

**Planning & Development Committee
Meeting Minutes of November 9, 2009
Council Chambers 7:00 p.m. – 8:05 p.m.
Lorraine H. Morton Civic Center**

Aldermen Present: D. Holmes, L. Jean-Baptiste, R. Rainey, D. Wilson, M. Wynne

Staff Present: J. Chambers, B. Dunkley, D. Marino, J. Murphy, B. Newman,
C. Ruiz, D. Spicuzza

Presiding Official: Alderman Wynne

DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Chair Wynne called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m., a quorum being present.

APPROVAL OF OCTOBER 26, 2009 MEETING MINUTES

Ald. Holmes moved approval of the minutes. Ald. Jean-Baptiste seconded the motion.

The Committee voted unanimously 5-0 to approve the October 26, 2009 P&D Committee meeting minutes.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

(P1) Ordinance 105-O-09 Rescinding the Evanston Landmark Designation for the Property Located at 1819 Dodge Avenue

Chair Wynne explained that the property has been demolished and this is the final step in rescinding the landmark designation since it no longer exists. She said she and staff have discussed proposing an ordinance that would make this process automatic.

Ald. Jean-Baptiste moved to recommend approval of Ordinance 105-O-09. Ald. Wilson seconded the motion.

The Committee voted unanimously 5-0 to recommend approval of Ordinance 105-O-09.

(P2) Request for Council Approval to Submit an Application to the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency for Funding to Resurvey the City's Evanston Lakeshore Historic District

Mr. Marino explained that this request to resurvey emerges from Historic Preservation staff as well as the Preservation Commission. The focus is to resurvey the Lakeshore Historic District. He said the best practice would be to do it more frequently. He explained that it was designated a historic district in 1994 with the adoption of the current historic preservation ordinance. Prior to that it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. The proposal is to request funding from the State of Illinois Certified Local Government Grants and Aid Program for this particular work. The involvement would include not only staff but also volunteers, members of the Preservation Commission and potential contractual staff for very specialized types of services. He explained that the City portion that is listed is intended to be in kind services, which also could include City staff.

Ald. Wilson clarified that the City's contribution of \$6,000 is not actually cash out of pocket, it is contributing staff and resources. Mr. Marino confirmed this and clarified that some of the \$22,560 may also help defray staff cost depending on the percentage of time involved.

Ald. Rainey moved approval of the submittal of the application. Ald. Holmes seconded the motion.

The Committee voted unanimously 5-0 to recommend approval.

(P3) Request Approval of a One-Year Extension of the Expiration for the 631-749 Chicago Avenue (AMLI) Approved Planned Development (Ordinance 103-O-08) to December 8, 2010 to Obtain a Building Permit

Chair Wynne reminded the Committee that the project was approved about a year ago and explained that given the current economic conditions Mr. Steve Ross of AMLI, the developer, has come back to the Committee to ask for an extension of time.

Ald. Holmes moved approval of the request. Ald. Rainey seconded the motion.

Ald. Rainey mentioned for those listening that may not be familiar with it, that this planned development is at the southeast corner of Kedzie and Chicago and it includes the Subaru Dealership. Ald. Wilson asked for further information about the progress of the development.

Mr. Steve Ross of AMLI, thanked the Committee for their consideration of the request and said he is very enthusiastic about the project and that he continues to spend a great deal of his time trying to obtain financing, but there is no construction financing available in the Chicago area and he only knows of a few financed projects in the entire country. He said in the recent past he has spent a great deal of time with the union pension funds which are active real estate investors, including going to Washington D.C. to meet with them and they are very interested in this project. He said the project is shovel-ready when the market opens up for financing and he believes at that time theirs will be a priority project.

Chair Wynne said Mr. Ross has been in constant contact with her and Mr. Marino and he has left no stone unturned in seeking financing. She said the community and Design Evanston had a lot of input in the project and it has been modified and adjusted to fit the needs and desires of the community. She is looking forward to having this development but the condition of the economy is a fact of life right now. She urged the Committee to vote to approve the extension.

Mr. Ross added, regarding the green building ordinance proposal for Silver LEED certification on new developments, his project was intending on achieving this level already and they embrace it.

