



City of Ashtabula

Ashtabula City Council

Community Development/Economic Development/Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting

Tuesday, January 10, 2023 at 4:00 PM

Council Chambers

4717 Main Avenue

Minutes

Opening of Committee Meeting

Call to Order

The meeting of the Ashtabula City Council Community Development/ Economic Development/ Parks & Recreation Committee was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Committee Chair Haines-DiGiacomo.

Roll Call

Members Present: Chair: Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo, Vice Chair: Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills, Member: President John Roskovics

Absent: none

Officers Present: City Manager James Timonere, Clerk of Council McKenzie Burgan

Parks & Recreation Board Members Present: none

Visitors: Michael Habowski, Alex Iarocci, Angie Maki-Cliff

Sunshine Law Certification

A quorum was established as defined by the Ashtabula City Council Rules of Order. The meeting met the requirements of the Ohio Sunshine Laws Open Meetings Act.

Welcome and Acknowledgement of Visitors

Special Guest Presentation

Michael Habowski- APMC to receive a resolution

Member, President John Roskovics, presented Michael Habowski with his Resolution. Michael Habowski has accepted this recognition on behalf of his board, caregivers, medical staff, and administrative team.

Alex Iarocci- Executive Director of Ashtabula Landbank

Alex Iarocci has been the executive director of the Ashtabula Land Bank since April 2022. He brought with him, board member and Ashtabula Treasurer Angie Maki-Cliff. The Land Bank exists to deal with two main problems; blighted structures, and underutilized land. Blighted structures destabilize the values of surrounding properties and pose public health risks. Underutilized, or vacant land, creates gaps in the neighborhood fabric. As of August 2020, Ashtabula City has 314 unoccupied structures and about 27% of parcels are vacant land. The Ashtabula Land Bank's mission is to strengthen neighborhoods and preserve property values by strategically returning vacant, abandoned, and tax-delinquent properties to productive use. Productive use is considered to be at least one of the following; enhancing the environment, activating vacant spaces, advancing community planning goals, and contributing to property tax. As a quasi-government entity, they have the same authority, in the Ohio Revised Code, as a traditional community improvement corporation

but, they operate as a non-profit. They receive funding from 3% of delinquent tax collections, about \$130,000 per year, and federal, state, and local foundation grants. They acquire property through tax foreclosure, forfeited lands, deeds in lieu of foreclosure, and donations. A big challenge they face is the time it takes to obtain property through the tax foreclosure process. Vacant land, within the county, has taken between 5 to 6 years to go through the foreclosure process. In August 2020, the Land Bank conducted a property survey to help determine what needs to be done to each piece of property. The survey results were converted into a grading scale for each property; F, meaning the property is a good demolition candidate, D, meaning the property is a good renovation candidate, and C, meaning the property should be improved through code enforcement. A \$500,000 grant from the state was received this past year to assist with demolition costs. A demolition list of 13 properties within the city has been created. No demolition of these properties has occurred as of this date but the pre-demolition process has begun. The Land Bank can renovate homes and has done 3 renovations to date. They only renovate houses that are deemed too risky for a private contractor to complete. Their goal, by renovating houses, is to increase the housing market in that neighborhood. They can aid in site assembly by cleansing the titles of properties that have been obtained through the foreclosure process of any liens. As an example, they helped with the Ashtabula Area City Schools Transit Hub Project, where they were able to help acquire 8 forfeited parcels that had over \$112,000 in delinquent taxes for a portion of that cost. They were then able to deliver these parcels to the schools with clean titles. There are 63 properties owned by the Land Bank within the City of Ashtabula and 58 of them are vacant land. Their first preference would be to transfer the lots to adjacent owners. There are ideas pulled from Trumbull, Cuyahoga, and Kent Main Land Banks for other options for these vacant lands. These include; partnering with local students, schools, and residents for public art projects, establishing community gardens and garden education programs, and pocket parks that are designed and assembled by local young people. The Land Bank is going to be looking at proposals to develop the old harbor field site and plans on completing another field survey to provide updated data and should receive state funding for demolitions in 2024.

