

BNIP NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

Wednesday, June 24, 2015

6:00 p.m.

MEETING MINUTES

A neighborhood meeting was held on Wednesday, June 24, 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 ninth neighborhood meeting over a 2 1/2 year period. Meetings began before the former Brodart property, now Memorial Homes, was demolished. Ms. Wheeler named all the partners that are involved in the BNIP project and introduced the partner representatives. Ms. Wheeler described the boundaries of the BNIP neighborhood and commented that the map needs to be updated without the named Brodart property. Ms. Wheeler mentioned that the next PHARE grant, the major funding source for the projects in the BNIP neighborhood, is due in August. The partners are contemplating expanding the area. People just outside the area have expressed an interest. There will likely be some expansion. The last meeting was held in February. We try to meet every three to four months to give updates and also to hear concerns of the residents. Ms. Wheeler asked the meeting participants to introduce themselves and to mention where they live in the neighborhood. Fliers about the meetings are sent to residents in the neighborhood. A letter was sent to landlords about the meeting in February, which introduced the Rental Rehabilitation program. Residents at Memorial Homes were also notified about tonight's meeting.

Jeff Dawson, STEP, Inc., provided a status report on the Homes-In-Need program. Eleven jobs have been completed, three are in progress, eight are ready to start and 26 jobs are in the waiting list process. There is a long waiting list. Applicants are served on a first come, first served basis. Mr. Dawson encouraged people to walk/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, such as plumbing, siding and roofs. Addressing health and safety issues is the first priority. A woman stated that her sewer pipe was broken. Mr. Dawson stated that a broken sewer pipe is a serious health and safety issue and he will take her name to perhaps move her up on the list. Citizens were concerned about the extent of the involvement of the Codes Department. STEP, Inc. does not generally work directly with the Codes Department on their projects. A citizen stated that there should be better communication between STEP, Inc. and the Codes Department. A woman who resides at 1549 Memorial Ave. complained about the Codes Department. Representatives of the Codes Department have attended prior meetings. People complained about the length of time on the STEP, Inc.'s waiting list. Mr. Dawson responded by saying there is not a lot of extra manpower and they are doing the best they can. Ms. Wheeler suggested that people on the wait list be contacted and given a timeline for their project. Mr. Dawson could bring the list with him to the next meeting. Mr. Ochs suggested that the map be color coded with tabs showing where the STEP, Inc. projects are. People were encouraged to continue to apply for the program if they have not done so yet. There is a balance in the current funding pot. Showing a need with a waiting list will be helpful in securing future grant funds. Mr. Dawson explained that the goal of

the Homes-In-Needs project is not to increase property values. Ms. Wheeler suggested looking at properties that can wait versus the properties that have code issues. Mr. Ochs asked if projects can be reprioritized. Mr. Dawson responded that projects are typically handled on a first come, first served basis.

Ms. Moser from Habitat for Humanity provided an update on the “Brush with Kindness” program. Applications were sent out to all homeowners in the neighborhood. Landscaping, painting and façade work are eligible activities. Five properties have been painted. A homebuild on 1607 Memorial Ave. is scheduled for late August/early September. After that project is completed, Habitat will build a home on Scott St. Habitat is building on vacant land.

A citizen had concerns about a vacant lot located at 1535 Memorial Ave. Mr. Grado stated that the City doesn’t own it. The City will file liens against the property for any maintenance costs that the City has to assume. There is a Blighted Property Review Board that reviews these properties.

Mr. Grado reviewed the Memorial Pool project. Funding for the project includes \$250,000 of DCNR funding, \$200,000 from the First Community Foundation, \$350,000 from Community Development Block Grant and private donations for a total of 1 million dollars toward the project. There will be a soft opening on June 25. The dedication ceremony will take place on Monday, June 27 from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The pool is a zero depth entry with 4 spray features and a slide for smaller kids. Additional features will be added next year. The First Community Foundation paid for the fence, seating, and a large slide. There is handicapped access with ramp and stairs with a railing on the south side. Mr. Grado reviewed the fees for the pool. Mr. Ochs inquired about decreased fees since it is a shorter season due to the late opening. Mr. Grado stated that the fees were determined by the City Recreation Commission.

Ms. Wheeler stated that it is the only remaining pool in the City and a wonderful asset to the neighborhood. Better pedestrian access is needed.

Mr. Grado spoke about the Phase II 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. The focus will be on pedestrian access and safety across the intersection of Oliver St. There will be new sidewalks along Beeber St. and stormwater management. The crosswalks will be similar to the safe routes to school. There are other nearby areas that need to be addressed, but for this project, we are required to stay within the BNIP area. The guardrail will be removed and replaced with curbing, sidewalks and topsoil. We are looking for ways to fund connecting the pool and pathways in the future. There is space on the east side and the south side of the pool.

Mr. Mazur described the Rental Rehabilitation program. The City received inquiries regarding ten properties, 22 units in all. There are four projects underway. The tenants’ income has been verified and inspections of the property have been done. Unlike STEP Inc.’s program, the

homeowners select the contractors. It is necessary to make sure that the rents are affordable over a ten year period. In some cases, the landlord has had to lower rents by \$60.00 to \$80.00 to insure that the rents are affordable. The incentive to lowering rents is receiving the funding to rehabilitate the property. The landlord is required to contribute 15% toward the total cost of the project. Projects are currently being prioritized so that the City can meet the PHARE requirement of assisting applicants who are in the 50% median income range. 30% of the total of the PHARE funds must be used to assist people who are in the 50% median income range. A mortgage is placed on the property to make sure that the rent remains affordable for a period of ten years. It is allowable to raise the rent up to 3% per year.

Patrick, Property Manager for Memorial Homes, provided an update. Memorial Homes is currently at 60% occupancy. It is anticipated that there will be full occupancy in about a month and a half. Most applicants that are not accepted have credit or criminal issues. Memorial Home has a family, community feel to it. Residents range in age from 2 years old to 80 years old. There are veterans who are residents. A citizen mentioned that trash along the Memorial Ave. side does not get picked up and people do not pick up after their dogs. Another citizen suggested getting a security camera.

Ms. Wheeler mentioned that there is no update on the other property around Brodart that was planned for the townhouse development. Different options for the property are being reviewed.

Mr. Ochs suggested having the next meeting at Memorial Homes. Patrick will look into that.

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.