

A work session of the Beaufort City Council was held on January 5, 2010 at 5:00 p.m. in the City Hall Conference room, 302 Carteret Street. In attendance were Mayor Billy Keyserling, Council members Gary Fordham, Donnie Ann Beer, and Mike McFee; Mack Cook and City Manager Scott Dadson. Councilman Mike Sutton was absent.

In accordance with the South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, Section 30-4-80(d) as amended, all local media were duly notified of the time, date, place, and agenda of this meeting.

### **BOARD AND COMMISSIONS INTERVIEWS**

Three Redevelopment Commission applicant interviews

### **CALL TO ORDER**

The Mayor called the meeting to order at 6:12 p.m.

### **DISCUSSION REGARDING 2010 MASC HOMETOWN CONNECTION MEETING SCHEDULE**

The event date is the same as the January 26 council meeting. Mr. Dadson said if it's missed, they should go to the February 17 lobbying day. A conversation ensued about dates.

### **DISCUSSION REGARDING RETREAT PROCESS AND DATES**

Mr. Dadson said the retreat will be February 2-4, 2010 at the BJWSA conference room. A discussion ensued about the meeting space and the upcoming Redevelopment Commission meeting on January 7, 2010.

### **DISCUSSION REGARDING VACANT LOT REMEDIATION PROGRAM**

Mr. Dadson said a Neighborhood Improvement Team has taken a proactive approach and that group has been broadened to include neighborhood associations and discusses clean-up days and improvements neighborhood-by-neighborhood. Staff has come up with a way to deal with this "almost on an amnesty level."

Mack Cook said this discussion is an outgrowth of conversations from a variety of places, including the monthly community association meetings, etc. Vacant lots are not a problem just confined to the Northwest Quadrant. It's a city-wide program, not a narrow few blocks. In the Northwest Quadrant, Pigeon Point, and in the future in the Old Commons neighborhood, the city has been caring for right-of-ways, both for aesthetics and for stormwater drainage. Mr. Cook said the right-of-way limitations have been stretched to the maximum now.

**Jerry Ashmore** from The Greenery said the clean-up days have been very successful and have instilled some community spirit, helped with stormwater flow and aesthetics.

Mr. Cook said staff wants council support. Mayor Keyserling said a lot could be done for people who don't have associations. He feels the neighborhoods should see this as a partnership with them and the city. Mr. Dadson said they now feel comfortable going back to neighborhoods to deal with those who can't or won't comply.

Councilman Fordham said in one neighborhood, cars are parked on the grass between the curb and the sidewalk, which isn't their property. Police need to put notices on cars and tow them. Also, there need to be more roofs in vacant lots, but he asked how to get the Housing Authority involved. He's not sure what they do. Mayor Keyserling said in reference to the parking, in the 1980s, when the sewer was put in, the streets were designed with a roll-over curb to be parked on as on-street parking. Cars may be killing grass but mostly they were parking lots. Councilman Fordham said the dead grass goes in the roadway and clogs up the stormwater drainage. Mr. Dadson said the parking could be organized better and that's worth looking into. The Housing Authority will be at a work session on January 19<sup>th</sup>. Councilwoman Beer said the sidewalk in Pigeon Point, when it was put in, took away all the off-street parking.

**Henrietta Goode** said it needs to be looked at realistically. Councilman McFee said when BJWSA flushes the hydrants where there are new sidewalks, they turn on the meters and eradicate the landscaping property owners have done and clog the stormwater drains. Mr. Dadson said this is all over the city. Councilman McFee asked if there was anything that could be done to ask them to respect the landscaping that's been done. They could put baffles on so as not to erode the land. Mr. Dadson said it's a matter of a letter and some meetings.

Mr. Dadson said that the proposal on the table advocates a vacant lot remediation program in which the city will obtain consent from the owner of a lot that needs to be cleaned up and will clean it without charge, but if the property owner doesn't maintain the property and it must be remedied again, *both* clean-ups will be charged for as an incentive to maintain the clean-up. The city will work everywhere in the city for up to 6 months for free.

Ms. Goode complimented the city's efforts on clean-up. The first clean-up was an amnesty at no cost. She recommended not going back and charging for the first clean-up – to consider it “a blessing” – if they have to go back in and charge for a second clean-up. Mayor Keyserling said that's where the neighborhoods' help is needed to sell and communicate this to people.

Councilman McFee said the clean-ups that have been done are not what's being talked about. Those are done and will continue to be done as part of taxes. The proposal is for private lots that legal access isn't available for without consent. Ms. Goode confirmed what's being said and said she supports the vacant lot owner being responsible for *keeping* it cleaned up after it's been cleaned up by the city.

Mr. Dadson said the city will continue to maintain its assets; the right-of-ways will be maintained at least 8 times a year. He reiterated that what's under discussion is private property. Councilwoman Beer said this is to target those who won't keep their lots clean.

**Pete Palmer**, head of the task force for the Northwest Quadrant and a trustee on the Historic Beaufort Foundation, said he can't say enough positive about what the council and staff have done physically and in terms of building trust. He endorsed this initiative very strongly. Mr. Dadson encouraged reading of Mr. Cook's report. This will strengthen the neighborhoods' resolve and reassure them that they'll have back-up while also maintaining the city's assets.

Councilwoman Beer said it's a safety issue, too, because of crimes that might happen on vacant lots. **Maxine Lutz**, representing the Old Commons neighborhood, said their association will alert property owners of what is happening. She added that there's a problem with vacant lots becoming parking lots.

Ms. Goode suggested that neighborhood associations be used to possibly alleviate the problem before a 2<sup>nd</sup> clean-up is necessary. They could be given a time limit to contact the owners and possibly help an elderly owner, for example. Councilman McFee agreed that if the association were to make the overture, the property owner might respond better than if the city stepped in. It sends a signal that the association and neighbors are watching the property.

Mr. Cook said if there's agreement to go forward, city council will be asked for \$50,000 that will be taken out of other programs. The city is restructuring how codes are enforced. Nuisance codes (weeds, cars, trash) enforcement could be given to the fire department, because they are fire hazards. The city does good fire prevention. The fire department can offer solutions as well as citations. When they see a problem, they can help remove the trash and get it to the curb. They have willing manpower. In the past, responses to code violations have been reactive, but the fire department could go systematically through a neighborhood and look for problems before they're reported. Councilwoman Beer said she'd rather do this than deal with burning houses. Mr. Dadson said it needs to be put in the form of a resolution.

**Evan Thompson** said the National Trust wants to highlight and share the city's efforts statewide and nationally.

Mayor Keyserling said council should be thinking in the next week about the final interviews for Redevelopment Commission and moving forward.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before city council, Councilman McFee made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Councilwoman Beer. The motion was approved unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_  
SHIRLEY HUGHES, ACTING CITY CLERK