

1. ROLL CALL

The Housing Commission meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m. with the following members calling in via Zoom conference call: Angie Davenport, Marvin Mast, Ryan Patton, Roy Little, Nathan DeBerry, Steve Dechant, Kelly Anne Lanham, Jeff Thomson, and Lisa Gleason. Lucas Soltow, and Dan Rich were absent. Adam Stewart, Neighborhood Coordinator and Julia Westfall, SCKEDD were also in attendance. Staff present were Ryan Hvitlæk, Director of Planning and Development; Jim Seitnater; Downtown and Housing Coordinator; and Charlene Mosier, Planning Technician.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the July 22, 2020 meeting were approved on a motion by Mast, seconded by Patton, passed unanimously.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS – Hvitlæk said John Vetter, Code Enforcement, has transferred to the Public Works Department and today was Building Official, Trent Maxwell's last day.

4. WRITTEN REPORTS

a. **March and April 2020 Housing Dashboard**

Investigations, rental inspections and code enforcement cases have been fewer due to Covid and Vetter and Maxwell no longer in the Inspection Department. There were no new residential permits this month; however, the number is still higher than last year. There have also been fewer demolitions than last year. The Down Payment Match program has been popular in part due to low interest rates. There were no additional Brush Up Hutch applications completed this month. Gleason said United Way painted two homes for community workday. Seitnater said youth volunteers arranged by Thomson to help with painting could not come this summer because of Covid. Hvitlæk said all programs will be reviewed at the end of the year. Some programs are getting low on funds.

Dechant asked how complaints are being handled with two less inspectors. Hvitlæk said complaints are being handled on a complaint basis as they cannot be as proactive with a reduced staff. The Inspections Department will be reorganized. Gleason asked the commission members for their thoughts on replacing these positions. DeBerry said if the codes are to be maintained and enforced, we need to replace the positions. This was the consensus of the commission. They indicated there has been improvement in neighborhood appearances recently and we do not want to digress after working so hard to get to this point. Lanham said we do not want those hours and years of work by the Housing Commission to be lost because there is no staff to enforce the codes. Little said John Vetter did a very good job with code enforcement and the improvement in recent curb appeal was in large part due to his work. Little said he does not understand why he was transferred to another department as this will be a loss to the city. Hvitlæk suggested voicing concerns to the City Council and the City Manager. Dechant said these staff members did not leave on their own and their absence is alarming to the momentum of code enforcement. The Housing Commission voiced their disappointment at these changes. Lanham would like members of the Housing Commission to have a meeting with the City Manager separately from the regularly scheduled Housing Commission meeting.

A motion by Dechant, seconded by Lanham to have Gleason draft a letter to the City Council and City Manager on behalf of the Housing Commission and state their concerns and comments, passed unanimously.

Dechant suggested we have copies of past newspaper articles on the work of the Housing Commission showing the long history and effort that has been done to get to where we are today available for the meeting with the new City Manager and City Councilmembers.

5. NEW BUSINESS

a. **Featured Neighborhood Report**

Stewart said he is finishing up the fall newsletter. The Creekside Neighborhood is working to improve Bernard White Park trail markers. A Pathways grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield of \$81,000 is being utilized. National Night Out will consist of a fall festival in the park for the Creekside Neighborhood. The Farmington Neighborhood will host a chili feed and tree planting using a \$2,500 grant from the Hutchinson Community Foundation. Grace Arbor is planning to hold a gathering with residents of the neighborhood and tell stories and give a history of their neighborhood. SW Bricktown will host a Hispanic heritage month and National Night Out. A mailing will be sent to the residents. The sixth neighborhood will be located between 11th Avenue and 17th Avenue from Main St to Monroe St and will meet Saturday for a planning meeting and ice cream at Cub Square.

b. **Update on CDBG Grant for Creekside**

Seitnater reported he and Hvitløk met with Bill Lampe from SCKEDD. They are working on gathering more information from applicants and on scheduling property inspections so bids can be completed. There are currently seven residential applicants and two rental applications. We are ahead of the timeline and want to keep on track to be ready for the second grant. SCKEDD has been very busy with covid grants and the process is taking a bit longer. There are two contractors currently interested in bidding.

