

Community Development Committee

February 16, 2023

A meeting of the Community Development Committee was held this date beginning at 3:07 p.m. over video conference call.

Notice of this meeting was sent out to the news media.

Committee Members: Councilmember Robert Mitchell, Chairman, Councilmember Jason Sakran, Vice Chair, Councilmember Ross Appel, Councilmember Keith Waring (joined at 3:13 p.m.), Councilmember Parker (joined at 3:35 p.m.), and Mayor Tecklenburg. Also Present: Dan Riccio, Geona Shaw Johnson, Magalie Creech, Latosha Jenkins-Fludd, Chloe Stuber, Kat Hill, Robert Summerfield, Rick Jerue, and Patrick Carlson, recording.

The meeting opened with a moment of silence led by Chairman Mitchell.

Approval of Minutes

On a motion of Mayor Tecklenburg, seconded by Councilmember Sakran, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the January 19, 2023, meeting.

Public Participation

None

Old Business

None

New Business

1. **An Ordinance to Amend Section 7-14 of Article 1, Chapter 7 of the Code of the City of Charleston, South Carolina to Establish an Advisory Livability Review Board for Certain Code Violations and the Abatement of Vacant Structures that Constitute a Public Nuisance, and for the Livability Review Board to Hear Appeals Pursuant to Section 21-64 of Article III, Chapter 21 of the Code of the City of Charleston, South Carolina**

Dan Riccio said that this ordinance originated from a previous committee conversation requested by Councilmember Sakran. The ordinance in place supported a Code Enforcement Board that addressed property code violations by adjudicating civil issues and public nuisances but had been effectively inactive for over two decades. Mr. Riccio said that it would be beneficial to update the ordinance to reflect the need to address the variety of vacant homes throughout the City by creating an Advisory Livability Review Board that was composed of two City staff members (with two alternates) and three citizens with knowledge of probate, construction, and engineering. The proposed board was designed to address the abatement of vacant structures and public nuisance violations prior to any final court action in order to educate and guide property owners about City rules concerning preservation and housing. This would help clear up the court system on an evolving basis by creating a space to address the approximately 200 vacant structures in the City.

Magalie Creech said that the original board was an appellate body to hear appeals of the City's abatement process so the proposed advisory board would also hear appeals, pursuant to Section 21-64. Ultimately, the main function of the board would be to provide the public with tools and resources to achieve workable solutions through a voluntary process, however, Livability Court could also refer a matter to the board to resolve the referred issues in a more expeditious manner.

Chairman Mitchell asked what members of the public would be on the board. Mr. Riccio said that the public members of the board would include a general contractor, an attorney engaged in practices of probate, real estate planning, and/or real property transactions, and a layperson who was a member of the City's Neighborhood Council.

Mayor Tecklenburg said that he served on the original board in the 1990s and most of the people who came before them had already received a ticket from code enforcement officers. The original board was empowered by the municipal court system to work towards a resolution with the ticketed citizen and only pass the issue on to Livability Court if necessary. He asked if the new board would have that same power.

Ms. Creech said that they envisioned maintaining that power but including a new voluntary participation invitation. The board would generate a letter inviting the owner of the vacant property to meet with the board and discuss the available options before a ticket is issued in the first place.

Mayor Tecklenburg said that he wasn't familiar with the qualifications to join the City's Neighborhood Council and thought it might be too restrictive and limit the search for the proposed board's layperson. Mr. Riccio said that they could eliminate that constraint but thought it would be best to find someone with a documented history of working on an existing neighborhood council of some kind.

Councilmember Sakran asked about the properties that had already been through the court system and still had not reached a resolution. Mr. Riccio said that they were going to focus on the more difficult, controversial, and older cases in order to help the owners address the obstacles that had prevented them from coming to a satisfactory conclusion.

Councilmember Sakran said he did not understand how that would address the people who were ignoring the rule of law. Mayor Tecklenburg said that, in the past, they would initially secure the house so that it did not pose a danger to the public and eventually, if necessary, pursue demolition by neglect.

Councilmember Waring said that they should consider having a representative from the Center for Heirs' Property on the proposed board in order to properly represent the individuals who also have to navigate the process of securing the property title. Mr. Riccio said that the position in question could be filled by someone from the Center for Heirs' Property but the requirement that the attorney on the board needed to be proficient in probate and real estate law should satisfy that suggestion.

Mayor Tecklenburg said that it might be necessary to assign a small budget to the proposed board in order to accommodate certain inevitable requests like engineering reports and contracting agreements.

On a motion of Councilmember Sakran, seconded by Councilmember Waring, the committee voted unanimously to approve Item 1.

2. Update on the City of Charleston Hope Center Presentation by Latosha Jenkins-Fludd

Geona Shaw Johnson said that the Director of the Hope Center, Latosha Jenkins-Fludd, would provide an update on the new facility.

Ms. Jenkins-Fludd said the new Hope Center will be located at 9 Cunnington Avenue and will provide collaborative community resources to serve those experiencing homelessness. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), there were four categories of homelessness that people typically experience: literal homelessness, imminent risk of homelessness, homeless under other statutes, and fleeing domestic violence. Throughout the state of South Carolina, 13,399 individuals were served and registered through a database tracking structure known as the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), of which 2,677 were served by the City of Charleston and its associated organizations. Between June 1, 2021, and May 21, 2022, City Outreach staff had 660 encounters with unhoused individuals, of which 128 were new interactions. The new Hope Center will work to serve as many of those individuals as possible, utilizing all of its 9,000 sq. ft. The first floor will consist of security and storage rooms, kitchen areas, and flexible open space to accommodate different numbers of individuals. The second floor will accommodate various service groups, medical providers, and City staff offices. The original Hope Center had served 310 individuals since opening in June 2022, providing access to food, showers, clean clothes, housing, and healthcare services. The intention was to also eventually offer access to employment, financial education, legal assistance, and behavioral health services. By collaborating with a variety of community partners, the Hope Center hoped to achieve long-term success and provide comprehensive services using evidence-based best practices.

Councilmember Waring said that even though the homeless population in the City was more concentrated on the downtown peninsula, this issue was also beginning to affect West Ashley and asked if there were any plans to build a center in that region. Ms. Shaw Johnson said that there was no plan to build a physical location at that point in time, however, they had multiple partners of established organizations and agencies in West Ashley that were working to address this issue. She said there had been a particular increase in family groups, primarily composed of women and children, experiencing homelessness effects after the moratorium ended. City staff were working to distribute referral cards to Outreach workers and emergency service staff to give to the affected individuals that would provide them with the necessary resources to contact various partners and agencies that offered transitional services.

Mayor Tecklenburg said that LS3P, an architectural firm, had donated full architectural and design services at no charge for the new Hope Center and they were finishing the necessary construction documents with Trident Construction and would have a construction quota soon. Recent fundraising efforts had brought the total amount of available funds to approximately \$5.7 million, with less than \$1.5 million needed to start breaking ground.

Councilmember Waring asked where on the proposed site the new center would be constructed. Ms. Shaw Johnson said that it would be located next door to 11 Cunnington Ave. She said that last year the City had released bids for the construction of the affordable housing apartments next to the site and they were reviewing proposals to develop the overall property as tightly as possible.

Adjourn

Having no further business, the Committee adjourned at 3:57 p.m.

Patrick Carlson
Clerk of Council's Office