



## COMMUNITY & NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE

October 16, 2008

The Community & Neighborhood Services Committee of the City of Mesa met in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on October 16, 2008 at 9:18 a.m.

### COMMITTEE PRESENT

Dina Higgins, Chairman  
Dennis Kavanaugh  
Dave Richins

### COUNCIL PRESENT

None

### STAFF PRESENT

Kari Kent  
Alfred Smith  
Natalie Lewis

#### 1. Items from citizens present.

There were no items from citizens present.

#### 2. Hear an overview presentation on the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP), hear from United Way to discuss ideas and vision for the NSP program's implementation in Mesa, and hear a presentation, discuss and make recommendations on tools and concepts to address other Citywide vacant and abandoned buildings.

Neighborhood Services Director Ray Villa stated that due to the City Council's extensive discussion of the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) at an earlier Study Session, he would not make a presentation concerning that issue at this time. He noted, however, that he would briefly review what steps other communities throughout the country have taken to address the issue of abandoned residential properties and vacant buildings.

Mr. Villa displayed a PowerPoint presentation (A copy is available for review in the City Clerk's Office) and reported that there are approximately 153 vacant buildings (retail, industrial and office) and 2,338 properties in foreclosure in the City of Mesa. He explained that abandoned residential properties or vacant buildings are often a catalyst for criminal activity, discourage economic growth, and create difficulty for the City in identifying a responsible party within the mortgage lender's agency to address such conditions.

Mr. Villa highlighted a series of maps displayed at the earlier Study Session entitled "Foreclosure by Zip Code in Mesa," "Foreclosure Density in Zip Code 85204," and "Incident Density Map in Zip Code 85204." He also provided a "foreclosure snapshot" of an area located between 1701 and 1952 East Jarvis in Mesa's 85204 Zip Code, which demonstrates that 20% of the properties in this location are vacant, repossessed, or in the process of foreclosure.

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that staff is unaware of any communities in Arizona that have implemented an enforcement process regarding abandoned properties or vacant buildings; that the communities of Chula Vista, California, Coral Springs, Florida, Sacramento, California and Evanston, Illinois have created programs which require that if a property goes into default and is transferred to a new trustee, that such entity must provide notification to the municipality that it is the responsible party for the property; that some of the above-referenced communities require that the responsible party's name and telephone number, as well as the name of the local management company, be posted on the outside of the property; and that in those instances where the property owner is located out-of-state, the entity must hire an in-state property management company to take responsibility for the property.

In response to a question from Committeemember Kavanaugh, Mr. Villa clarified that some of the above-listed communities have enacted ordinances that address vacant commercial buildings as well as abandoned residential properties.

Committeemember Kavanaugh commented that in his district, he is aware of a building that has graffiti on it and noted that the other tenants in the shopping center requested that the City help to remedy the situation. He stated that in researching the matter, staff has encountered difficulty in identifying the owners of the property. Committeemember Kavanaugh said that if the Committee considers a vacant buildings ordinance, he would hope that it addresses residential and commercial properties and also includes a registration process as previously outlined by Mr. Villa.

Further discussion ensued relative to the fact that some of the above-mentioned cities require that when a residential property is abandoned and in the process of foreclosure, that once the property changes hands (i.e., the bank takes it over), the bank is required to provide the municipality with the name of the responsible party, the management company, and an emergency contact person; that certain cities require that the properties be maintained in the same condition as the surrounding neighborhood so as not to create criminal activity or attract nuisances; and that staff is seeking the Committee's direction with regard to conducting further research on the matter and bringing back alternatives for the Committee's consideration.

Chairman Higgins stated that it was the concurrence of the Committee that staff proceed with the development of an ordinance that would address abandoned residential properties and vacant buildings in the City of Mesa and also that staff bring back recommendations for the Committee's consideration.

Special Assistant to the City Manager Natalie Lewis indicated that the next meeting of the Community & Neighborhood Services Committee is scheduled for December 4, 2008. She said that staff could present the recommendations to the Committee at that time.

Mr. Villa further remarked that his staff has been working with the All Coming Together in Our Neighborhoods (A.C.T.I.O.N.) team and various other organizations to implement positive changes in the 85204 Zip Code area. He said that the development of an abandoned residential properties and vacant buildings ordinance would enhance those efforts.

Additional discussion ensued relative to the fact that the owners of two or more rental properties in Mesa are required to register with the County Assessor's Office; and that voter approval of

Proposition 400 would amend the Mesa City Charter to allow for interior inspections of deteriorated rental properties as authorized by State law.

Mr. Villa introduced Acting Code Compliance Director Scott Bouchie to the Committee and said he would be actively involved in the process and spearhead most of these efforts.

Chairman Higgins inquired regarding the feasibility of a process whereby the owner of a rental property would be required to have the property inspected prior to it being rented to a prospective tenant.

Mr. Villa responded that State law prohibits the City from charging a fee to inspect a property for no particular reason. He noted, however, that if a Code Compliance officer issues a violation regarding a property and the owner fails to remedy the situation, the City is permitted to assess a fee for the follow-up inspection.

Chairman Higgins thanked staff for the presentation.

3. Hear a presentation and discuss the All Coming Together in Our Neighborhoods (A.C.T.I.O.N.) program activities and outcomes.

