
Blighted Property Review Committee
Thursday, September 15, 2016
Non-Hearing Meeting Report

BPRC Members Attending: M. Wolfe, H. Urena, W. Cinfici

Others attending: L. Kelleher, K. Potts, T. Butler

Ms. Wolfe, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m. She noted that there is not a quorum; however, the committee is not considering taking action on any issue at the meeting. The meeting is informational.

Public Comment

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

Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Deferred until October Certification hearing.

After Certification

Ms. Kelleher highlighted the meeting with Mr. Twyman and Mr. Steckman regarding post certification. She stated that Mr. Steckman has some great ideas for post certification options for blighted properties; however, before those ideas can be vetted and implemented he needs to bring the new Property Improvement Division Manager on board and allow that person to become acclimated.

Ms. Kelleher stated that at the meeting Mr. Steckman noted his desire to have the 2017 budget include a \$500K program for blighted property rehabilitation. This fund would provide low interest loans that would be replenished as the money is repaid. This concept was attempted once before using the money from the sale of the former Argo site located on Buttonwood Street (now Dollar General). However, complications prevented the program from starting.

Ms. Kelleher said that she highlighted the staff work that took place to develop acquisition methods as alternatives to the costly eminent domain process and work

with NGOs such as Habitat and NHS to rehabilitate blighted properties for owner-occupancy before the Spencer administration closed those efforts down. She expressed hope that the new administration would re-start that work.

Ms. Kelleher reported that at the meeting with Mr. Twyman, Mr. Steckman asked her to prepare an ordinance reinstating the requirement for an out of town property owner to have a local property manager if the owner resides 50+ miles from Reading. She said that a location 50 miles from Reading is approximately a one (1) hour drive.

Ms. Kelleher stated that the requirement was amended out of the Housing Ordinance around 2010-12, as the Property Maintenance Manager wanted to ease regulations for property owners. She added that there was some confusion when the regulation was in place about who could be the manager. She stated that the Department of State requires property managers to either be real estate brokers or be employed by real estate brokers. She stated that the new ordinance includes the Department of State requirements for the property manager.

The committee discussed the importance of having a locally responsible manager, as they noted the number of properties that qualify as blighted properties that have absentee owners.

Mr. Cinfici inquired if notices will be mailed to the owner or the manager. Ms. Butler stated that the ordinance requires notice to be sent to both the owner and manager.

Blighted Properties on Other Communities

Ms. Potts inquired about how the Wyomissing BPRC ordinance was working. Ms. Kelleher stated that she has not heard. She noted that the County created its own BPRC process for municipalities that have blighted properties and no way to deal with them. She stated that she and Ms. Butler helped them organize their program and the documentation required.

Ms. Kelleher reported that she, Ms. Butler and Mr. Arentz were invited to Hazelton in July to make a presentation on the Blighted Property process and Property Maintenance

tools. She stated that the visit started with a tour of the areas that have blighted properties and that the problem there appears to be much worse than here in Reading.

Mr. Arentz asked questions about Hazelton's use of various basic property maintenance programs such as rental property inspections and learned that Hazelton does not use inspections and other basic tools as they are afraid of legal challenges. Hazelton only has two (2) property maintenance inspectors. During the presentation to the Hazelton City Council the City team tried to make Hazelton understand the importance of using basic property maintenance techniques to encourage the rehabilitation of properties to avoid the BPRC process and how using the BPRC process works as a last step tool to get owners to maintain properties.

Ms. Kelleher stated that she recently received a call from a municipality in Georgia inquiring about the BPRC process and property maintenance tools.

Tax Sale

Ms. Butler stated that during the past year there has been increased sales of properties on the Tax Sale Repository list, the last step in the tax sale property process. Properties on the Repository Sale list have not been purchased at the Judicial or Free and Clear tax sales. She stated that she recently learned that a property purchased at the Repository Sale was demolished by the City before title transferred to the new owner. She stated that the Tax Claim Bureau waits four (4) months from the date of the sale to process the change in title.

Ms. Kelleher expressed the belief that the delay is required due to the redemption period that allows the former property owner to reclaim the property by satisfying the tax delinquency. She recommended that Ms. Butler speak with the Tax Claim Bureau Solicitor Soc Georgeadis about the redemption period.

Ms. Wolfe described her long journey to attempt to become the owner of 628 N Front Street. She stated that she was referred to the Redevelopment Authority who suggested that she speak with the Mayor. She stated that the church located at Greenwich and N. Front is the owner of 626 N. Front and wants to also own 628 to create a parklet, a community garden and a parking lot.

Ms. Potts stated that the Mayor keeps Mondays open to meet with citizens and she suggested that Ms. Wolfe use that as an opportunity to bring this matter to his attention.

The next Certification hearing will be held on Thursday, October 20th at 6 pm.

Mr. Urena moved, seconded by Ms. Wolfe, to adjourn the meeting at approximately 7 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher, Secretary