

MINUTES
CITY OF DEKALB
ANNIE GLIDDEN NORTH TASK FORCE
HOUSING AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE
February 15, 2018

The Annie Glidden North Task Force Housing and Commercial Development Subcommittee held a meeting on Thursday, February 15, 2018 at City Hall in Council Chambers.

Before the meeting was called to order, Management Analyst Ray Munch introduced himself as staff liaison and Community Development Director Jo Ellen Charleton as work group representative to this subcommittee.

The meeting was called to order at 2:06 pm.

A. ROLL CALL

Present were Denise Weinmann, Shelly Perkins, Morgan Brickley, and Ellingsworth Webb. Each committee member introduced themselves and told a little about their background.

Shelly: Lifelong resident. Director of DeKalb Housing Authority.

Ellingsworth: Eden's Garden Property Manager. DeKalb resident. Rental property owner. Active in community in many other ways.

Denise: DeKalb resident. Commercial real estate agent. Active participant in many community groups. Involved with the City on past projects.

Morgan: Associate Director for Student Involvement and Leadership Development at NIU, overseeing Greek Life.

B. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ellingsworth Webb moved to approve the agenda. Morgan Brickley seconded. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

C. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audience members Chad Glover and Will Heinisch introduced themselves.

D. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/ACTION

Ray Munch explained the questions Camiros prepared for this meeting and discussion ensued.

Denise: The neighborhood needs to be a vibrant mix of students, family, and Greeks. It needs some commercial but not sure what is feasible. Needs walkability. There should be an annual increase in EAV. This is necessary to get an infusion of capital into the area. The neighborhood needs public transit, off-street parking, and good lighting.

Glenn Roby arrived 2:17 pm

Morgan: Agreed with Denise but questioned how we get there. Walkability is a really big deal. It's not currently pedestrian friendly.

Denise: Students go where it's warm, trendy, and techy. We don't have anything like that here. A lot of the desired improvements work for all kinds of residents. Some developers want to take on a whole block to make their projects feasible. Parking requirements for residential are a challenge and require more land for a project. In the future, we may not need as many parking spots. Also, there needs to be incentives.

Glenn: The City is looking at a reduction in parking (on street) to help reduce crime. The other challenge is things to do. Other towns have an entertainment district. There isn't a continuous strip here. Walkability and bike paths need to go somewhere. He had a conversation with a local banker who said they would be willing to do something in the neighborhood.

Denise: There is a particular property owner who owns a lot of property and he isn't reinvesting in the properties and it is rumored that this owner is converting properties to section 8 housing. How do we deal with that?

Shelly: Provided clarification that the property owner in question only has 17 voucher holders in his properties. He is not going all section 8, as rumored.

Ellingsworth: The owner has to pass inspections if he has vouchers.

The group engaged in further discussion on this issue and revealed that Hunter Properties and owner Sam Okner is the property being discussed.

Denise: He needs to be held accountable. How?

Glenn: He has over 900 units.

Morgan and Ellingsworth: This creates a stigma, safety issue.

Ellingsworth: The assumption is that housing vouchers mean African-Americans and that's not true.

Glenn: The program is run well by the Housing Authority, lots of checks on Section 8. Then there is low income which may or may not be good. Then there are owners renting to one or the other or both. Need to define what each group is.

Will Heinisch - Can Shelley share the information she has that shows where different kinds of housing programs are operating? (Jason Michnick made copies and distributed to all)

Shelly: Explaining differences is good but what matters is the quality of property management.

Glenn: The Task Force needs to be educated. They can be advocates and also make better decisions.

Denise: Any potential businesses will run demographics and see that there isn't the income to support the business.

Ellingsworth: The right business is key. Anybody will spend money if it's the right business. Walmart as example.

Denise: A developer was looking at the old Campus Cinema for a grocery store. Income and crime stats knocked it out. It was a store that carried lower priced items. This has happened numerous times. I need help in how to bring potential users to the neighborhood.

Shelly: If you took out some density, then the mathematical equation shifts and income goes up.

Denise: It doesn't change enough.

Ellingsworth: The loss of income during the summer months is a problem. Have to draw from other neighborhoods to make up some of that money. There are businesses that have thrived in the area.

Denise - But are they the kind of businesses that you want?

Ellingsworth: Imboden's is an example of knowing your market. Maybe we get Mom and Pop rather than big boxes.

Denise: The neighborhood has changed due to enrollment decrease. This is out of our control. But if we have some amenities, we can entice students back.

Ellingsworth: There used to be a different mix in the neighborhood.

Denise: What students want has changed.

Morgan: At what point do businesses attract from beyond the neighborhood? That is worth bringing into the conversation. Things that other people want and will come into the neighborhood for.

Denise: Fanatico's struggles attracting from outside because of their location.

Shelly: My family goes to places in the neighborhood all the time. Townies won't go.

Denise: A lot of businesses are struggling, often because of the summer loss of students.

Ellingsworth: For summer months, there is a need to create events for townies to get them to come. Need promotions.

Denise: Arts draw people too. A lot of ethnic restaurants thrive in those kinds of areas elsewhere, why not here?

Shelly: Getting back to crime, people in the buildings know what is going on. How do we get these tenants to be part of the solution? Flyers, 800 numbers. Kids know who should not be there. Tenants have to have a voice and step up.