Assistant City Prosecutor III Patty Tracey introduced Police Officer John Fitzgerald and said they are both members of the All Coming Together in Our Neighborhoods (A.C.T.I.O.N.) team.

Ms. Tracey displayed a PowerPoint presentation (A copy is available for review in the City Clerk's Office) and reported that the A.C.T.I.O.N. team is comprised of several City departments, non-profit organizations and neighborhood partners. She explained that the purpose of the team is to provide a comprehensive and coordinated approach in addressing neighborhood crime and deterioration and offer assistance Citywide and within a geographically-defined focus area. Ms. Tracey also noted that Community Prosecution is a long-term proactive partnership between the City Prosecutor's Office, law enforcement, the community and public and private organizations.

Discussion ensued relative to various Citywide projects that have recently been undertaken by the A.C.T.I.O.N. team; the fact that the A.C.T.I.O.N. team unanimously selected a one-square mile focus area surrounding Reed Park; that the focus area has over 406 separate parcels, a minimum of 100 properties that are foreclosed or vacant, six to eight halfway houses, an elementary school, and 94% of the rentals are owned by non-Mesa residents.

In response to a question from Chairman Higgins, Officer Fitzgerald clarified that halfway houses in Mesa must be registered with the City. He said that on one street in the Reed Park focus area, there are three or four recovery homes, two of which are next door to each other and another is located several houses down the street. Officer Fitzgerald added that the facilities do not meet the City's 1,200-foot separation requirement.

Ms. Tracey further reported that the A.C.T.I.O.N. team selected Reed Park as its focus area due to the fact that there is a large City park with a high level of usage by the surrounding residents; the principal at the local elementary school is involved in neighborhood development; and the school is a recipient of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Grant and winner of the Toyota Literacy Program. She stated, however, that the challenges for the area include a high number of calls for police and

fire service; a high density of rental and/or multifamily dwellings; resistance by the residents to involve police in the neighborhood; and signs of property deterioration.

Ms. Tracey explained that in an effort to address the above-referenced challenges in the Reed Park focus area, the Police Department has implemented a series of enforcement tactics. She offered a short synopsis of those efforts as follows:

- Increased Police presence in the neighborhood through the use of additional foot patrols and bike patrols.
- Implementation of a Zero Tolerance Policy.
- Development of a "Reed Park Trespass List," which includes photographs, probation terms, aliases and physical descriptions of individuals who have committed crimes in the area.
- Development of a relationship between the Police Department and the property owners and residents in the focus area.

Further discussion ensued relative to the fact that in 2008, there has been a reduction in Police calls for service in the Reed Park area (4.66% overall reduction in the first quarter, 27.84% in the second quarter and 35.56% in the third quarter); and that with regard to Part 1 crimes (i.e., shoplifting, burglary, homicide, aggravated assault), there has been a 3.33% overall increase in the first quarter, a 25% reduction in the second quarter and a 35.56% reduction in the third quarter.

Ms. Tracey also spoke regarding the enforcement tactics that have been implemented by the Fire Department in the Reed Park focus area. Those efforts consist of the following:

- Participation in multi-departmental inspections.
- Boarded up vacant buildings where documented criminal activity was occurring.
- Secured unsafe walkways discovered during an emergency medical response call.
- Enforced annual inspection fee payments.

Additional discussion ensued relative to the fact that in 2008, there has been a 32.43% increase in calls for service during the first quarter, but a 28.30% decrease during the second quarter.

Ms. Tracey further spoke regarding the efforts of the Code Compliance Division to implement enforcement strategies in the Reed Park focus area. She explained that such efforts have included instituting a Zero Tolerance Policy and assigning a full-time Code Compliance Officer to inspect property and document violations within the area. Ms. Tracey displayed a series of "before and after" photographs demonstrating various Code violations that have been issued and subsequently corrected.

Ms. Tracey informed the Committee that the Transportation Department has also assisted the A.C.T.I.O.N. team by completing two alley improvements in the Reed Park area.

Further discussion ensued relative to current and future projects in the Reed Park focus area (i.e., afterschool summer program, bimonthly produce food drop); and the projected trends for the A.C.T.I.O.N. team.

Committeemember Kavanaugh acknowledged the efforts and hard work of the A.C.T.I.O.N. team and the fact it utilizes multiple resources to accomplish its goals and objectives.

In response to a question from Committeemember Kavanaugh, Ms. Tracey stated that given the challenges that currently exist in the Reed Park area, the A.C.T.I.O.N. team anticipates that it would continue to focus its efforts in that location for approximately five years. She added that the team would eventually like to select other focus areas throughout Mesa.

Chairman Higgins requested that staff research the close proximity of the halfway homes located in the Reed Park area that may exceed the City's 1,200-foot separation requirement.

Deputy City Manager Kari Kent responded that staff would confirm that the halfway homes are registered and were not grandfathered in prior to the distance separation requirement being instituted.

Ms. Tracey presented a plaque to Code Compliance Officer Charles DeWitt, who is retiring today, in recognition of his service and dedication to the City of Mesa and in particular, his last year of service in the Reed Park focus area.

Chairman Higgins congratulated Mr. DeWitt on his retirement. She also thanked staff for the presentation.

4. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Community & Neighborhood Services Committee meeting adjourned at 9:58 a.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Community & Neighborhood Services Committee meeting of the City of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of October 2008. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

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LINDA CROCKER, CITY CLERK