

BNIP NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING
JANUARY 8, 2014

MEETING MINUTES

A public meeting was held on Wednesday, January 8, 2014 at the All Saints Church, Parish Hall on the corner of Scott and Beeber Streets at 6:00 p.m. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the City's Keystone Communities grant application to PA DCED for rental property facade improvements to the Brodart neighborhood.

The notice of the meeting was published in the form of a display advertisement in the Sunday, January 5, 2014 edition of the Williamsport Sun-Gazette and was also posted on the City's website.

A list of attendees is attached.

Summary of the Public Meeting

Kim Wheeler, Planner for Lycoming County, explained that Lycoming County and the City of Williamsport are continually trying to find resources to invest in the neighborhood. The targeted neighborhood includes 150 households. The boundaries of the neighborhood are Beeber St. on the west, Andrews Court and Light St. on the north, Berger St. on the east, and West Fourth St. on the south as well as Memorial Ave. around the former Brodart Warehouse facility.

This meeting is the fourth neighborhood meeting. Ms. Wheeler asked for a show of hands if it was the attendees' first meeting. She mentioned that postcards about the meeting were sent out to residents and letters about the meeting were sent to owners of rental properties in the neighborhood.

The purpose of the meeting is to discuss grant applications to DCED to support improvements in the neighborhood. Ms. Wheeler presented project updates. Because residents participated in the July 2013 mapping exercise that identified lighting concerns, traffic issues, streetscape and public safety concerns, the City has a project scope of work for the area.

The City has the opportunity to acquire funds because of gas drilling money that is required to be opened up for housing needs. 2.4 million dollars has been allocated over the past two years just for Williamsport. \$550,000 of the 2.4 million has been allocated to the Brodart neighborhood. BNIP redevelopment activities include exterior renovations for homeowner properties (Homes-in-Need program) and the Brush with Kindness program for small exterior home projects such as landscaping. Representatives of Lycoming County have also had discussions with Lycoming Engines.

The City is trying to secure funds for the rental facade program that will address the exterior renovations for rental properties. The neighborhood is 43% owner properties and 57% renter properties. Ms. Wheeler stated that we want to hear any concerns.

Attendees were asked to introduce themselves.

Connie Baker, STEP, Inc. provided a status report on the Homes-In-Need program: 1 project is complete, 4 projects are underway, 4 projects are ready to start, 6 projects are ready to audit and 6 applications are in eligibility review. Applications for the program are available this evening.

Tina McDowell, Greater Lycoming Habitat for Humanity, mentioned that they will be building 2 homes in the neighborhood. Also the Brush with Kindness program will focus on exterior clean up and landscaping and small repairs for owner occupied homes. Habitat may also consider rental properties. Applications are available this evening.

John Grado, Community Development Director, stated that the Brodart building is down and we are ready to focus on site development and infrastructure work. Act 2 Clearance from DEP has been approved in order to prepare the site for residential use. There will be topsoil and seeding in the area along Scott St. The development should be open by this time next year. Mr. Grado stated that additional grant funds will match the proposed PA DCED state funds to complete the vision for the overall neighborhood. The entrance at Oliver St. and Beeber St. and access into the Memorial Park will be reviewed. The funding match is set aside for the streets around Brodart and will include improved accessibility and lighting. Lighting is a priority of the Mayor and LED lighting will reduce energy costs. Mr. Grado mentioned the funding for the renovation of Memorial Pool: \$250,000 from DCNR funds, \$250,000 from Community Development Block Grant funds, \$200,000 bond issue funds and a challenge to the public to raise \$50,000. The total pool renovation project is \$750,000. The pool renovation will be complete by May 2015. The infrastructure/streetscape project is \$1 million. The grant is due January 17, 2014. PennDOT has been cooperative regarding any proposed streetscape work.

Bill Kelly, Lycoming County Planning, stated that state officials are seeing the good return on the previous investments in the neighborhood.

A citizen complained about crime in the area and questioned why funds should be invested in the area when crime is a problem. Mr. Grado explained that the investment will help to turn the neighborhood around for the better. The recently enacted rental registration ordinance should make a difference and visual improvements should help to alleviate the crime problem, especially with additional lighting. A resident mentioned that the Crime Watch group is growing and they walk around the neighborhood. A resident stated that the Crime Watch group is trying to get the message out, but it's not easy. A resident complained that there is not enough lighting in the neighborhood. Another resident complained that improvements to property result in higher property taxes.

Ms. Wheeler stated that the many things can work together and the process of providing the resources helps to bring about neighborhood uplift.

The City will request \$500,000 from PA DCED for the public infrastructure work. The streetscape work will be matched with the streetscape work around the Memorial Homes development. Ms. Wheeler reviewed the scope of work including addressing drainage issues, planting trees, installing crosswalks, lighting, and accessible curb ramps. The work will take place at Beeber St., Oliver St., Sutton St. and Stevens St. The intersection at West Fourth St. and better access to Memorial Pool may have to be a phase two project. The hope is that this grant will be successful because of the impact of the other funds being invested in the neighborhood.

Ms. Wheeler stated that the City is applying to DCED for a grant in the amount of \$50,000 for a facade renovation program for rental properties in the neighborhood. In addition, the grant includes a request for \$5,000 for program delivery funds. Ms. Wheeler stated the eligible work items and mentioned that the goal is to keep the homes affordable. The landlord must agree to an affordability period. An agreement with the City and the landlord will be executed. Any new owner of the property must be notified of the agreement. Ms. Wheeler stated that the landlord 50% match is a requirement of DCED. The strategy is to recognize that there are needs to improve the existing housing in the area in addition to providing new housing stock.

There was a question regarding the funding sources for the new housing development. Ms. Wheeler stated that sources of funding are from PHFA tax credits and PHARE funds. A citizen mentioned that there will be parking issues.

Mr. Ochs stated that more people in the neighborhood could result in more crime. Mr. Grado explained that the CDBG matching funds for the BNIP infrastructure work will be multi-year funds. The work will not happen all at once.

Attendees at the meeting felt that sidewalks and curb ramps at Oliver St. should be done first.

Mr. Grado was asked about the brick from the Brodart building.

Ms. Wheeler explained that if the City receives grant funding it will not be until May 2014 or later.

Mr. Grado was asked about security cameras on the streetlights. Mr. Ochs stated that Terry McBride from PennDOT should attend a meeting. Ms. Wheeler explained that DCED did not have a 30 day requirement for taking public comments regarding the grant application. Mr. Grado stated that the City Council Public Works Committee reviewed the grant applications and will recommend that the grants be approved to the full body of City Council.

Trees that were recently felled will need to be replaced and priority areas will have to be determined

Ms. Wheeler stated that rental property owners should sign the sign up sheet if they are interested in the facade program.

A question was asked regarding the rental facade program and whether the work could be "do it yourself". Ms. Rucinski stated that it would be for materials only. The work is for one structure at a time.

A citizen stated that the neighborhood needs better code enforcement. Mr. Grado stated that a Mayor's "townhall" meeting should be held in the neighborhood and could include representatives from the City's Codes department. The townhall meeting is a good forum for discussing citizens' concerns.

The meeting adjourned 7:40 p.m.