



Housing Committee

Wednesday, August 9, 2023

City Hall Council Chambers – 601 Main St W. Ashland, WI 54806

10:00 AM

Take notice that a meeting of the Housing Committee will be held in- person in the City Hall Council Chambers, with the availability to attend virtually.

To join the meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone: <https://meet.goto.com/157765245>. Or dial in using your phone. United States (Toll Free): 1 866 899 4679 Access Code: 157-765-245

The following items will be considered:

1. Agenda Approval

2. Consent Agenda

- a. Approval of minutes from the July 12th, 2023 Housing Committee meeting

3. Citizen Comments

4. Old Business

- a. Foreclosures - Discussion
- b. Vacant Properties - Discussion
- c. Rooming Houses - Discussion
- d. Main Street Housing - Discussion
- e. Empty Buildable Lots - Discussion

5. New Business

6. Announcements

- a. Update on progress with CDBG, HIP, and Property Maintenance

7. Adjournment

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City of Ashland - Housing Committee Meeting Minutes

The City of Ashland Housing Committee will be holding its Wednesday July 12th, 2023 meeting at 10:00 am in the City Hall Council Chamber and via GoTo Meetings.

The meeting can be accessed using a computer, tablet or smartphone using the link <https://meet.goto.com/157765245>. The meeting can also be accessed by phone at 1-866-899-4679 using access code: 157-765-245.

Present: Matt MacKenzie, Charlie Ortman, Kaas Baichtal, Tom Buzzi, Steven Wiley, Ray Kallio, Kelly Westlund

Absent: Priscilla Neiman, Ana Tochtermann

Agenda

- 1) Agenda Approval
10:10 Ortman moved to approve the agenda and Baichtal seconded. Motion carried.
- 2) Consent Agenda
 - a) Approval of minutes from the June 14th, 2023 Housing Committee meeting
Ortman moved to approve the minutes as written and Baichtal seconded. Motion carried.
- 3) Citizen Comments
Westlund stated that the Bayfield County Board did approve funding for a housing outreach intern that will start this coming semester and shared information regarding the CDBG revolving loan program offered by NWRPC. Hopefully we can increase use of the programs.
- 4) Old Business
 - a) Update on progress with CDBG, HIP and property maintenance
Mr. Kallio provided an update. With the HIP program there are a couple of projects but no contractors are available until 2025. It would be nice if we could have the homeowners sign a waiver of liability so the City is not liable if homeowners do some of their own work. He would like to explore allowing people that are not licensed or insured to be able to do some work since contractors are not available. With CDBG he does not get updates from the Spooner office. Lawn issues have been ongoing and Kallio thanked Baichtal for mowing her properties. Garbage issues have been addressed and the motel by Walmart sold recently. 90% of complaints are neighbor lawn complaints. Baichtal mentioned a database of cases and asked if it was still in use. Mr. Kallio and Mr. Wiley stated that they have not used the database since the current permitting and code enforcement software was in place.

MacKenzie asked how we can get information on the HIP and CDBG programs out there to inform people about these programs. Kallio answered that staff places information on social media, in the water bills, etc. An issue is that HIP is such a small amount of money.

Baichtal asked if we could track in a spreadsheet all the people who inquire but cannot be helped. This would allow us to see trends.

Westlund asked if HIP was run through the City or NWRPC. Kallio answered that the City runs the program. Westlund asked if staff referred people to the program when out on enforcement. Kallio answered yes but the money available is limited. Many people are incapable of doing the work themselves but there is no expiration date once someone is approved. Westlund explained that the Bayfield County Outreach Specialist may be doing outreach around the region so this person may be able to help by providing ideas.

Baichtal stated that she had projects she was not doing due to cost and an example was a large tree that a tree removal service would be asking \$8,000 to take down. If there were programs available to help with some of these projects that would be beneficial.

MacKenzie asked Buzzi if realtors were aware of these programs. Buzzi answered that they were not especially for the HIP program. Buzzi asked if there was a cap on funds. Kallio said that there was a cap based on the projects. MacKenzie asked if it would be beneficial to create a fact sheet for the programs. Buzzi replied that he would be interested so yes. Kallio explained that the City would likely not invest in rental properties. Baichtal asked if there could be something written into an offer to have a City award for some cases where the seller cannot address an issue that the buyer wants addressed as part of the sale. MacKenzie suggested that we create a fact sheet on our HIP and CDBG programs. He stated that sending it with the water bill is nice but costs money. He suggested putting together a fact sheet to have available at our next meeting.

5) New Business

a) Foreclosures – Discussion

Wiley provided an update and had contacted the Ashland County Sheriff about getting lists. He has not seen anything recently so can follow up. Ortman asked what our goal is. MacKenzie stated it would be good to know what housing stock we have that is not for sale. Baichtal stated that we also want to prevent banks from allowing properties to become dilapidated by not heating during the winter, etc. MacKenzie explained that we had demolition by neglect issues in the past so we want to address that. Roofing structure language is in code but not necessarily language for heating. Baichtal explained that water swells up when it freezes so if the system has not been drained this can cause issues. If the house has water heat the system can be destroyed. The trouble is that banks send an asset preservation company through to winterize but they do not do it until a month after people are out so many times there are issues with the system. They don't pay much money either to the company going through. MacKenzie asked if we have language in our ordinances regarding this. Wiley was unaware of specific language and stated that staff would have to look at this. MacKenzie stated that we can look at updating our ordinances and see what other communities have done and draw from their examples. Baichtal stated that some banks are so large that they may not know what they are doing. The City can come up with something and inform the bank who may not care so at least neglect does not occur through ignorance. Kallio stated that many foreclosures are owned by banks not even in State of WI. Baichtal explained that she tried to buy the 923 2nd Ave W property for 6 months. The owner put the property on Auction.com and Baichtal kept winning but they kept not completing the sale.

