MINUTES
City Commission Workshop Meeting
5:30 PM - Thursday, September 26, 2019 - City Hall

CALL TO ORDER: 5:30 P.M.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF QUORUM AND PROPER NOTICE

PRESENT: Marie Aliberti, Nan Cobb, Daniel DiVenanzo, Alan Holden, Vice Chair Emily Lee, Karen LeHeup-Smith, Carole Martin, Robert Morin, Victorious Wright and Chairman Michael Holland

1. WORKSHOP ITEM AND COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

1.1 Discussion on proposed housing rehabilitation program and Lake County SHIP program

Ron Neibert, City Manager, provided an overview of the Lake County SHIP program and reviewed the criteria for receiving assistance from the program. He confirmed that the loan is forgiven after fifteen years provided the applicant continues to live at the home. He presented the financial criteria for the program and noted they also have home purchase assistance. It was noted they cannot transfer the title to the property.

Daniel DiVenanzo commented on the length of the County's waiting list and questioned whether or not it would be beneficial to City residents. He asked if someone had a home and wanted to do more to their home than the City would fund if they could go to the County first.

Mr. Neibert responded he was unsure since the CDBG progam says they can't have received other HUD money within a specific time period. He stated he was unsure whether or not someone could utilize both programs and stated that if someone doesn't qualify for the City's program, then staff would refer them to other programs.

Mr. DiVenanzo expressed support for the City funding a larger number of lower cost repairs such as doors, windows and inoperable light switches.

Mr. Neibert indicated the City would have to decide if it wants to do more houses at lower amounts or fewer homes at higher amounts with Mr. DiVenanzo expressing his opinion that the lower amounts might be more helpful.

Mr. Neibert noted that the CDBG program requires that all items in a house must be brought up to code.

Mr. DiVenanzo asked if the City could do a separate City program and also the CDBG and people could apply to either and then the City could limit the amount available for rehab with Mr. Neibert stating the maximum would be $40,000 per home.

Mr. DiVenanzo asked if City could do a program other than CDBG with Mr. Neibert indicating it would be up to the Committee to recommend to the Commission and then up to the Commission whether or not to fund.

Mr. DiVenanzo asked why the Mount Dora Memorandum of Understanding was included in packet with Mr. Neibert explaining that Commissioner LeHeup-Smith is on the LCAA Board, who administers the Mount Dora CRA rehabilitation program, and asked to have the information provided.

Mr. DiVenanzo asked Ms. LeHeup-Smith how the funds are pooled. He asked if LCAA provides any funding with Ms. LeHeup-Smith responding they have a weatherization program and they can pull from that. She noted they have done programs in Mount Dora and Leesburg. She indicated that the Mount Dora Northeast CRA under the weatherization program provides a maximum of $12,000. She explained her feeling that it would be better if the City could piggyback off an existing program.

Mr. Neibert indicated he was trying to find out from Mount Dora how much money they are providing and how many homes are they rehabbing with the funds. He added that, since the funding is through their CRA, the program is limited to homes within the CRA district.

Emily Lee asked about the success of the program with Ms. LeHeup-Smith indicating what she provided is all the information she has so far. She commented on the possibility of having LCAA provide a presentation.

Mr. Neibert report that Tom Carrino spoke with Mount Dora and they haven't done any homes in the last two or three years due to cost estimates exceeding limits for the program.

Ms. LeHeup-Smith commented they can't repair just one window. They have to do all that's needed.

Mr. Neibert indicated there is nothing prohibiting the City from crafting its own program. Those presented are just those that already exist.

Chairman Holland expressed support for having LCAA come and address Committee to see what could be done.

Mr. DiVenanzo asked if anyone has been identified that a resident could contact for information.

Mr. Neibert responded not at that time. He indicated that part of it could be done through the Building Department; however, if can contract with LCAA to operate program then the City would just write a check to them and City staff time would not be involved.

Mr. DiVenanzo cited the need to know how many people are being helped, how much individual projects are costing, and administrative costs.

Discussion regarding possibility of working with LCAA.

Mr. Neibert stated that the City would decide on the criteria for approval with some minimum and maximum levels.

Discussion was held regarding the possibility of finding vendors/contractors to perform certain repairs for a discounted rate. They could be provided with a specific list of jobs to do in a day.

Ms. Lee cited the need for there to be some type of educational program required. She questioned how the homes got into disrepair and emphasized the need to make sure they don't get that way again.

Mr. Neibert responded the City could require that any participant has to watch an educational video on home maintenance. He confirmed the home owner would not have to pay back the loan.

Ms. Lee stated the homeowner needs to have skin in the game with Mr. Neibert indicating they could be required to have some sweat equity or similar requirement.

Further discussion was held regarding financial status of applicants and how they could contribute to the program.