The Committee voted unanimously 5-0 to recommend approval of the request.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

(PD1) Draft Report of Affordable Housing Task Force

Ms. Susan Munro, representing the Affordable Housing Task Force and the Housing Commission, thanked the Task Force and the Housing Commission for the time, effort and expertise they brought to the process. She said the Task Force would not have brought this report to the Committee quite this soon except that affordable housing is a special topic for the City Council meeting. They were hoping to get more public input before they had a final draft and they are seeking input and questions and are ready to answer peoples' questions tonight. She said in the overall plan, just as AMLI is having trouble, they are not recommending production of affordable housing in the next few years because there is a great deal of affordable housing in Evanston currently and their goal is to connect people to the places that exist. They recommend some strategies that might help achieve that, such as improving the infrastructure in terms of the City departments and the Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs) in Evanston and to improve political will and education. Their major goals are around these areas and foreclosure. She said she would be happy to hear comments or questions.

Ald. Wilson said he reviewed the report and he appreciates the effort of the Task Force and their recommendation for not producing any more affordable housing. He said he appreciates the specific suggestions and strategies including working with the public for a better understanding of what the City is trying to accomplish and broadening the public's understanding of the definition of affordable housing. He thanked the Task Force and the Housing Commission for that work.

Ald. Rainey said regarding the use of the term "political will" referred to in the report, that there would have been a lot more political will if the Housing Commission had had more back bone and had given the Council more counsel on what was going on because at any time when any member of the Council, especially her, would make any criticism of the disaster we were facing in terms of affordable housing administration in our

community, she always felt that the commission was immediately backing up the CHDOs, telling them to keep going and encouraging them to ask for more money when really that whole story was dead on arrival a long time ago. She said she thinks they all share some of the blame and one of the problems she believes is that the City has had some stone walling regarding going to the outside, especially Habitat for Humanity (“Habitat”). She said is reading newsletters from Illinois communities about the work Habitat is doing in their cities, and the City is treating Habitat like they are poison because of one incident. She said she received a new explanation about what the problem was with Evanston and Habitat and it is ridiculous for us to hold a grudge for a lifetime. She said she plans to call them and ask them to read the Task Force’s report and to share with them some of the City’s opportunities and even if we don’t get any of the \$40 million grant the City has applied for, we still have some empty houses, and she believes the City is right for Habitat.

Ms. Munro responded that she agrees with Ald. Rainey about the Housing Commission and she takes some responsibility for this. She said she did not have the time and understanding of the process until they formed the Task Force to fully understand the role that the Housing Commission could have been taking. She said when you come on the Commission you are not really trained to know what your role is, but they should have taken a more proactive stance and they have been too passive and dependent on the CHDOs to come forward with projects. On the second point that Ald. Rainey made, she said she would love to have Habitat for Humanity back in Evanston and that she worked on those original projects on Dodge as a volunteer with the high school groups. She said it would also give the City the opportunity to make use of a wonderful group at Northwestern called GreekBuild which has been working with Habitat for Humanity in Waukegan. She said they would love to be doing it here and through Andrew McGonigle, who is on the Task Force, she met with the GreekBuild team and the leadership of that organization and they would love to be working in Evanston. She said if the City could get Habitat with their new model of working with foreclosed houses back in Evanston working with some of the vacant and foreclosed houses and a targeted block, and for instance get the GreekBuild students to be able to do it in a very affordable way, it would be a wonderful opportunity for the City. Ald. Rainey said she agreed with Ms. Munro that one good thing that has come out of this is that Jeff Murphy has done a wonderful job of organizing the types of distressed housing that we have and where they are located and the entire registration process and the vacant building ordinance, all of which greatly help us. So we can serve up these properties to Habitat and ask what we can do about them.

Ald. Rainey argued, in response to Ms. Munro’s comment that the Housing Commission was not aggressive enough, that she thought the Housing Commission was very aggressive, that is, aggressively blinded in working towards more vacant affordable home ownership and nothing was going to stop them and anyone who said anything otherwise was anti-affordable housing, making her feel that the Housing Commission was not her friend. She said she found the report fascinating.