They would not allow the broker to sell it locally. By the time they allowed a sale the systems had been destroyed. MacKenzie asked if we craft such a code, what enforcement tools we have to see it through. MacKenzie asked Wiley to talk to the City Attorney and do it. If the City cannot do it the next step would be to approach legislators.

b) Vacant Properties – Discussion

Wiley provided an update. He explained there is a map of vacant City-owned parcels but it does not include everything so he did not include in the packet yet. MacKenzie stated that last night at Council Brant Kucera presented the Ore Dock Upland plan. There are vacant former RR rows in that area and our goal is to return them to property owners to return lots for compliance. There are lots near the lake and walking trail which have potential. The committee could recommend some of these go forward with a request for sale by the City. This could be attractive. Ortman liked that the infrastructure is there or will be there and thought it is our best shot. It is a dream place for lots of people. It should take care of housing crisis for double-income, no kids or remote workers that want to come here. If this does not solve the issue nothing will. Baichtal asked about the size of the lots and stated that many people want bigger lots. Ortman explained that this is not for those people. Ortman asked if we can we get the master plan to the committee. Wiley answered that staff can do so. Baichtal stepped out at 10:43 am. Ortman asked if the City could do something like a winter maintenance foreclosure. MacKenzie stated this was part of what Wiley would ask the attorney.

c) Rooming House – Discussion

MacKenzie mentioned Stuntz fire house and Fire Department closing it due to fire egress issues. Perhaps we can get information out there regarding how to do rooming houses legally. Baichtal stepped back in at 10:46 am. There is some interest in the community for rooming houses but this would be something we would have to look at. Baichtal explained that state law requires communities to have a license for rooming houses or you cannot have them. Wiley explained that right now some rooming houses are allowed as conditional uses but he is not aware of a license existing in the city currently. MacKenzie explained that the first step is to look at how to create a license for them. Then we can look at an ordinance. MacKenzie asked Wiley to look into a rooming house license and what would be needed.

d) Main Street Housing – Discussion

MacKenzie has been talking with the City Administrator about housing on the second floors of more downtown buildings which would bring more people into the downtown businesses. The City would be looking at not allowing office or personal services on first floors of downtown businesses. The goal is to see dining or retail. Existing uses would be grandfathered. Housing is what we would like to target and see more of. MacKenzie explained that a TV station wants to come back and do a show on this during the summer on housing on the 2nd floors. We have people looking for housing on Main Street. Wiley re-iterated this. Ortman stated that we should always have one unit ahead of demand so we should have two units, see how they move, and proceed. We need to change the situation. We need to find the sweet spot so we are not behind when people come looking for housing.

e) Empty Buildable Lots – Discussion

MacKenzie stated that infill is our game plan. We should consider what we can do to make things more attractive in town. We have an emergency shelter and will have transitional housing so we are doing better than most. We have housing units going up on the east side. Baichtal stated that only some units at the Timeless Timber site are affordable and the rest (2/3) will be market rate.

MacKenzie asked how we can provide more housing options. For the ore dock area we are looking at townhouses. He asked that if committee members have ideas on how we can use empty buildable lots and get spec homes built, to let the committee know. How can we attract someone from out of the area who has an interest? Westlund stated that some communities she works with provide the parcel for a dollar if someone builds within a year. MacKenzie stated that it would help if Bayfield County and some of the surrounding communities there and in Ashland County had additional low-income housing (satellites) which would free up housing in those areas as well. Ortman mentioned that Kelly Peterson was working on this with NWRPC. Westlund stated that there is a lot of NIMBYism sentiment. They have gone back to some of those communities with the rural housing readiness force and are looking at what options and parcels might work. They are looking at creating their parcel inventory and then approaching developers. There is a two year wait time for developers in many cases along with the remoteness of the area as barriers. Wiley explained the benefit of having a vacant parcel inventory and being able to go to developers with lots that are attractive to them. Ortman asked if Wiley had been in touch with Westlund. Wiley replied that he had not been in touch this topic. Baichtal also suggested looking at the county inventory of vacant lots because people can get them for cheap.

6) Announcements

MacKenzie mentioned discussions with Bad River about the County or Bad River doing some development near the City line. If Bad River did something just outside the City we could look at extending utilities to that site. The City is looking at this and trying to do it. MacKenzie stated that the DNR provided funding for the EPA to help with the Baron Radiator Site. The City could be looking at a café, brew pub, ice cream shop, eatery, etc. This would tie in with the plan to create more downtown events in that area.

7) Future Agenda Items

MacKenzie would like to see us keep what we have on the agenda and have further discussion on there. Ortman would like to add the Catholic Church nunnery. He asked if it was languishing. Baichtal said she was not sure. It is on the market. The church has strong opinions on who buys it. Mr. Kallio left out at 11:09 am. The church would not want anything done with it that would make it less safe for kids attending the school. MacKenzie asked if there was anyone with the financial wherewithal in the community to turn it into a rooming house. Baichtal answered affirmatively. MacKenzie asked if we can encourage it to be developed into a rooming house. Is there something we can do? Baichtal stated that she would do it if it dropped into her lap and there was permission. MacKenzie asked Wiley to check the codes for that area and look at whether we need to change the codes to facilitate this. Westlund stated that if it was student dormitory housing it would put Northland in charge of property management there and get some students out of single-family homes. Buzzi said that he can contact Jay Emmert who is the listing agent. He can distribute to the realtors. Ortman asked if Wiley can explore what Bayfield has done. We should see where we fit in there.

8) Adjournment

Baichtal moved and Ortman seconded to adjourn. Meeting adjourned at 11:16 am.

Respectfully Submitted,

Steven Wiley
Planning and Development Director