Nan Cobb agreed they need to have two programs – one for the CRA and one for outside the CRA.

Carole Martin questioned if the applicants are they going to have the wherewithal to maintain the property after the rehab. She stated the education needs to be more than just a video. She commented on the need to get them engaged so they follow through.

Discussion was held regarding how people's circumstances may have changed which resulted in their current condition.

Mr. DiVenanzo commented on how income levels may fluctuate and noted that, at some time, they had the ability to purchase the home but something happened to make it not possible to make necessary repairs.

Nan Cobb reported on tour she and Gail Isaac-Thomas took of the CRA district to look at the homes. She stated they identified five or six houses that are truly in bad shape. She noted that the CDBG is all or nothing and some of the homes would not qualify. She commented on possibility of a community group working together to take on one house and just work on the outside of a home, but not roofing. She stated she contacted Lake County and Habitat to see if they could help with such a program. Habitat indicated they would supply all of the labor if the City supplied all the material. He indicated Habitat had stepped back from Eustis because of residents not following through and caring for their homes. He also informed her about a community cleanup program and indicated he would try to get Eustis back on the list for that. She indicated she also spoke with Sheriff Grinnell regarding using their "weekend warrior" program to help cleanup one area at a time. She commented on Selleen Drive and stated they didn't see anything that really needed attention. She cited the possibility of contacting individuals or organizations to see if they would sponsor a home. If work can be done upfront, then when they apply for a CDBG, the work wouldn't go over the $40,000 limit.

Mr. Neibert stated they could contact Waste Management about helping with yard and junk cleanup. He cited a program that was able to clean up three streets in one day.

Ms. Cobb stated they identified five to seven homes that probably need to be demolished. She indicated she did not know if anyone was living in those homes. She added that a number of homes that need work that are rentals so they would not qualify for CDBG funds.

Mr. Neibert commented on ways the City could encourage the landlords to improve the properties. He suggested the City could create a required rental inspection program to force them to improve the homes.

Ms. Cobb stated the City could contact the property owners through mailers to provide information. She also suggested holding a meeting at the library to provide information about available assistance. She stated they identified five or six that need help now.

Ms. Lee commented they need to get back the community pride. If the community got together, they could help cleanup properties. She emphasized they have to work to get the community involved and develop pride in their community.

Mr. Neibert responded that would require getting organizers within those neighborhoods to create beautification committees.

Mr. Morin commented that everything discussed is what's been discussed over the past two years. He indicated the problem is how to fund the programs. He stated that volunteering is necessary. He commented on the need for seed money and then figure out what to do going forward.

Mr. Neibert suggested inviting LCAA to attend the next meeting and provide answers to some of the questions. He commented that with the CDBG program, the guidelines are already set and the City doesn't have any latitude. He added that the City could get started much faster without using the CDBG.

Mr. Morin stated his understanding that the Dept. of Agriculture has weatherization funding. He added that there is very limited federal funding available. He expressed opposition to waiting for additional presentations and emphasized they need to go forward.

Alan Holden stated they need to have a plan and suggested they assign committee members work to do in between.

Mr. Morin also suggested splitting off committee members to move more quickly.

Mr. DiVenanzo disagreed stating that suggestions have to be taken back to the Commission for approval.

Mr. Morin further commented on the committee working independently.

Mr. DiVenanzo asked if there is a reason you can't go ahead and apply for the CDBG while working on other programs.

Mr. Neibert explained that he was going to ask Lake County to administer the CDBG but they said they can't do it. He expressed concern regarding having sufficient staff to administer the program. He stated they would have to hire staff and noted the difficulty in hiring good staff with grant funding. He stated that's why he was trying to get an already funded entity to administer. He then noted that there is a Regional Planning Agency that is over Lake County and indicated he has a call into them to see if they administer similar programs.

Mr. DiVenanzo asked if the City provides funding to Open Door with Mr. Neibert confirming that it does.

Mr. DiVenanzo commented on the success of Open Door. He cited the possibility of establishing a nonprofit that could apply to the City through the pilot program. He expressed concern regarding how bureaucracy would slow down the program.

Mr. Neibert stated he understood the concern regarding bureaucracy but noted that it does provide accountability.

Mr. DiVenanzo noted that the City already requires organizations to provide an accounting of their use of City grants. He emphasized the need for smaller projects.

Mr. Morin stated they need to determine the intent of the program. He indicated they should not build by exception but deal with any exceptions as they go along.

Mr. Neibert expressed concern regarding the possibility of providing funding to an organization with no experience. He stated that LCAA already has

experience. He added that the City could set its own criteria and tell LCAA what those are.
Chairman Holland explained his initial intent was for the Commission to work with the Committee to establish criteria, then the Commission can step back and the Committee takes over. He suggested getting LCAA to do a presentation within the next two to three weeks, then the Commission can approve and step back.