City Manager Timonere stated that the pocket parks have been looked into and a key component would be having someone within the neighborhood who would take on the overview and maintenance responsibility of the park in partnership with the Land Bank, as the City is trying to minimize the current number of parks they are responsible for. If there are people who would like to volunteer to assist with these potential pocket parks, they may contact Alex or City Manager Timonere for further discussion.

Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo asked what the process would be to acquire adjacent, vacant land. Alex explained that first, an application would need to be completed. Then, the Land Bank would evaluate the application and look to see if the applicant is current on all property taxes, if there is any history of tax foreclosures, and if there are any active code violations. Screening is done on all potential buyers to make sure they are selling to responsible residents.

Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo asked how the selling price is determined. Alex stated it is \$100 for adjacent owners when the property is non-buildable and \$200 if it is buildable. For non-adjacent buyers, it is \$500. Alex stated that most of the properties are non-buildable. Vice-Chair Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills asked what the size has to be for the property to be buildable. City Manager Timonere stated that the frontage must be between 40-60 feet, depending on the area.

Chair Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo asked how property tax would be configured if she were to buy a piece of adjacent property for \$100. Alex explained the taxes are based on the value placed on the land by the County Auditor and the tax rate for the city. On average, the properties are valued between \$4,000-\$7,000.

The 58 properties within the city that the Land Bank owns have not received any interest from adjacent owners for the purchase of those properties. Angie Maki-Cliff stated that there's a backlog of abandoned/vacant land they are working on obtaining. Angie and Alex are working to try and get an expedited process for foreclosure on abandoned or vacant properties with delinquent taxes higher than the property's value so the Land Bank can gain ownership and get the land back to productive use. In the county, there are over 200 parcels that would qualify for expedited foreclosure.

City Manager Timonere stated that parcels located next to each other can be combined and could potentially have enough frontage then to build a house on the combined land.

Member President John Roskovics asked who maintains, for example, the harbor football property. Alex stated that all lots owned within the city are mowed by the city and the Land Bank reimburses the city. City Manager Timonere stated that the harbor football property is currently leased to the Ashtabula Midget Football League and they maintain the property from April to November.

Angie stated that their delinquent tax collection fund was up 23% in 2022. Her office uses Community Action's foreclosure prevention program to collect these delinquent taxes. Over half a million dollars were collected in delinquent taxes from this program. She advises anyone who needs help paying their taxes, utilities, mortgages, and rent to utilize this program.

City Manager's Report

No report.

Parks & Recreation Committee Report

No report.

The Parks & Recreation Committee will meet sometime this month.

Unfinished Business

None.

New Business

Mr. Roskovics expressed his concern about the Salvation Army moving to its new location as they currently serve a lot of customers through foot traffic and their new location will not be as centralized. Vice-Chair, Ward 4 Councilor Jodi Mills, asked Mr. Timonere if there are any updates on the Walnut Beach sign and he stated the sign should be installed sometime in February. Mrs. Mills also asked for an update on the handicap-accessible mats for Walnut Beach. City Manager Timonere stated that he reached out to the state purchasing agent who does equipment like this and they do not carry the ADA mats, so a search and bid process may need to be done for this.

City Manager Timonere stated that pickleball lines would be painted on the tennis courts this upcoming June.

City Clean Up

The City Cleanup will be held on Earth Day, Saturday, April 22nd. Anyone interested in participating, please reach out to Mrs. Mills or Mrs. Haines-DiGiacomo to sign up.

Next Meeting

Tuesday, February 14, 2023

The next Community Development/Economic Development/Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting will be held on February 14th at 4:00 p.m. The guest will be Sally Bradley from the Hubbard House.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:48 p.m. by Chair, Ward 5 Councilor Jane Haines-DiGiacomo.

Attested By:

Clerk of Council, McKenzie J. Burgan