c. **Update on Code Enforcement**

Hvitløk said code enforcement policies have been reviewed to better communicate with residents and soften the language. The City Attorney and City Manager have worked with the Inspection Department and Planning Department to develop door hangers. The City of Salina has used this approach and it has been successful. If an inspector sees a violation, he places the hanger on the door. Lanham said she uses door hangers in her business and they work very well. Another approach is to time the sending of enforcement letters based on the project, such as letters about peeling paint would not be sent in the middle of winter without a reasonable amount of time to complete the project due to weather conditions. It gets the process going and keeps it moving without making unreasonable demands. Information on available programs is included with the letters. Door hangers need to be responded to in two business days or a follow-up letter will be sent. If the occupant is on vacation that will be accounted for. Little said it may be just as easy to wait until May to send the letter rather than having to send a second letter. He also has safety concerns for those placing hangers on the doors.

Questions were asked about mowing fees and how they are charged to the property owner and paid. Hvitløk said fees are attached to the property and can accumulate. Dechant said some owners use the City similar to a mowing company and this can be quite expense.

The plan is for door hangers to be implemented in the next couple of weeks.

d. Update on COVID and Housing

Hvitløk updated the commission on covid and housing concerns. He showed a chart of unemployment claims in Reno County starting in March and the number was 110 to 120 claims a month for the past two years. In May, there were 2,100 unemployment claims and 1,100 in August. The numbers have gone down a little but are still high. A moratorium on evictions by the Governor ended in July and was renewed until September 15. Federal moratoriums on evictions may be applied due to covid if requirements are met but we are not sure how that will affect us locally. Seitnater researched 1507 cases of which 119 were landlord tenant disputes and most cases were on the 1st and 15th of the month handled by an attorney. Lanham said her evictions were down and United Way helped numerous renters with their rent payments. Gleason said the number of requests for rent assistance from United Way was overwhelming. There are 15 to 20 requests each day mostly at the first and middle of the month. Many landlords have waived late fees to stretch these funds. Hvitløk said some of the funds are drying up now and unemployment is still high. John Deardoff is consulting with the county and nonprofits are utilizing Spark Funds. City funds are budgeted and there are covid grants; however, there is not enough city staff to administer additional grants, which will place more stress on nonprofits to do grant work. Kari Mailloux said some groups were behind before covid. Resources are thin and affordable housing is full.

Lovella Kelley said evictions are still happening and asked where these people go. Commerce Gardens has a waiting list. Marvin Mast said there are empty land bank lots that could be developed with duplexes with one bedroom and low cost utilities. Hvitløk said studio size homes from 400 to 600 square feet are classified as economy homes and some are being built by New Beginnings.

Jo Mora of New Beginnings said a large industrial building is needed to construct these economy style homes. These homes could also be constructed in conjunction with their traditional jobs program.

Mast said there is a balance to show mercy and understanding by landlords and landlords keeping their bills paid as well. Mailloux said utilities and rent still need to be paid even if they have been deferred. Most assistance requests are housing related. The Salvation Army also receives about 30 calls a day for assistance, many are covid related. Mast said many rents have increased and those on disability are seriously impacted by this. Gleason said the needs are not going down but the funds are and covid is not going away any time soon. Some brainstorming with the various entities of housing could be helpful during this time.

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Lovella Kelley said some apartments are in very bad condition. She asked about the rental inspections part of this. Gleason said this has been the work of the Housing Commission for a number of years and we are continuing to look for ways to improve rental living conditions.

Hvitlok said Spark funds will be available the next month for childcare and housing and the City will be working with the county to utilize these funds.

e. Update on Housing Discrimination

Hvitløk said the City Attorney is monitoring the Supreme Court decisions and working with the Human Rights Commission on gender identity, sexual orientation, and protected classes. The State will accept complaints on discrimination. The Housing Commission and Human Relations Commission are maintaining that these groups are protected.

6. OPEN COMMENTS

a. None

7. OTHER

a. The next Housing Commission meeting is scheduled for September 23 at 4:00 p.m.

8. ADJOURNMENT – The meeting adjourned at 5:25 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Charlene Mosier, Planning Technician

Approved this 28th day of October, 2020.



Secretary

Ryan Hvitløk, AICP, CFM
Director of Planning & Development