



Minutes
Ad Hoc on Housing and Resident Safety
Friday, February 25, 2022 @ 8:30 a.m.
City Council Conference Room

CALL TO ORDER

Council Member Wood called the meeting to order at 8:31 a.m.

PRESENT

Council Member Spitzley, Chair – arrived @ 8:41am

Council Member Wood, Vice-Chair

Council Member Brown, Member

OTHERS PRESENT

Renee Richmond, Council Staff

Lisa Hagen, OCA

Jim Smiertka, OC – arrived @ 8:33

Scott Sanford, Code Compliance – arrived @ 8:32am

Tony Gant, Nation Outside – arrived @ 8:45

Andrew Fedewa, EDP

Mary Koutsoukos, LBWL – arrived @ 8:47

MINUTES

MOTION BY COUNCIL MEMBER BROWN TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 4, 2022, AS PRESENTED. MOTION CARRIED 2-0.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public present at this time.

Presentations

Code Enforcement – Scott Sanford, City Lead Housing Inspector

Councilmember Wood stated Code was asked to come in for a presentation and some questions were sent to them. Mr. Sanford said he believed the questions were responded to in an email but could answer questions the Committee might have. Mr. Sanford then indicated in the handout that EDP gave a 3-year span, there were 5,418 single family rental certificates issued and 495 multi-family certificates issued. Councilmember Wood asked if they had the number of people that get a certificate but then don't follow through with the inspections, Mr. Sanford indicated their system is not designed for that and would have to be calculated manually. He continued that they do the billing for single/multi between the 1st/3rd of each month and the late fees on the 15th of the month, and then any 30/60 days on rental certificates to catch those that haven't paid. Councilmember Wood asked if on the 15th is that include tag monitoring fees, Mr. Sanford responded no that is on the 1st. Mr. Sanford continued that his office does everything by email for records.

Councilmember Spitzley arrived at 8:41am

Public Comment

Councilmember Spitzley asked if anyone from the public wanted to comment.

Tony Gant introduced himself as a resident of Lansing and part of Nation Outside and organization that wants fair chance housing for formerly incarcerated people and have conversations with Council and the Committee. He explained that people with a criminal history are unable to get housing or get displaced, when someone is released and goes back to live with a family member even that family member could be displaced because of the background of the released person. Councilmember Spitzley asked if it could be because the application asks if you've been convicted of a crime. Mr. Gant said they had a person released and returned to his home with his wife and when the rental found out they had to leave. Councilmember Spitzley agreed with future conversations and asked Ms. Richmond to reach out for a future date so he could set a time to come in. Councilmember Wood recommended maybe a presentation at the same time and the landlord association can come in too.

Maria Koutsoukos stated she was just here to find out about the fair housing and how to help.

Councilmember Brown requested to go back to Mr. Sanford on how their system works and asked for example if they have 10,000 certificates filed and 5,400 are filled are they up to speed in completing. Mr. Sanford replied they have received approximately 200 inspections and we are 2-3 months out with scheduling, we are at 63% but the numbers get skewed because rental certificates are issued per building and not unit. Councilmember Spitzley asked what makes someone submit a rental certificate, Councilmember Wood commented for instance if someone moves out of their house, but their son move in and takes care of it, it is now a rental. Mr. Sanford stated they are at about 1900-ish buildings and then corrected they are roughly at 55% not 63%. Mr. Sanford continued that everything is broken down by months and average 270-320 family renewals and anywhere from 70-100 multi-family. Councilmember Wood mentioned if she is not mistaken and her house is up for rent and nobody is in it, I don't have to have a certificate, Mr. Sanford responded as long as it doesn't go beyond a year. Councilmember Spitzley asked about the cost, Mr. Sanford stated Council sets the fee, and for single family it is \$240 for the inspection fee and includes on premise and a reinspection. Councilmember Wood asked law to verify the fee can only be as much as what the cost of the job is and not more correct. Mr. Smiertka stated if it's because an issue they may need an outside evaluator. Councilmember Wood asked if Code was a fund within itself and Mr. Sanford said they are in the general fund, and they are the only code enforcement that does all housing inspection, trash, disabled cars, etc. He continued that Grand Rapids has 15 code officers and they don't tag houses. He added that if you look, they did almost 77,000 letters from 2019-2020, almost everything is a recheck and then they have to re-write and recheck again. Each number represents a specific inspection, and they have to recheck so you could double the number, we've asked for additional code officers. Councilmember Spitzley verified they have 10 code officers and 4 inspectors and then sked how many more they need, Mr. Sanford said he would need more time to figure that out, we aren't adequately staffed. Councilmember Spitzley said she is just wondering what they need, Mr. Sanford said legacy cost is always a concern, but we don't deal with people out office is in the housing business. They don't get involved with landlord/tenant issues.

