

AD HOC BLIGHT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF TUESDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2019

The inaugural meeting of the Ad Hoc Blight Committee was held on Tuesday, October 15, 2019 in the Second Floor Conference Room, City Hall, Manistee, Michigan. The meeting commenced at 2:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Kelly Greve, Susie Cooper, Robert Hornkohl, Shawn Waruszewski, Kathryn Levy, Kathy Grabowski, Dennis Otto, Timothy Kozal (Committee Leader)

OTHERS PRESENT: Thad Taylor (departed at 2:45 p.m.), Jim Grabowski, Caitlyn Berard

PURPOSE: To discuss and provide recommendations to City Council on the prevention and elimination of contributing factors and causes of blight.

DISCUSSION

- Timothy Kozal offered opening remarks and a welcome to the committee members. The purpose of the committee was discussed and introductions of members was done.
- Susie Cooper asked for clarification on the DDA Director's name and why the downtown area has so many boarded up windows.
- Robert Hornkohl enquired as to the length of a building permit can be left open.
- Thad Taylor informed all present that January 1, 2020 SAFEbuilt will more than likely be taking on issuing permits (electrical, plumbing, and HVAC). SAFEbuilt plans on having more of a presence in the City. Also stated, better control and more timely checking should be seen with SAFEbuilt.
- Timothy Kozal brought up historical building permits and how they are tracked. Dennis Otto stated historic building permit can be renewed when the original expires. Kelly Greve offered as to how much improvement needs to be seen in order to renew a historical building permit.
- Kathryn Levy asked about expiration dates and who oversees all other permits. It was stated by Susie Cooper that it should be a priority to check permits.
- Timothy Kozal stated blight control should move toward being reactive and not proactive.
- Kathryn Levy enquired as to the responsibilities of who oversees each district.
- Robert Hornkohl enquired as to burned out houses. Timothy Kozal offered that burned structures typically involve working with an insurance agency and that the City tries not to incur the costs associated with demolition. Kozal stated that once a court order is received for being outside compliance, the County of Manistee takes precedence regarding issues such as back taxes.
- Susie Cooper asked about a list of structures so that following progress made on a building could be documented. Cooper stated what can be done to help as the process is bogged down and big excuses are given as to why it's bogged down.
- Robert Hornkohl offered hiring a part-time Blight Officer to enforce follow-up. Timothy Kozal informed that a Blight Officer would be for ordinance enforcement and not serve as law enforcement front-end compliance.

- Kathryn Levy enquired as how blight buildings are identified. Timothy Kozal offered the portal on the City website for reporting and also that anyone can call the Police Department or stop in to report blight.
- Kelly Greve asked how long, once reported, blight is allowed to happen. Timothy Kozal stated a 7-day notice is given and the process takes off from that point. Susie Cooper enquired as to the penalties. Kathryn Levy offered that the penalties should get larger each time a building is cited and another civil infraction is issued.
- Susie Cooper would like the blight ordinance changed in regards to boarded up windows causing blight. Dennis Otto offered that infractors could paint the wood while Kathryn Levy stated the idea of using historical pictures to cover the boarded-up windows and offered to donate that art.
- Susie Cooper would like to know how all the committees (Historical, DDA, and Blight) can work together.
- Timothy Kozal stated a consensus needs to occur to give a voice to the committee to the City Council.
- Dennis Otto enquired as to vehicle repair being done repeatedly in the same area on City streets.
- Kelly Greve stated the root cause of blight needs to be examined and questioned why it takes so long to obtain progress. Dennis Otto concurred that it drags on and on. Robert Hornkohl offered hiring an Enforcement Officer could assist with tracking progress.
- Susie Cooper offered that the current Blight Ordinance is vague and you could drive a truck through it for enforcement purposes.
- Kathryn Levy enquired as to defining the fines. Susie Cooper offered there is no structure for fines in the current ordinance.
- Shawn Waruszewski offered that landlords need to be held to a higher standard for enforcement. Kathy Grabowski stated Housing Commission tenants' issues should be responsibility of the tenants. It was offered by Dennis Otto that volunteers (students, National Honor Society members) could offer the elderly services such as general yard clean-up and lawn mowing.
- Robert Hornkohl enquired as to what the Blight Committee can do and what is expected of the committee. Timothy Kozal stated enforcement is needed as well as getting to the root cause. Hornkohl enquired if there was a consensus regarding hiring a part-time Blight Enforcement officer. Hornkohl also suggested viewing blight ordinances from other communities.
- Susie Cooper feels the ordinance policy needs shoring up. Cooper feels what has been done and what needs to be done should be forwarded to City Council and enquire if City Council will fund assistance.
- Kelly Greve would like to see the process from start-to-finish on blighted properties. A possible site visit to 2 Duffy Street was mentioned as this is now a City owned property that has gone through the entire process.
- Kathryn Levy stated that work needs to be done on the blight ordinance.
- Robert Hornkohl cautioned on the committee doing one thing at a time. Hornkohl hopes the committee goes a long way toward making progress and has a big impact on blight issues.

The next Ad Hoc Blight Committee meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday, October 29, 2019 at 2:30 p.m. in the Second Floor Conference Room, City Hall, Manistee, Michigan.

The meeting concluded at 3:45 p.m.

Bridget Guillen
Police Secretary