Mayor Tisdahl asked Ms. Munro to ask the Housing Commission to please write to Senators Burris and Durbin and Congresswoman Schakowsky about the NSP II Grant

because affordable housing in this community, which is in a bit of trouble at this point, is going to be helped incredibly if we do get that grant. She asked that they all write the legislators letters thanking them for their efforts on our behalf and that it is the best thing anyone can do within the next two weeks for affordable housing in Evanston.

Ms. Munro explained further that the NSP II Grant for \$40 million Mayor Tisdahl referred to is before HUD for consideration.

Ald. Jean-Baptiste thanked Ms. Munro for the report saying it is a reflection of the good work they have done as volunteers for the City. He thanked them for persevering over a long period of time. He said he is still not sure, when they address the Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs), what they mean to say about the direction of the CHDOs. Ms. Munro responded that Evanston has 5 CHDOs. She said a senior advisor to the head of HUD read the report and said 5 CHDOs is too many for a City of this size. HUD has CHDO experts who come to cities and assess their CHDOs. She said we know the CHDOs have been having trouble selling their places and making their business model work. At the same time the Task Force has proposed a number of activities in the report that do not really fit in with what the CHDOs have traditionally been doing, for instance, rental subsidies, and making vacant and foreclosed properties into affordable housing. So we don't know if we have a mismatch, but the Task Force felt there needed to be a 3rd party, i.e. someone from HUD to meet with the CHDOs to assess their current capacity and to work with them to determine if what they want to be works in Evanston. Their budgets are tiny and they do not have the capacity to start new projects. They have not yet responded to the other activities that are in the plan to see if they are feasible for them.

Ald. Jean-Baptiste agreed with what Ald. Rainey stated earlier, that those who work on the Housing Commission and the Task Force never raised any criticism of what the CHDOs were doing. He said he is aware that the economic conditions have prevented them from being successful. He said he never heard an internal discussion or debate about an alternative. It was mainly "let's support those who come forward and want to be CHDOs" and it appears that if more people had come forward and applied to become CHDOs the Housing Commission would not have objected. Ms. Munro said there is a distinction between the Housing Commission and the Task Force: the Task Force has only worked within this year and the current conditions; the Housing Commission had had a long history of advocating for the CHDOs. Those were the projects for affordable housing that came to them as the Housing Commission. It was that or nothing would be coming forward as affordable housing projects. Ald. Jean-Baptiste said if the CHDOs had not come forward with anything, the City does have its own initiatives on the issue of affordable housing such as the downpayment assistance program. Ms. Munro agreed but said the downpayment assistance program is the only program. Ald. Jean-Baptiste said there has been a lot of discussion in the P&D Committee about saving the homeowners who are facing foreclosure, so he is not sure that we were focusing on what might have been key at different points in time, so he does not think it is the truth that but for the CHDOs there would be nothing done with affordable housing. Ald. Jean-Baptiste suggested that the City look critically at what will work best for the City at all times so that when an activist comes forward and says they are able and willing to do affordable

housing we will hear the counsel of those that are on the front line of this work to be better informed to make the proper decision.

Ms. Munro said there was a period of time in the late 1990's and certainly up until 3 years ago when there were many developers in Evanston and it seemed that it was a better idea to have maybe 1 or 2 more CHDOs than we have traditionally had. Then everyone got caught in the economical downturn. We also had a situation where there was a rule that the CHDOs could not start a project until they finished the previous one, which made it impossible for any one of them to really grow because they had no cash flow. They could not get anything in the pipeline and this has been problematic for them over the years. None of them have had capacity to produce a lot of affordable housing and now we have a situation that if you produce it you can't sell it anyway.

Ald. Holmes said she served on the Affordable Housing Task Force and she commended the members for their dedication and for meeting at 7:15 in the morning. She said it was a very inclusive group representing all different aspects of the City with different opinions. She said the Task Force is focused on the present and what has happened in the past year. She addressed Ald. Jean-Baptiste's saying that the Task Force is not concerned with what has happened with the CHDOs, but more with the City's position now: the downpayment assistance program, foreclosures what to do with vacant, boarded up and foreclosed buildings. She said they should look at it as maybe the Task Force came just at the right time in terms of what is happening with the economics of the community, and look forward at solutions. She said she learned a lot just serving on the Task Force. Ms. Munro said she learned a lot too.