Councilmember Spitzley mentioned maybe we could look at the Ombudsman position, she thought that person was supposed to have a legal background that could assist with questions from tenants on issues with landlords. Councilmember Spitzley inquired about 927 Washington Avenue and where these people are going and thought the roll of the Ombudsman and if Jim Smiertka could look at it and continued if it is something they need to look at as a budget priority for that role to expand or eliminate. Councilmember Spitzley added maybe we could get Mr. McDonald in to talk about the position. Mr. Smiertka state he as a meeting today to review the

Ombudsman and asked Ms. Hagen to please be on that with him. Councilmember Wood stated she appreciates what that position has done for educating people on rentals, but we haven't seen is what it is important as to what Mr. Gant spoke about, is it human rights organization or housing ombudsman. Councilmember Brown appreciated hearing about the role as he's had people from Autumn Ridge reach out to him as well as others that their houses were targeted with gunfire, and they don't have support and are homeless. Councilmember Wood added looking at Autumn Ridge that maybe something the Ombudsman could've handled.

Councilmember Brown asked Mr. Sanford based on his experience in the City and his opinion does he feel upkeep on rentals are getting better or worse, he replied better, they are writing about 8-10% and banks have stepped up, the only thing is HUD can be a fight as we don't know it's HUD until just before they sell. We also write owner occupied, not just rental but with owner occupied that goes to court, they can get into a rental for inspections but owner they have to get permission. Mr. Sanford continued that LPD has been helpful in telling them to call when at an owner occupied and if they can get out there to assist, they will. Mr. Sanford added they work with the community mental health and elderly, Councilmember Wood mentioned TCOA, and Mr. Sanford continued that he also works with Veterans and communities. Mr. Sanford also stated there is a huge hoarding issue, not just junk and trash, people save papers, files, magazines, books, etc. He continued that they have used a house on Hughes street for training.

Councilmember Spitzley thanked Mr. Sanford for all the information, it will be helpful to put forth recommendations. Councilmember Wood mentions that she has requested a current IPMC.

Housing Code Enforcement Manual – Practices and Procedures (2019)

Councilmember Spitzley asked to speak about the current manual and housing law, Ms. Hagen stated this was created back in 2019. Mr. Smiertka stated what jumped out at him was law had created a civil infraction bureau, but it is gone now. Mr. Sanford indicated he thinks it goes directly to court, Ms. Hagen mentioned fines are different. Councilmember Wood said her issue with civil infraction is there's finger pointing at who is responsible, and for example someone is issued five tickets then four are dismissed, we need to hurt them in the pocketbook or the behavior repeats. Councilmember Spitzley agreed that something needs to be done before a pink or red tag is issued. Mr. Sanford said sometimes the landlord will vacate the property and displace the tenants, we are not going to displace a 200+ unit property. Councilmember Wood asked Ms. Richmond to research old files from 1999 to see if we have a housing study, she confirmed. Lastly, Mr. Sanford asked if the Committee wanted him to attend future meetings, all concurred.

Adjourn

Adjourned at 9:44am

Submitted by,

Renee Richmond, Recording Secretary

Lansing City Council

Approved by the Committee April 8, 2022