



Minutes
Ad Hoc on Housing and Resident Safety
Friday, July 22, 2022 @ 8:30 a.m.
City Council Conference Room

CALL TO ORDER

Council Member Wood called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

PRESENT

Council Member Spitzley, Chair
Council Member Wood, Vice-Chair- excused
Council Member Brown, Member

OTHERS PRESENT

Sherrie Boak, Council Office Manager
Jim Smiertka, OCA
Lisa Hagen, OCA
Judge Kristen Simmons, 54-A District Courts
Anethia Brewer, 54-A District Courts
Zach Etzin
Norma Bauer
Veronica Flores
Eric Gaines
Jody Washington
William Lawrence

MINUTES

MOTION BY COUNCIL MEMBER BROWN TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM JULY 8, 2022 AS PRESENTED. MOTION CARRIED 2-0.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Washington spoke on a recent "Peoples Council" meeting where their number one issue is housing as it relates to affordable units and their state of condition along with HUD owned affordable housing.

Ms. Bauer spoke on her frustration with Lansing Housing Commission owned homes and their maintenance of those.

Mr. Gaines introduced himself from Nation Outside and stated he was there to just take notes on the ordinance discussion later in the meeting.

Council Member Spitzley clarified to the public that City Council has no control over the Lansing Housing Commission. They have their own Board, which is all appointed by the Mayor. Regarding the Lansing Housing Commission scattered housing, there was confusion early on that the City was part owner, however under the directive of the Mayor and OCA City Council

corrected that portion of the ordinance that was confusing, and the City of Lansing does not own any of the Lansing Housing Commission scattered housing. Mr. Smiertka added that there is State Statute that authorizes the creation of the Housing Commission.

PRESENTATIONS

"Community Court" – Judge Kristen Simmons (54-A District Court)

Judge Simmons began by explaining the specialty court would be the first in Michigan and to qualify you have to be in the system already but this will work with you to find the appropriate ways to address the violation instead of fines, costs or jail. This will allow the justice system restore trust with the community but also address the issues; when you increase the livelihood you decrease crime. Judge Simmons continued you goal would be to include an element to address mental health but until there is a better facility to address those in mental health court, this will not be addressed when the Community Court starts. Over the last 3-5 years there has been a push to have a Community Court, and she is encouraged that this can also deal with cases of blight, property issues, major housing issues with Code, and they are hopeful that Code will concur with this proposed court and the Community Court can assist in handling housing issues.

Council Member Spitzley concurred with the proposed plan and agreed there needs to be a point where the City is not "over-taxing" the City Attorneys with court cases on housing. She then provided examples of multi family sites where this would have been helpful and provided a working benchmark and schedule for the property owners of those large complexes.

Mr. Smiertka asked Judge Simmons if she envisioned one City Attorney to handle just Community Court, and Judge Simmons stated her plan would not be just one attorney but a complete buy in from the City Attorney office and LPD to work in tandem.

Ms. Brewer provided statistics from a similar court in Detroit where they saw 237 cases in 2019 with a 92% success compliance and diversion was served.

Mr. Smiertka suggested the Courts look at the code on civil infractions to see if there needs to be modifications to the fees by Council.

Council Member Brown asked for clarification on "Community Courts" and "Specialty Courts". Judge Simmons explained that a specialty court is a problem solving court such as the sobriety court and eviction court.

Council Member Brown asked if there was a timeline on when this Community Court would begin, and was told the goal was 7/1/2022 at the start of the fiscal year but it now looks like 9/1/2022. They have what they need and they have gotten some small funding from Financial Empowerment and their goal is to use the resources they already have.

Council Member Spitzley asked if the Courts would need ordinance changes made by Council. Judge Simmons confirmed they looked at the current ordinance and do not see any changes needed except possibly addressing the ordinance on blight to address having the authority in the Community Court.

Council Member Spitzley asked OCA if there is a way for Code Compliance to have the "regular" violators put in this Community Court instead of violations, fees, fines, etc. Mr. Smiertka stated there needs first to be a stipulation with the landlords/tenants, and then the City would need to amend the penalty section to add Community Court as an option where it already says civil infraction. He concluded that he supports the idea of the Community Court and making the changes.

Council Member Brown asked if they can accept funds from foundations, and Judge Simmons and Ms. Brewer confirmed they can accept grants from anyone.

Ms. Brewer expanded on other things that could change which included a need for a coordinator similar to a probation officer, to be in charge of case management.

Ms. Brewer then spoke briefly on the eviction program acknowledged they were one in 12 that received a grant thanks to the work done by Judge Alderson on the PILOT eviction program which produced a viable resolution to keeping people in their homes. The grant is for \$300,000 for 2 years and possibly more in a 3rd year. They have hired an eviction coordinator who coordinates with the landlord and tenant to assist they can stay in their homes.

Council Member Brown inquired into the connection between the eviction court and the HRCS Housing Ombudsman role. Judge Simmons explained they will not be in the eviction court and the courts cannot assist them until they have been served the right to eviction documents. If the tenant is not to that point they would need to contact someone else for assistance, because the Courts do not step in to assist until they are in the court system.

Ms. Flores asked for information on these courts be made known to the Landlord Association. Council Member Spitzley noted that those organizations have been invited and made aware of these public meetings.

Council Member Spitzley acknowledged the courts and their work on the two programs, noting the City Council goal is to make sure the residents are made aware and they can stop the cycle before they get to the courts. There needs to be information on the "Before you Sign" document the Committee has been speaking about in their list of goals from this Committee.

Ms. Washington voiced her concerns with the homeless being "evicted" from their camps. Judge Simmons noted it is not "eviction" under the law, however she does understand the concerns with what is happening. Council Member Spitzley suggested maybe there could be an Ad Hoc on Homelessness for City Council in the future.

Discussion/Action:

ORDINANCE Discussion – Updates to Ordinances; Proposed 296.20 – 296.31

Council Member Spitzley asked for details on what was in front of the Committee, because her intent was to address code compliance and the rights of tenants.

Ms. Hagen stated it began with a discussion on amending the Human Rights ordinance and Code thought it was best to put under the Rental Property Section of the ordinance, incorporating a penalty. Therefore this document is only for discussion and the OCA still needs to look at the legality of it.

Council Member Spitzley stated there would be no continued discussion on this until Council Member Wood could be present. Council Member Brown concurred. Council Member Spitzley reiterated that her focus was to look at the penalty structure for a way to give more enforcement to a Code Officer before they tag the properties allowing ways for residents in a clean safe home. This will allow things to be addressed before things get to a reoccurring bad landlord. If Code is not the appropriate authority, then she is open to discussion.

Mr. Smiertka stated this was a request from Committee, and Ms. Hagen stated that this was an ask by Council Member Wood, not at the last meeting but the meeting before, to see what the Fair Chance Housing Ordinance would look like.

Council Member Brown reiterated that he would agree with Council Member Spitzley and hold discussions at the next meeting because this was not what he recalled and there seemed to be some confusion from the last meeting(s).

Council Member Spitzley stated again her interest is a stipulation, whether in a policy or preferably an ordinance, giving Code Enforcement stronger teeth to address long term offenders I with landlords.

DISCUSSION – Recommendations to Council

Will be discussed at next meeting.

Council Member Brown stated he had to leave, so Council Member Spitzley adjourned the meeting due to lack of quorum, and asked any members of the public that wished to stay after and speak to her she would take notes.

Adjourn

Adjourned at 9:35 a.m.

Submitted by,

Sherrie Boak, Recording Secretary

Lansing City Council

Approved by the Committee August 12, 2022