Ald. Wilson asked Ms. Munro to clarify, for the benefit of those listening, what the acronyms stand for: a CHDO is a Community Housing Development Organization. They are the non-profit organizations that develop affordable housing either for rental or for sale and they have done construction of housing in Evanston, conversion of rental buildings to condos, and conversion of rental buildings to affordable rentals and one of the City's 5 CHDOs is a land trust, which is a different model, which is to hold the land once a property is acquired so that the land can stay affordable, holding down the appreciation on the property.

Chair Wynne called the two speakers who had signed up to speak to the podium:

Sue Carlson said she agreed with Ald. Holmes and Ald. Wynne in commending the Affordable Housing Task Force and particularly the Chair, Susan Munro, for this really excellent report. She concurs with the Task Force, especially in regards to the importance of the strategy 4.1 to elevate the whole issue of housing within City government and she applauds their innovative approach outlined in Strategy 1.2, to develop a plan to use existing underutilized, largely vacant housing stock. She said funding a housing counselor to work uniquely with Evanston homeowners threatened by foreclosure is a no-brainer and the City should get that done quickly. Lastly, she said, she would like to re-iterate but not to embarrass Susan Munro, and her appreciation for the gift of time and talent that she has donated to this community.

Chair Wynne agreed.

Ms. Betty Ester of the Citizens Lighthouse Community Land Trust said the people who worked on the Task Force and serve on the Housing Commission show what dedication and commitment they have to the task of trying to keep affordable housing in Evanston. She said she read the report and that she has been before the Housing Commission many times but she has also been before the Housing Commission with the Citizens Lighthouse Community Land Trust. She said her organization has discussed the goals and she feels the Task Force is on the right track.

Ms. Ester said Goal #1 was a goal of the founding members of the Community Land Trust in 2001. Knowing that they cannot build new units in Evanston because they are land locked, they must work with existing property. They have many vacant units, some of which are foreclosures, some are vacant because of property taxes owed and some, because the owner chooses to have them vacant. Ms. Ester explained that in looking at the list of vacancies provided by Jeff Murphy, the City must decide what do with them. Some people want to own, some want to rent, so the program must provide something for both segments. She said the next step is to figure out where the money will come from and if Evanston is going to provide affordable rental units, then Evanston must have its own Housing Authority. She said the City cannot rely on Cook County, and the need is here, in Evanston. She said the Human Services Committee has discussed having its own housing authority and this needs to be revisited if the City takes on the plan proposed by the Task Force. Without it the plan will not succeed because they had 22 units that were affordable in August of 2008 which were lost, so the City must ask itself why it is losing affordable units. If the City's program is using state or federal funds, they come with restrictions, similar to when you obtain a grant. In the Community Land Trust, they have looked at having an owner of an affordable 2-story unit which provides an affordable rental unit.

Regarding Item #2 Ms. Ester said the Community Land Trust also talked to the City about being proactive in counseling people before they go into foreclosure. They asked for a request but it was denied. Then a HUD consultant came out with the Dennison Report which reviewed the 5 CHDOs and they presented a plan for how the City should deal with foreclosures. She urged the Committee to go to citizenslighthouse.org and read the document because it spells out what needs to be done. She said the City also needs to have a relationship with the banks. Without it, the City will not be able to do enough in the area of foreclosure. The Citizens Lighthouse was seeking assistance from HUD to help make that happen where the bank could be comfortable with the issue of privacy enough to talk to people.

She concluded that though the Citizens Land Trust is unique CHDO in that they invest in the community because each time they obtain a property it is an investment in the community providing one more permanently affordable home in Evanston. Each time they do it, the money stays in Evanston. There is no worry that in so many years the house will be lost because it will be sold at market value. Citizens Lighthouse has reached out to Habitat to Humanity to work with them and they continue to try to build that relationship, though it is difficult. She said the City cannot give everyone a house

that they are going to sell at market value. Some must be kept affordable, otherwise we limit the number of people we will be serving.

Ms. Ester concluded: First, find out where the money will be coming from; from the HOME dollars that come to City. She urged the Committee to read the national housing law which says: “develop non-profit organization in your community to deal with the issue of creating affordable housing.”

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Bobbie Newman