

REVITALIZING NEIGHBORHOODS COMMITTEE
Meeting Minutes 01-15-08

The meeting was called to order at 9:40 by Chair, Paul Haan.

Committee Members Present:

Gail Heffner, Beth Byron, Mike Williams, John Gussenbauer, Ben Stehouwer, Heather Ibrahim, Jill Meyer, Russ Lewis, Frank Lynn, Carol Townsend, Paul Haan, Christine Helms-Maletic

Approval of Minutes

Minutes from 12-08-07 approved unanimously.

Officer Elections

Gail volunteered to serve as a co-chairperson to replace Lori Stanton. Paul agreed to continue as co-chair, and Christine will continue as secretary. John G. moved to approve the slate, Jill supported, motion passed unanimously.

Dyer Ives Grant Proposal

Carol reported that, together with Paul and Christine, she met with Lee Weber to propose the RNC's Zoning brochure/training work with neighborhood and business groups (see December minutes for details). Lee suggested that a second phase of the project incorporate the development of a staff position, supervised by the RNC, to support the work of grass-roots groups related to zoning issues. Carol distributed the "Draft Job Description--Shared Community Organizer" to the committee for discussion.

Carol indicated that the Dyer Ives Zoning Project grant would cover 18 months' worth of work, giving us time to flesh out the details related to the position and to apply for funding. This resource would be available City-wide for both "funded" and non-funded neighborhood and business associations and other interested groups. Beth suggested that the position could also be regarded as a "resident expert" to teach people to be effective when appearing before the Planning Commission or Board of Zoning Appeals. Paul agreed that advocacy training is an important piece of the proposal. The job description could include a process of monitoring the Commission's agenda as it is published, notifying groups when an issue arises in their area, and using the issue as an organizing tool. However the proposed staff person would serve as a facilitator, not a leader, of community organizing so as not to overburden them and not to interfere with existing community organizers and neighborhood leaders. Paul suggested that a United Growth advisory group would supervise the position to prevent potential conflict between a neighborhood's goals and United Growth's goals on a given issue. John recommended that UG have funding in place so that the potential staff person would not be distracted from their organizing work by having to support themselves with grant-writing and fund-raising. Potential funders suggested by committee members include GR Community Development Department, the Campaign for Human Development, the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, Dyer Ives and service or membership fees from participating organizations.

Beth gave an update about zoning information being collated by Planning staff for distribution to organizations. Most of the information is still in draft form, and staff is working on handouts for homeowners. She handed out a draft FAQ for the committee to review.

Visioning Exercise

Carol distributed a "Revitalizing N-hoods Committee Visioning Exercise" for discussion. The committee had time to consider Exercise #1--identifying long-term trends--but will have to give Exercise #2 some thought for next time.

Responses to Exercise #1: "What long-term (20 years) trends can you identify that will significantly impact how central city neighborhoods will be developed?"

- Less capital available for economic/community development
- Recognition by homeowners of economic feasibility of urban vs. suburban living
- Recession will last less than 20 years--how will it effect city long-term?
- Increased opportunity for stronger local banking/lending to local consumers
- Increases of costs for gas/oil will lead to changes in the way people use transit (streetcars)
- Higher cost of fuel may result in slowed development in ex-urbs
- Transit-oriented development will become popular
- Urban Land Institute Report has some data on population growth that we should look at
- Progress (or lack thereof) in school systems/educational opportunities will affect people's desire to live in the city
- Regional industry changes (health care in West MI) and job opportunities will impact urban growth
- Major employers (particularly in manufacturing) are shifting or moving jobs out of the city/state/country--what, if anything, will replace these?
- Water will continue to be an issue
- Alternative energy sources could change the urban landscape
- GR is currently in stronger economic condition than the rest of the state (particularly downtown development)--will this continue?
- Development projects will involve more private-public-non-profit partnerships
- Globalization and loss of family-owned businesses to large companies or foreign ownership will be a factor (Support your local business!!!)
- Mixed-use development and layering of uses to increase density will accelerate
- Local food production will become the norm again
- Families will be paying more for health care than for rent or other expenses

Carol gave committee members a homework assignment: Think about how central-city neighborhoods will look in 20/30 years and about how the RNC (that's us, not the Republicans) can make positive change in light of these trends.

Meeting adjourned at 10:40

Respectfully submitted,
Christine Helms-Maletic