

THE CITY OF FREDERICK
Blighted & Vacant Property Committee (BVPC)
Meeting Minutes

April 6, 2016 - 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

City Hall Board Room, 101 North Court Street, Frederick

Committee Attendance: Kathryn McKenzie, Ruthelen Greene, Kathy Griffee, Truby LaGarde, Darcy Richards, Tee Pecora, Kara Norman, Steve Cranford,

Elected Officials in Attendance: Alderman O'Connor (liaison)

City Staff in Attendance: Richard Griffin, Meredith Wivell, Joe Adkins, Brittany Parks, Dan Hoffman, and Rachel Depo

Public in Attendance: Ned Bond, Barbara Dillon

I. Approval of Minutes

On motion by Kara Norman, seconded by Darcy Richards, the minutes of the March 16, 2016 meeting were unanimously approved as presented.

II. Update on Certain Blighted Properties.

Code Enforcement staff and BVPC members discussed the status of several properties:

(1) 56 South Market Street. The property owner is working on getting Historic Preservation Commission approval, is moving towards abating the current violations, and has hired a contractor to maintain the property through the summer. The local artist who was involved with potential use of the property is looking to relocate to another site.

(It was noted at this point that the ordinance regarding boarding standards has been scheduled for a Mayor & Board workshop on April 20 and that the ordinance regarding failure to register with the state's foreclosure registry has been tentatively scheduled for a May 5 public hearing. Both documents will be sent to the BVPC members.)

(2) 123-125 North Market Street. A notice of violation has been issued for a roof leak. Building permits have been issued and work is moving along. A citation was issued for the broken storefront window and is pending trial.

At this point staff gave a brief explanation of the municipal infraction process. Additionally, it was discussed that the new smartphone app is working well and is recording complaints real-time to the online database viewable on the city website.

(3) 302-304 North Market Street. The sidewalk will be blocked off for the duration of the repairs. The owner has until April 15 to abate the violations.

(4) 328 North Market Street. A standing seam roof blew off. A temporary fix is in place.

III. Discussion of Residential Vacancy and Blight.

BVPC members and staff discussed residential blight. The City of Frederick includes approximately 27,000 housing units in 22 square miles.

Committee members made it clear that vacancy with absentee and/or unknown ownership can quickly become blight and cause health, safety, welfare, and inability of the community to have reasonable enjoyment of their neighborhood. Examples were given about specific properties.

There was substantial discussion around the issue of health, safety, and welfare issues particularly in attached units and multi-family. The committee is interested in the city abating code issues quickly when health, safety, welfare issues arise and the property owner is either unknown or unwilling to resolve the issue. Mr. Griffin clarified for the group that the Budget Director has articulated that budget is not an issue when dealing with these issues – because the city will bill the property owner and/or place a lien on the property to ensure future repayment.

There was significant a discussion of the difference between a notice of violation and a citation, the abatement process, emergency measures, etc.

Rachel Depo and Joe Adkins provided information on issue of court approved abatement actions.

It was discussed that sometimes there is a disconnect between city and HOA/Property Management Organizations and that more could be done to promo

It was also mentioned that in downtown that having an HPC / CE Liason staff person could help resolve issues.

IV. Recommendations Consideration Presentation

David Esworthy and Steve Cranford presented a power point on recommendations to address vacancy and blight. The group provided positive feedback for the presentation but mentioned that some of the items highlighted (particularly marketing) seems to be more of a citywide or economic development function than a blight abatement function.

Mr. Griffin stated that he would begin preparing the final report for the next meeting.

It was also suggested appoint a code enforcement “captain” on both the “bottom up” and “top down” approaches to lead the charge on strategy, responsibility, and communications.

IV. Public Comment

Mr. Griffin invited others in attendance to comment.

Public comments from Ned Bond and Barbara Dillon were made – primarily suggesting that the City be more proactive and aggressive on issuing notices of violations particularly in downtown Frederick. It was stated that it was perceived that city reacts when public pushes – needs to be more proactive.

V. Adjournment – the meeting adjourned at 8:00 PM

Prepared by – Rachel S. Depo, Assistant City Attorney with revisions by Richard Griffin