

HOUSING/RECREATION/CDBG/GICH COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

MARCH 25, 2021

PRESENT: Mayor Carswell, Vice Mayor Jones, Council Members Anderson, Byne, Williams, City Manager Valerie Kirkland, Assistant City Manager Trinetta Skinner, Planning & Development Coordinator Shelly Broxton, Public Works Superintendent Robert Seamans

ABSENT:

1. The meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Vickey Bates at 4:00 p.m.
2. Mayor Carswell gave the invocation.
3. Asst. City Manager (ACM) Skinner provided an update on the 6th Street Park Project. ACM Skinner stated that the playground equipment that was previously there was successfully removed. The replacement equipment has been ordered prior but the manufacturing company of the equipment has not made the delivery. Delivery updates will be made by the manufacturing company to ACM Skinner. The project will be completed as the required equipment is delivered. Mayor Carswell spoke to a growing concern being made by citizens in regard to the potential disturbing of the burial site described as a "slave cemetery" where the playground was constructed. As a compromise, Mayor Carswell spoke about designating a section of the park's footprint for historic and communal observance for the deceased. ACM Skinner confirmed that the area to be designated for historic and communal observance was not city owned property but privately owned. Mayor Carswell detailed the results of research performed on the playground property declaring that it had been used as a cemetery but had not been a "slave cemetery," acknowledging the designation possibly being from an oral tradition. Mayor Carswell and ACM Skinner also confirmed that the replacement equipment would be secured in the same space where the previous equipment had already been and would not be disturbing any burial sites. Chairwoman Bates queried the cemetery designation as being a "slave cemetery" when the documents relating to the lot describes it as being a "colored" cemetery. Councilwoman Anderson clarified that the designation of "slave cemetery" was made by council members from previous administrations at the time. Vice Mayor Jones further clarified that the information being circulated is that there would be digging or excavating in that area. Superintendent Seamans detailed the removal process of the existing equipment verifying in support of the councilmembers statements that no excavation will be done. All equipment is being placed in the same general area with very slight changes to safely and properly secure the equipment to the ground being careful not to use the same holes created from securing the initial equipment. New holes will be drilled close to where the exiting holes are.
4. Assistant City Manager Skinner provided an update on the CDBG 2021. The City is in phase II of the 6th Street Recreation Project. ACM Skinner stated that the City is waiting on a date from the

grant administrator, after which a public hearing will be held to announce that the grant will be applied for that area. An update will be made to the revitalization area strategy to include the 6th Street Recreation Area. Previously before the COVID-19 pandemic started the previous city manager and Vice Mayor Jones were in discussions with Thomas Grove Baptist Church to arrange a transfer of property ownership. ACM Skinner stated that the Service Strategy and Delivery Plan needs to be updated to include housing, recreation and public works facility vehicles.

5. ACM Skinner provided an update of the Community Health Initiative Partnership (CHIP) update. There were two houses demolished and rebuilt: 872 Jones Avenue & 419 West 7th Street. The residents of the homes are very appreciative and satisfied with the completion of the project. The City had plans to use another portion of the CHIP Grant to build then sell two to three houses. Because of a sizeable increase in materials cost, only one or possibly two homes will be built. Initial financial outlays were estimated at \$90K. That total has increased to be approximately \$130K. The grant administrator suggests that home building be delayed until September 2021 in hopes of a reduction in pricing.
6. ACM Skinner provided an update on the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH). The city is currently certified as an alumnus and would need to re-certify in 2022. 607 Liberty Street is designated as unfit housing in the downtown area. Contact has not been made with the owner of the property. Access to the building needs to be made in order to complete an inspection to move forward in the process. The property owner at 713 Liberty Street has obtained a permit to work on the property. The owner of the property at 715 Liberty Street hadn't contacted the city after missing the deadline for repairs. City Attorney Frails recommends that the city restart their entire process in designating unfit housing requesting that inspections and appraisals be performed on every property. Cost was estimated based on previous housing demolitions of structures approx. 1,100 square feet. The total approximate cost for each property considered dilapidated housing is \$9,100 excluding attorney fees. Additional fees may be applicable dependent on other legal proceedings. Mayor Carswell recommended that in the event property owners do not respond appropriately and in the allotted time to repair their property, the property is forfeited to the city, and the cost of demolition is passed on to the owner in the form of additional taxes. The city could then build homes on the property to sell or sell the property or portion thereof to recoup funding. City Attorney Frails will review suggestions affirming the legality of such actions. City Manager Kirkland suggested that the Land Bank Authority could be reactivated.
7. ACM Skinner gave an update on Housing Development in the city. A meeting was held with developers as recently as 3/25/21 for single and multi-family units on parcels on Fourth Street. One of the developers requested a delay for applying for rezoning with the city because a portion of the property is owned by the county. He wants to gain agreement with the county before moving forward with the city. A second developer for property on Lover's Lane has received approval for a preliminary plan to build 7 houses, constructing two at a time. He is currently looking to hire a general contractor. A third developer intends on offering upscale apartments after converting the Armory Building at 538 Liberty Street with approval of a

conditional use permit. Mayor Carswell spoke about other potential developers that may provide either a grocery store or local entertainment such as bowling with reconsideration of zoning restrictions currently in place.

8. With no further business on the agenda, the meeting was adjourned at 4:44 p.m.