

**Housing Committee Meeting**

November 12, 2015, 7pm

1401 Hollins Street, Baltimore, MD 21223

**MEETING MINUTES**

In Attendance

Michael Seipp (SWP Staff), Jamie Pitts (Chair), Diana Geis, Daniel Rodenberg, Anne Ames, Selina (B&O Tavern Owner), Nancy McCormack, Chris Redwood, Lou Packett

Edith Gilliard-Canty, Beverly Jacobs, Bif Browning

Meeting called to order at 7:09pm by Chair.

Chair asked if anyone had any other items to be added to the agenda before starting. No one had any additions to the agenda. Community land trust would not be discussed at the meeting because the people who were invited to discuss the land trust were not able to make the meeting.

**Announcements**

The meeting was opened up to announcements.

Michael Seipp mentioned that a group of investors expressed interest in investing in Southwest Baltimore neighborhoods through an investment fund. The governor has agreed to support this fund. Implementation of the fund is a year away. Amount potentially for the fund is anywhere from $15 million to $20 million dollars. The SWP vision plan was the motivator for the investor to provide financing to SW Baltimore neighborhoods. This fund is for any project or initiative as a loan from a bank and would need to be paid back like any loan would need to be. This is not for SWP but for the SW Baltimore area; anyone can apply once the fund is established.

It was brought up that a vacant city-owned house recently caught fire in Mount Clare (205 S. Stricker St). Chair thinks that it would be a good idea to engage firefighters as potential partners to help mitigate vacants. Anne Ames also suggested boarding grants as a way of protecting the vacant properties that are open to casual entry. 11 South Calhoun was also mentioned as a house that caught fire recently in the area.

A general discussion took place about vacants in the city, steered by the chair, along the lines of what can we do as a committee about vacants.

Selina from the B&O Tavern (now being renamed the B&O Café) was introduced as the new owner of the establishment. She is changing the name to ‘café’.

**FRANKLIN SQUARE and MOUNT CLARE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS**

**Developer Interviews**

Six non-profit developers approached by the Partnership to develop in the SWP area. Four of those developers expressed interest (Telesis, GBAHC, Eterprise Homes, and Unity Properties [aka, Bon Secour’s Housing]). To-date, 100 houses between both neighborhoods are being focused on for redevelopment. The committee members discussed interest in having the historic aspects and materials in the properties maintained/preserved as much as possible either through the design process as well as in the construction process.

A discussion was held on what questions to ask the developers when they are being interviewed. Michael Seipp reminded the committee that this is a lease-to-purchase project.

A suggestion was raised to ask the developers to consider hiring local contractors.

A comment was made about green building standards.

A question about lead in the properties came up as a concern and it was suggested that the developers be evaluated on their ability to remove lead in these properties.

Someone asked about rebuilding a vacant house in between two stable homes. Michael Seipp commented that infill housing redevelopment is very expensive and all the developers will say that they would opt to raze the property, shore up the walls on the existing houses, and create a yard for either of the flanking properties that sat on either side of a demolished house.

Diana Geis asked who makes decisions on demolition of houses on alley streets when demolition is occurring at the same time along adjacent major streets.

The developers and Michael Seipp have worked together over the years on a variety of housing projects. He is familiar with their work.

Committee agreed to meet with two developers on Nov 19 at 4pm and 5pm at NDC.

Committee agreed to meet with last two developers on Nov 24 at 4pm and 5pm at NDC

**Meeting with Architects**

Michael had discussions with three firms and obtained fee structures.

Michael suggested meeting with the lowest bidder first and going to the next if the committee didn’t feel the lowest bidder would be a good fit for the redevelopment.

Committee agreed to meet with one of the three architect firms on Nov 16 at 4pm at NDC.

**LLC Formation to Hold Properties**

Legal team recommends that SWP create an LLC for each property it acquires if it wants to redevelop those properties. This is recommended for legal protection of the organization in case there is legal action related to one of the properties. Once a developer comes on-board, the property would be moved over to the developer and out of the name of the LLC. The chair asked for consensus to ask the board to allow formation of an LLC to acquire property.

A concern was raised about SWP having an LLC at all because of the negative impression it could create about the partnership forming LLCs to own properties and possibly fueling further accusations about the Partnership’s activities.

A comment was made that perhaps one LLC could be formed rather than an LLC for each property.

A question was asked if this formation of LLC is legitimate. Michael commented that it is, and that’s it’s commonly done.

**Grant Requests to Foundations**

Michael Seipp mentioned that SWP will need to apply to large foundations to apply for grants. A resolution from the SWP board is needed to allow staff to do this. Chair/Michael will ask the SWP Board of Directors to pass a resolution providing approval to make application. The committee was in agreement.

**Observations by Diana Geis**

Wants to see the committee tour the neighborhoods and houses being discussed in the meetings. She toured Mount Clare with Anne Ames and was able to get a beetter understand of the issues in the community. A general discussion ensued about rising housing rents, quality of life issues with regards to housing, etc.

A comment was brought up about finding places for displaced people to go once these houses are redeveloped.

A question was asked whether drug dealers will remain or go once these houses get fixed up.

A comment was raised regarding the consequences of doing this development in both neighborhoods.

**Coordinated and Focused Housing Inspections (idea from Baltimore City Housing)**

Identify problem landlords to the city in order for the city to go after them. Problem landlords being negligent on property repairs, providing substandard housing to their tenants, not abating issues raised by tenants for basic living, etc.).

There was general discussion about this and most committee members seemed in favor of coordinated and focused housing inspections.

A comment on being conscious and mindful of going after property owners tha might negatively impact residents was raised by the chair. It was recommended that we should wait until a resource guide for tenants informing them of their rights, etc. was available.

A question was raised as to why the resource guide has not been developed and disseminated to the community yet since it was brought up months ago. Michael commented that time is an issue.

A objection was made to waiting for outreach to tenants (through the resource guide) to happen and alerting them to code enforcement’s work in the area because it would make the partnership seem to favor protecting negligent landlords instead of working to improve quality of life for the community.

Diana Geis asked what happened to the code enforcement person who was supposed to come some time ago to the Housing committee meeting.

Chair asked to have someone from the city’s code enforcement division at the next meeting to discuss code enforcement. Michael Seipp agreed to ask Stan Janczak from Code Enforcement to come to the next meeting.

No new business was raised.

Meeting adjourned 9:08pm by the Chair.