

CITY OF MUSCATINE
IN-DEPTH CITY COUNCIL MINUTES
Council Chambers – 7:00 p.m. – March 10, 2016

Mayor Broderson called the City Council meeting for Thursday, March 10, 2016, to order at 7:00 p.m. Councilmembers present were Rehwaldt, Fitzgerald, Natvig, Saucedo, Bynum, Harvey, and Spread.

Community Development Director David Gobin referenced the map City Council had on their desks. He stated the map is of the entire city and the gray area shows the revitalization areas established in 2013. He stated the diamonds and triangles that can be seen on the map indicate properties that are posted.

Mr. Gobin then began his power point presentation on the city's Property Disposition Program and its status. He stated there are four paths the city can take to acquire and take control of properties that have posted and they are:

- Acquire by way of a tax sale process
- Acquire by the condemnation process
- Acquire by Iowa Code 657-A "Forced Investment"
- Acquire by purchase, donation or easement

Mr. Gobin stated the "Forced Investment" option is a relatively new process and is not used in Muscatine. He stated a property owner is "forced" to invest money in the property or it goes into the hands of the city. He stated the properties shown here tonight are ones that have been identified by staff. He stated that some of those properties have been abandoned by the property owners.

Councilmember Bynum stated the map key shows Posted Property (Conditions) and asked for an explanation.

Mr. Gobin stated that refers to the condition the property is in which could be due to structural issues, Fire Code violations, faulty wiring or any number of issues making a property uninhabitable. He stated that when a property is posted, the property owner does have the option of making it habitable.

Councilmember Fitzgerald stated that posting the property also allows neighbors to know what is going on with a property in their neighborhood.

Mr. Gobin stated that is what the housing inspection program is for. He stated that the building permit side allows the property owner to make improvements.

Mr. Gobin, speaking in reference to the map City Council has on their desks, pointed out the property the city has acquired through the West Hill Sewer Project. He stated that in a few years that property will become developable. He then pointed out the vacant lots located along Mad Creek. He stated many of the properties could be developed or could be abutted to existing property.

There was discussion concerning Iowa Field which is owned by the city.

City Administrator Gregg Mandsager, speaking in reference to the property the city acquired through the CSO Project, suggested to City Planner Andrew Fangman that the property be further broken down on the map to show the buildable lots.

Mr. Gobin stated the current property status includes 62 posted properties for uninhabitable conditions, 9 vacant properties obtainable for back taxes, and 7 city-owned properties for disposition. He stated this list is continuously changing.

Councilmember Spread asked if 62 uninhabitable properties is the norm.

City Planner Fangman stated it is probably the average number noting that many of the properties stay on the list for a long time.

Mr. Gobin stated that some of the properties have been on the list since 2000.

Councilmember Harvey stated that many of the lots shown are not buildable for zoning reasons or are too small for putting a structure on. He asked if these issues would be addressed, and City Planner Fangman answered yes. He pointed out those types of properties have been identified on the map.

There was further discussion on the need for more flexibility when dealing with lots that are not buildable.

City Administrator Mandsager stated that is the city's goal and plan with the new zoning ordinance.

Mr. Gobin stated the city does not want to discourage growth but rather encourage it.

Discussion then turned to the "Forced Investment" option.

Councilmember Fitzgerald stated he feels there are probably properties now where this option could be used.

Mr. Gobin stated that property owners are given a chance to bring the property up to code and if that doesn't happen, the court steps in. He said at that point, the city acquires the property, hires a contractor to bring it up to code, and then sells it.

Councilmember Natvig asked what drives the "Forced Investment", and Mr. Gobin answered safety, structural issues, and other extreme issues.

City Administrator Mandsager stated the city does not have a property maintenance code but it does have a nuisance abatement code.

Councilmember Bynum stated that many years ago City Council would receive a Top 10 Demolition List from the Building & Zoning Department.

City Administrator Mandsager stated staff has started discussing ways to prioritize projects. He stated the general consensus is to rehabilitate properties based on the ability to get money back out of the property after it is sold and then move on to the next property. He stated this process makes more sense to staff.

Mr. Gobin stated tonight is just the beginning of the process. He stated there will not be any action items for quite a while. He said this process is new to the city. He stated staff is looking at how to slowly rehabilitate properties or sell city-owned properties and put them back into the city's tax base. He stated there are two properties right now that could be sold to adjoining properties. He stated one is buildable and one is not.

City Administrator Mandsager suggested City Council look at the list they were provided showing city-owned parcels, property obtainable for back taxes, and posted properties that are uninhabitable. He stated there are multiple avenues the city can take to get properties back on the city's tax roll that in the process will help clean up properties in Muscatine. He stated all three taxing entities will benefit from this process.

City Planner Fangman pointed out that we don't want to take over properties and then not get rid of them.

There was discussion concerning the dilapidated building located at the corner of 5th Street and Mulberry Avenue and the problems the city is facing getting one of the buildings demolished. There was also discussion concerning absentee property owners, the property the city acquired from the West Hill Project, the Safe Streets building, and the home on Iowa Avenue that was moved from Mulberry Avenue six years ago.

Councilmember Rehwaldt asked if there should be an item on the next City Council agenda to sell all city-owned property.

City Administrator Mandsager stated that first the step will be to have the property declared as surplus and then the determination made on how to dispose of the property.

Councilmember Fitzgerald stated he prefers the bidding process the city has used in the past.

Mayor Broderson, speaking on prioritizing properties to be disposed of, stated she gets the most comments from people who are concerned about uninhabited properties. She stated she feels they should be prioritized first.

City Administrator Mandsager stated the request to declare property as surplus will probably be presented at the first City Council meeting in April.

Mr. Gobin stated he liked the Mayor's suggestion

Mayor Broderson stated she appreciated Mr. Gobin's diligence in wanting to move this process forward.

Under comments, Councilmember Saucedo asked when the city would begin filling up potholes.

City Administrator Mandsager stated staff is doing so now. He suggested Councilmember Saucedo call Public Works and let Connie Mann know which streets he would like to see done so that she can get it put on the list.

Mayor Broderson stated she had received three calls concerning parking issues. She asked if there is something that can be done about the parking meters around the Food Pantry. She then asked if it would be possible to provide parking for the minister and church secretary for the Vineyard Church. Her final request concerned the possibility of getting some type of parking tag for the counselors who visit the MCSA.

Councilmember Saucedo asked how the 2nd Street reconfiguration is coming along.

City Administrator Mandsager stated the City Engineer plans to hold one more public meeting and to complete the design concept for City Council which should be completed in the next two weeks.

#23333. Councilmember Spread moved the meeting be adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Gregg, Mandsager, City Administrator