms. Butler next week to discuss moving the Conservatorship forward.

Mr. Varghese explained that he has been meeting with Ms. Phile in the Tax Claim Bureau to gain an understanding of the tax sale process. He stated that he also held a meeting with the Housing Partners – Our City Reading, NHS, Habitat for Humanity and Reading Housing Authority. Unfortunately Our City Reading did not respond to the meeting invitation. He stated that Habitat and NHS are excited to take more properties for rehab and resale for owner occupancy. However, Ms. Kelleher noted that both would prefer to avoid the eminent domain process as it is lengthy and unreliable.

The group discussed the benefits of Conservatorship.

Other Matters

Ms. Wolfe stated that her church acquired a property from tax sale. While RAWA released the lien, the City is unwilling to release their liens, which prevents the title from transferring. Ms. Butler was asked to explore this issue and to try to identify a solution.

Mr. Varghese inquired about the selection of properties for the blighted property process. Ms. Kelleher stated that right now the properties are selected by Property Maintenance. She stated that judging from the last batch certified and the upcoming batch, Property Maintenance is concentrating on transitional areas where the property's problems are fairly minor. She stated that a number of properties corrected their deficiencies during the last cycle, which caused Property Maintenance to select 30 properties for the cycle that begins in August. *(Note: A number of properties corrected their deficiencies while the August agenda was being prepared).*

Ms. Kelleher suggested that Mr. Varghese take an active role in the selection process.

Mr. Olsen stated that the next meeting is a Certification Hearing on Thursday, August 21st at 6 pm.

Mr. Urena moved, seconded by Mr. Luckey, to adjourn the meeting at approximately 6:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher, Secretary