



Housing Committee

Thursday, November 9, 2023

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

1:30 PM

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 September 14th, 2023 Housing Committee meeting

3. Citizen Comments

4. Old Business

- a. Foreclosures - Discussion/Update
- b. Vacant Properties - Discussion
- c. Rooming House - 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 Thursday September 14th, 2023 meeting at 1:30pm 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: Charlie Ortman, Matt Mackenzie, Tom Buzzi, Kaas Baichtal, Steven Wiley, Ray Kallio, Kelly Westlund

Absent: Ana Tochterman, Priscilla Neiman

Agenda

- 1) Agenda Approval
Ortman moved and Baichtal seconded to approve the agenda at 1:31 pm. Motion carried.
- 2) Consent Agenda
 - a) Approval of minutes from the August 9th, 2023 Housing Committee meeting
Ortman moved and Baichtal seconded to approve the minutes from the August 9th meeting. Motion carried.
- 3) Citizen Comments
Westlund mentioned that this month she wanted to make the committee aware of an opportunity: the Chequamegon Bay Regional Housing Coalition Charter. It was part of the Rural Workforce Housing Coalition through WHEDA. As we pursue funding opportunities going forward this could help formalize a working group and this could be useful for funding opportunities. She is hoping the City could sign on. It is an expression of support and does not commit the City to funding or staff.

Baichtal asked to bring something up. Mackenzie said Baichtal could bring it up now or under announcements. Baichtal is a lead safe renovator which means like everyone else that works on dwellings she has been trained to renovate without spreading lead and can also do abatement. The EPA is looking at changing the definitions of lead safe amounts to make them much more restrictive. Ashland has had many houses fail and there is a shortage of workers in the area. This would make it worse. The comment period for the potential rule change is right now so if the City has a comment regarding the EPA's proposed change the City can do so. Mackenzie thanked Baichtal for making the Committee aware. He asked Wiley to look into it and bring it to Council if need be.
- 4) Old Business
 - a) Foreclosures – Discussion
Wiley did not have an update. He stated that he needed to follow up with the County Sheriff to start receiving lists of foreclosures again. Ortman stated it would be good to track foreclosures. Mackenzie agreed. Baichtal mentioned that

many properties get short sold before they reach that point. If we want to head off the realtors that can get tricky. Mackenzie said the goal is not necessarily to head off the realtors. Ortman stated that if we know how it works and about them maybe we can help. Westlund mentioned a property on Prentice Avenue and that it was going up later this month for \$62,000. Baichtal stated that usually they like to go up to bid for at least half of that so \$30,000. Mackenzie asked what role the Housing Committee should take in any of this. He asked if the Committee should be involved in listing. He wanted to clarify our role. Ortman explained that the market seems to be working. It would be nice to see what is happening and if a property does not seem to be moving maybe we can see why and whether we can help. If we observe it for awhile we can see what we can do. Baichtal stated that sometimes an investor will have a house waiting in line while they rehab one before that. She does not recommend the City buy these things. A previous property was an example where it did not work. No one could get a loan to buy a property that was not hooked up to water so the City had to sell it at a loss of \$12,000. She recommended not going down this road. Mackenzie asked to leave this on the agenda. Baichtal stated that she would go to the September 20th sale at 10 am. It always occurs on a Wednesday. It happens in the center area on the first floor of the Courthouse. She recommended arriving 10 mins early.

b) Vacant Properties – Discussion

Mackenzie recalled the discussion was that some homes are owned by banks or other parties and not being used. They are not properly winterized or weatherized. Often a property not winterized goes through a winter and is wrecked. The house then needs considerable reconstruction. The Committee previously talked about this. Mackenzie was not sure where everyone is at. One thing he has seen is that in Maine for example they have a concern with out of state banks owning homes. They are looking at charging a fee for homes going empty. Vacant properties cause issues for the city such as fire hazards, squatters, etc. There is more time spent by the City to police this such as calls, etc. He recommended looking at a permit that would allow the City to do something. Should we look at something like this where if you leave a house empty for X amount of time you have to come to the City and obtain a permit and winterize the house, pay the water bill, and pay a permit fee? Kallio mentioned that we could do a raze order by neglect. Mackenzie stated that it is not always an easy process to do so. The owner could put on new shingles and the process starts over. Westlund mentioned the City of Superior where vacant parcels were listed on their website. This could take collaboration with local realtors. Mackenzie said this would target the bank owned properties. Buzzi believes it would be an incentive for folks to stay on top of things and care whether pipes freeze or not. Baichtal explained that the state laws in WI might prevent it. The Committee would need to couch it in a way that makes it a good thing for property owners rather than a fine. Baichtal stated that the WI Realtors has a powerful lobby and is looking for examples of local overreach to send in so this might get sent in really quick. Ortman asked if these homes are often wrecked or just occasionally. He asked about condemning. Baichtal replied that the problem with condemning is that an owner or tenant would need to get an occupancy permit to occupy a property again. Mackenzie believed that banks do not always know how our winters are. Baichtal explained that often banks hire an asset protection service at very low rates. They are told to not do it until one month after the property has actually been vacated. A person arrives, quickly does the stuff and it is often two weeks after everything has exploded anyway. Ortman asked how a bank ends up owning a home. Baichtal answered through foreclosure due to the owner not paying a mortgage. