

BNIP NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING
Wednesday, February 11, 2015
6:00 p.m.

MEETING MINUTES

A neighborhood meeting was held on Wednesday, February 11, 2015 at 6:00 p.m. at the All Saints Church, Parish Hall, on the corner of Scott and Beeber Streets.

Kim Wheeler, Lycoming County, began the meeting, stating that this meeting is the eighth neighborhood meeting since April 2013 and that we will continue to hold neighborhood meetings to engage with the community to provide feedback and resources. A show of hands indicated that there were a few new people attending today's meeting. Ms. Wheeler introduced the partners and the neighbors introduced themselves and stated their address in the neighborhood. Ms. Wheeler commented that the meeting has a good representation of the neighborhood.

Ms. Wheeler reviewed the Brodart Neighborhood Improvement Program, which, in addition to the 40 new apartment units, includes infrastructure improvements such as street reconstruction and lighting, and rehabilitation to existing homes. There are 150 existing households in the BNIP area. Approximately 50% of the households are owner-occupied and 50% are renter households. To date, there have only been funds available for homeowner rehab, however, at this meeting, we will be introducing a new program to assist in the rehabilitation of the rental properties as well.

Ms. Wheeler stated that \$4.5 million dollars has been awarded in to the County through PHFA's PHARE (PA Housing Affordability Rehabilitation and Enhancement) Program for affordable housing projects and initiatives, county-wide, in the last three years. Between funds allocated directly to the development of the Memorial Homes Project and the existing residential upgrades, \$2.15 of the \$4.5 million is being invested in the Brodart Neighborhood.

Lori, from All Saints Church, welcomed everyone and stated that the congregation is very interested in the efforts to improve the neighborhood and that they are happy to host the BNIP meetings.

Jeff Dawson, STEP, Inc., provided a status report on the Homes-In-Need program. He stated he will have to check the number of jobs completed. The most recent home to be completed is on Scott St. Fourteen jobs are in progress and eleven applications have been determined to be eligible. Mr. Dawson encouraged people to drive around the neighborhood to view the projects. There is a visible impact on the neighborhood. The program is designed to address both interior and exterior code deficiencies with the house. The cost is averaging approximately \$14,000 per house and includes "big ticket items" such as siding and roofs. The maximum amount of funding per project is \$25,000. Applications are available by contacting STEP, Inc. He encouraged people to apply so that they have a steady stream of applications.

Ms. Wheeler stated that there was no update on the Habitat for Humanity “Brush with Kindness” program. Habitat has had problems finding painters. Four properties are scheduled for spring and Habitat is looking for a full schedule. Applications are available and can be obtained by contacting Habitat. Habitat does work on both homeowner and rental properties.

Mr. Grado reviewed the public streetscape improvements taking place in the neighborhood. The funding includes \$200,000 of Act 13 dollars and \$300,000 of Community Development Block Grant dollars. This amount is being matched with \$500,000 of DCED dollars for a total of \$1 million dollars. The streetscape improvements around the perimeter of Memorial Homes have been completed. Much of the work that will be done is based on the needs identified by the neighbors, which include lighting and crosswalks. Mr. Grado mentioned that the State Historic Preservation Office approved the application to place the Original Little League Field on the National Register of Historic Places. This was due to the effort of Bill Kelly.

Ms. Wheeler stated that the City was not successful in obtaining a grant from DCED to fund a rental rehabilitation program in the neighborhood since we had received \$500,000 from DCED for the infrastructure improvements. The PHARE funding from PHFA did provide \$200,000 for a rental rehabilitation program to uplift the existing properties. Lycoming County can apply every year for additional funding, probably in the summer. Ms. Wheeler stated that we can’t do everything for the neighborhood, but that neighbors can do some things such as a neighborhood crime watch. She mentioned that there were representatives from the City Codes department who attended one of the meetings to address the condition of properties. The City has an existing rental rehabilitation program.

