

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

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**SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON SAFE AND HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**City Council Chamber, 1st floor, City Hall**

**August 9, 2017**

**1:00 p.m.**

**Location:** City Council Chamber, City Hall – St. James Building, 117 West Duval Street

**In attendance:** Council Members Reggie Brown (Chair), Lori Boyer, Anna Lopez Brosche, Katrina Brown, Bill Gulliford, Sam Newby and Garrett Dennis

**Also**: Council Members Jim Love and Scott Wilson; Paige Johnston – Office of General Counsel; Robert Campbell – Council Auditor’s Office; Jeff Clements – Council Research Division; Steve Cassada – Council Staff Services; Ali Shelton – Mayor’s Office; Kirk Wendland and Paul Crawford – Office of Economic Development; Mark Merritt – Jacksonville Public Library; Stephanie Burch – Neighborhoods Department

**Meeting Convened**: 1:10 p.m.

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order and the attendees introduced themselves for the record. Mr. Brown discussed his perception of the committee’s charge to create a “cradle to career” pipeline that will prepare young people for successful lives. Neighborhoods approaching the “tipping point” need to be identified. He suggested thinking about the task at a very fine-grained geographic level (600 foot radius) so that success can be more easily achieved than in larger areas. The process should be broadly based, including both the City and the private and non-profit sectors. Leadership will be important, as will full buy-in and participation by City departments. Current resources need to be identified and coverage gaps and service needs should be identified.

Mr. Brown solicited ideas about what departments and people need to be involved and what sorts of “trigger” events could be utilized to galvanize support for the overall effort. He wants each of the 14 district council members to identify problems and opportunities in their districts and for community organizations and leaders to be giving input and suggestions. Brief reports on the needs of the 14 districts would be made at the committee’s next meeting on September 7th at 9:00 a.m.

Stephanie Burch, Director of the Neighborhoods Department, said that reporting back on neighborhood needs citywide by September 7th is a very aggressive goal given the number of functions her department performs and the number of geographic areas needing to be surveyed. Chairman Brown agreed that the Neighborhoods Department would report later in the committee’s process.

Council Member Gulliford said that housing quality and affordability is a very important and must be addressed if neighborhoods are to be successful, regardless of what other public services are provided. Home ownership is vital to neighborhood stability. He suggested that dealing with the whole city simultaneously might be very difficult and suggested that one or two pilot neighborhoods be selected for a “full court press” of intensive attention in order to learn lessons that can be applied to subsequent initiatives. Council President Brosche agreed with the Gulliford suggestion to develop a model for how to attack the problems and make a real impact, rather than giving the whole city a broad brush but shallow approach. Chairman Brown suggested Paul Tutwiler’s Northwest Jacksonville Community Development Corporation area as the first target neighborhood and Ms. Brosche suggested a second pilot in a different part of town with different needs. Council Member Wilson suggested the Windy Hills or Brookwood neighborhoods on the Southside. Council Member Boyer felt that the contrast between a Northside and a Southside neighborhood would be instructive because it would provide information on how conditions and resources differ from one part of town to another.

Council Member Gulliford recounted the City of Atlantic Beach’s success at making a major turnaround in a neighborhood off of Mayport Road that coupled key public infrastructure improvements with energized community leadership. Small successes lead to bigger successes, and it’s better to start off small and grow rather than to be too aggressive and fail by taking on too much at the start.

The following entities were identified as needing to participate in the study process: Code Enforcement, JEA, Planning Department, Public Works, Neighborhoods Department, JSO, Health Department, Office of General Counsel, Office of Economic Development and JTA. Council Member Newby suggested identifying “neighborhood mayors” – active citizens who know everything about their area and would be a great source of information. Ms. Burch suggested identifying manageable areas of perhaps 5 city blocks and cautioned that full-fledged revitalization will take a long time. One year is enough time to determine needs and try a pilot project or two, but the whole city can’t be turned around in that time – Jacksonville is too large and too diverse for quick solutions. Council Member Gulliford suggested inviting Aundra Wallace, Executive Director of the Downtown Investment Authority, to address a future meeting since he had valuable experience as the head of the land bank in the City of Detroit

Chairman Brown asked the committee members to read the section of the Task Force on Consolidated Government’s report dealing with neighborhoods and review its recommendations for potential applicability to this project.

Council Member Wilson asked a representative of this committee to attend a future meeting of his Task Force on Parks to make the connection between recreation and neighborhood revitalization.

Public Comment

Stanley Scott said that the African American Economic Recovery Think Tank has already done much of this work in Jacksonville and has tried without success to give the data to the City. He recommended starting from the grass roots rather than the committee making decisions at the outset and dictating to the community. The Think Tank will be holding a meeting this Saturday and invited interested members to attend. Leadership is a problem in Jacksonville. He volunteered his services to participate in the neighborhood studies.

Doretha Tompkins, President of the Riverview Neighborhood Association, agreed with the neighborhood survey concept and agreed with Mr. Gullford’s comments about the importance of home ownership. Residents not caring about their neighborhoods is a serious problem – no community pride. She distributed pictures of the overgrown, clogged drainage ditches in her neighborhood and said that septic tanks need to be eliminated.

Chief Leonard Propper of the Sheriff’s Office said the JSO is committed to the committee’s work and agrees with strategy of starting with small achievements and growing from there.

Paul Tutwiler of the Northwest Jacksonville Community Development Corporation said that overgrown lots and lack of community pride are a problem in revitalizing communities. One of the challenges with taking City-donated lots is the requirement that the house be rebuilt within 1 year, which can be very difficult process because of the problems in dealing with faulty titles, liens, back taxes, etc. Council Member Gulliford felt that properties should not be conveyed to third parties without clear titles. A land bank or some other intermediary entity is needed to clear the titles before they’re conveyed. The Northwest Jacksonville CDC is happy to participate in the pilot project.

Council Member Dennis suggested looking at batch foreclosure as a means of obtaining title to problem properties. Council Member Gulliford said that Florida state law doesn’t currently permit land banking; perhaps the City could request the Legislature to amend the state law. Stephanie Burch said that the law currently requires the City to pay off any pending liens and all back taxes if it forecloses on property, so doing that can be very expensive. Assistant General Counsel Paige Johnston explained the many factors that go into clearing title, which can be difficult and expensive if there are mortgage foreclosures, outstanding home equity loans, and the like pending on the property.

Chairman Brown appointed Mr. Dennis as the Chair of a subcommittee on foreclosures. Council Member Katrina Brown recommended that all business be done in the special committee rather than breaking off into smaller subcommittees. Chairman Brown rephrased Mr. Dennis’ charge as a research assignment, not a subcommittee.

Council Member Katrina Brown asked for a place on the September 7th agenda to discuss a plan she has been exploring.

**Meeting adjourned:** 2:28 p.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research

8.11.17 Posted 12:30 p.m.

Tapes: Special Committee on Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods meeting – LSD

8.9.17