Mr. Neibert confirmed he would schedule some meetings with LCAA to inform them of what the Commission and Committee are looking for.

Ms. Lee noted that Orlando has numerous rehab programs. She asked if staff has looked at any of those.

Mr. Neibert responded that he could request information from those; however, staff was concentrating on other local programs.

Mr. Morin suggested they get the numbers first on how many homes LCAA has actually assisted. He stated he wants to make sure whoever comes in has the expertise.

Chairman Holland explained his intent is to provide the funding and guidelines and ask them to oversee. He emphasized they have the expertise. He indicated that, if things don't work well, they can then consider another organization.

Mr. Holden stated they need to have a step by step plan so they don't waste time. He asked what are they deciding today?

Mr. Neibert stated that he will schedule a meeting with LCAA within the next two or three weeks to meet with Committee. In the interim, he will meet with them to explain Committee's desire to establish a quick, efficient and effective housing rehabilitation program of the City's own making utilizing their existing administrative structure to administer the program under the City's guidelines.

Mr. Neibert then commented on the second thing he heard regarding community beautification. He stated staff can start looking at how to set that up. He emphasized they will continue to explore to see if CDBG can work for the City. He stated his belief that creating their own program and use an existing organization structure they can get more done more quickly with less bureaucracy.

Mr. Holden stated that by doing that first, the City can then show what they have already done which would help with future grant applications.

Chairman Holland asked Mr. Holden to work with Mr. Neibert separately to discuss if United Way has a program that could be utilized as a backup.

Mr. DiVenanzo confirmed that house repairs fall under the definition of housing rehabilitation.

Mr. Morin emphasized that it doesn't have to be a full housing renovation and commented on requirements at the national level.

Chairman Holland noted that if they do the federal program then they have to bring all of the homes completely up to code.

Mr. Holden commented on the need to get a basic plan on paper.

Ms. Lee stated they need to get community feedback with Mr. Holland recommending they get more feedback after they hear the LCAA presentation.

Ms. Cobb commented they can begin their own program and then still apply for CDBG.

Mr. Neibert explained that if the commit the $250,000 to the application, then they can't spend it on their own program.

Mr. DiVenanzo stated he would like to make the decision tonight to not apply for CDBG.

Further discussion was held regarding whether or not to apply for the CDBG.

Mr. Morin expressed frustration with their inability to discuss information with other Committee members.

Discussion was held regarding sunshine law limitations. It was noted that information can be provided to the City Manager who can then distribute the information to the members.

Mr. Neibert suggested having one Commissioner attend the meetings as a nonvoting member and report back to the Commission.

Discussion was held regarding how quickly the program could be developed and a date for the next meeting with LCAA presentation.

Mr. Neibert explained he would need to meet with LCAA first to see if they are interested and provide guidance on what the Committee wants.

Marie Aliberti stated there are two components – one is financing and one is action. She stated they don't need financing to do a community cleanup. The need volunteers with boots on the ground and some dumpsters to do a community cleanup which will be a start. She acknowledged the financing takes time.

Discussion was held regarding a date and location for a community cleanup. It was agreed to hold the cleanup on November 16th along Bates Avenue.

Discussion was held regarding a date for the next meeting. It was agreed to hold the next meeting the week of October 7th with the City Manager to coordinate.

2. PUBLIC INPUT

Chairman Holland opened the floor to public comment at 6:41 p.m.

Gail Isaac Thomas asked if they could extend the clean up down Wall Street from Bates Avenue.

Mr. Neibert noting that, if using dumpsters, certain things can't be picked up such as tires, fluorescent bulbs and paint.

It was suggested that a notice go out in the utility bills with Mr. Neibert stating it would depend on if there is sufficient time before that neighborhood is billed.

Ms. Lee asked about the quarterly cleanup with Mr. Neibert stating that now someone just has to call for a large item pickup and it will be picked up within three days.

Discussion was held regarding the need for volunteers to help with Ms. Aliberti indicating she would go to the high school to seek volunteers.

Mr. Neibert clarified they would go into people's yards but only with their permission.

Ms. Isaac Thomas noted a lady and her daughter in the audience who lives on Wall Street and whose home will qualify for assistance. She indicated she would be coming back to future meetings.

3. COMMITTEE DIRECTION

Chairman Holland summarized the direction of the Committee is for the City Manager to contact LCAA regarding holding a presentation the week of October 7th and to schedule a community-run cleanup for November 16th. He added that Mr. Holden would contact Mr. Neibert regarding additional ideas for running the program is LCAA falls through.

4. ADJOURNMENT: 6:48 P.M.

Minutes prepared by Mary Montez, Deputy City Clerk.

Christine Halloran

CHRISTINE HALLORAN
City Clerk

Michael L. Holland

MICHAEL L. HOLLAND
Chairman