Glenn: That also requires that tenants have a longer view of their tenancy. They are more likely to say something if they expect to be there longer. This is really tough to do with students. The challenge is creating a community where people want to live and stay. Then they are invested. Code enforcement is a lever the City has and it has been helping. Beyond that it's on the owner. Also need to work with the university to grow enrollment. Make the neighborhood attractive, get owners to invest, need enough income to do that.

Denise: How do we incentivize property owners to improve their properties?

Jo Ellen: Hunter has said he will never buy more properties in DeKalb. The hardest challenge is for the City to know if he is really making the improvements he says he is. He moves stuff around from unit to unit. Students don't appreciate maintaining housing stock. They beat it up and move on.

Morgan: Sorority houses have some supervision but frats don't. Community policing and neighborhood watch are important, but how to get them to do it. The University is pushing that with students. The problem is nobody wants to stand behind what they say. Maybe push the anonymous tip line.

Shelly: There are some people who will step up and we have an opportunity to change the story.

Denise: Why not promote those people as heroes?

Morgan: Sorority women will stand behind what they say. But the wanting to remain anonymous is societal.

Denise: This needs to be commended and publicized.

Shelly: We need to establish that troublemakers can't hide here.

Glenn: The City did catch all the shooters in recent crimes.

Shelly: And none were voucher holders.

Glenn: We need to publicize that people get caught here. DeKalb is a safe place and we need to tell that story. We need to better leverage Proudly DeKalb. Proudly DeKalb could be the common place to get information, be the voice.

Jo Ellen: Should we do more with code enforcement?

Denise: Yes.

Glenn: I have mixed emotions as a property owner but it's ok. The City worked with me but I feel the pressure. My experience has been good, but I can't speak for others' experience.

Denise: We need to hold the big owners accountable.

Will Heinisch: We need to empower the residents. Residents don't know the tools in place that they can use. Maybe AGN needs a neighborhood association to inform residents. There needs to be a central place to get information.

Ellingsworth: We could include a sheet in the move-in packet. This would be the responsibility of property owner.

Ray: Carol Stream had a similar program to provide information to new residents. They gave cases of new resident packets to property managers. I don't know how that happens here, if at all.

Ellingsworth: It happens in different ways. I have a move in process that goes through this.

Will Heinisch: Some don't do anything.

Denise: If there were events, information could be handed out.

Shelly: University Village residents say they don't feel connected to the community. They don't get information. Maybe once a month the City could have an orientation.

Denise: I don't know that people would come.

Glenn: Then there are all the things that the University offers that people don't know about.

Shelly: This sounds like a great program for an intern to design.

Jo Ellen: At some point it becomes too much information and no one looks at it.

Ellingsworth: Maybe put it on a jump drive.

Shelly: Maybe just give people a link.

Glenn: We could use hashtags for different groups - Greeks, residents, students. People who want to promote a product could do so if they bring something to the table.

Will Heinisch: Maybe it all falls under Proudly DeKalb.

Glenn: Someone has to be paid to run it. We need to create more positive momentum.

Denise: Is there a way to incentivize current owners and new developers?

Jo Ellen: Sure, we know all of the tools. We have provided incentives to the residential businesses and it hasn't helped.

Denise: If we target an area that needs reinvestment and put a package together, it has to make financial sense.

Jo Ellen: The results of this planning effort should be what we want this place to be. This can be given to developers along with incentives. Being part of a plan gives the developer more sense of comfort.

Denise: When is new lighting coming?

Jo Ellen: Soon. ComEd will be replacing streetlights in the area this year. Then we need to see if we need private owners to do something.

Morgan: Sidewalks along Annie Glidden are narrow, close to the road, and not many crosswalks. Students don't feel safe going from campus to their housing. UV renovations are nearing completion.

Shelly: UV is not 100% subsidized. They have 72 market rate units there now.

Ellingsworth: Still low income though.

Shelly: The rent structure is incredibly interesting. My organization does not have a good relationship with them.

Ellingsworth: Market units mean no income restrictions.

Shelly: A voucher holder also can rent a market rate apartment. Wealthy people do the tax credits and use them on other developments.

Ray: Offered discussion on next meeting date. Members agreed on meeting March 1, 2018 at 1:30 pm. Same location.

Jo Ellen: Is there anything that would be helpful in terms of information from the City?

Ray: Camiros asked for a list of desired outcomes from the first meeting, specific actions to be taken in the second meeting, and potential community partnerships in the third meeting.

Denise: Demographics of the area would help. I will pull an ESRI report.

Ray: Members can email Jo Ellen or myself if you want additional information.

Glenn: Do we have census data? I question Camiros' numbers.

Shelly: What benchmarks are needed to bring certain businesses in? Then what pieces have to change to get there?

Denise: A lot have site requirements within a certain radius.

E. ADJOURNMENT

Glenn Roby moved to adjourn, second by Shelly Perkins. Motion carried by unanimous vote. Meeting adjourned at 3:49 pm.

Minutes taken by Mim Evans, NIU Center for Governmental Studies

Minutes approved by the Housing and Commercial Development Subcommittee on:
March 14, 2018