Mary Rucinski, from the City’s Community Development Department, provided an overview of the rental rehabilitation program for the BNIP neighborhood. The property owner is required to provide a 15% match no matter what the cost of the project is. The income of the tenants is reviewed. Only the owners of the rental properties are eligible to apply for the program. Rents have to be affordable for a ten year period. \$25,000 is offered as a grant with ten year forgiveness. City employees do not do the rehabilitation work, but the City will write the specifications, do the inspections, and get bids from contractors. The landlord is required to make a 15% contribution. The reporting requirements are over a 10 year period. If one side is owner-occupied and one side is a rental, the City can do the rental side and STEP, Inc. can do the homeowner side. The property owner submits the application and the City will contact the tenant for the income information. The owner of the property needs to provide a copy of the lease with the application. If there is no tenant, the City will review the landlord’s proposal for affordable rents. The program will allow for some annual rental increases. Affordability equals 30% of tenant’s income including rent and utilities. 30% of the total funds for the program must benefit tenants at 50% of the Area Median Income. Tenants must meet this requirement for 10 years. There is a total of \$200,000 for the program. \$60,000 of the funds must go to households that earn up to 50% of the Area Median Income or less. 50% of the Area Median Income is currently \$28,400. The remainder of the \$200,000 (\$140,000) can be spent on tenants who are up to 200% of the Area Median Income.

Jonathan Williamson, Williamsport City Council member, stated that there are some strings attached with the program, but it includes more than it excludes, which is just what the neighborhood needs.

Chris Kaiser, from Larson Design Group, reported that Phase One of the infrastructure around Memorial Homes is complete. He stated that since West Fourth St. is a PennDOT road, it is necessary to obtain a Highway Occupancy Permit including for work on the crosswalks. PennDOT reviews the intersection for more functionality between vehicles and pedestrians. PennDOT is primarily concerned with pedestrian access to the intersection and feels that the intersection works for vehicles. There is no crash data on the intersection – meaning that there have been no reportable accidents. The goal is to construct a safe island for pedestrians to cross on the north side where the brick lining ends. The brick will be removed just on the edges for more curb work and landscape improvements on the east side of Beeber St. There will also be storm sewer work and a retaining wall. The brick will be retained and the guardrail will be removed. The concern is for pedestrian safety. There are limited funds to do improvements on the street. A half roundabout was considered, but trucks would have difficulty.

Mr. Ochs commented that there should be better snow removal on PennDOT roads. He stated that the handout of the drawing showing the intersection improvements, provided at this meeting, should include a narrative explanation.

The City will maintain the sidewalk along the Memorial Park. The sidewalks along Beeber St. are a public improvement within the right-of-way. The property owner is responsible for maintenance of sidewalks, but the crosswalks are under the City control.

Dan Gallagher, from Arbor Housing, presented an update on Memorial Homes. The construction is complete and tenants are moving in. Some material replacement was necessary because the flooring was defective. The trellis area still requires some landscaping. Current tenants seem very satisfied. There has been a great deal of interest so no advertising has been done since the initial ad in the Sun-Gazette. They are still reviewing 30-40 applications. It is an involved process. Fewer than a dozen tenants have moved in. They are not rushing the process. They want to make sure that the applicants meet the requirements. There is a community room that opens up to a patio. A resident stated that she is very proud of the project. The building will have handicapped accessibility soon. The building is secure and there is no public access.

Mr. Grado stated that the City owns the remaining vacant land and that the City is working with a developer who must submit a land development plan. The lot is maintained by the City.

Memorial Homes has 25 one bedroom units and 15 two bedroom units. All units have one bathroom each. The date for an open house at Memorial Homes will be decided in the future.

Mr. Ochs suggested that evergreens be planted between the Memorial Homes parking lot and Scott St.

Mr. Grado stated that the condition of the land owned by the Williamsport Redevelopment Authority is temporary. The 25 foot setback is green area that meets the landscaping requirements.

The meeting ended at 7:30 p.m.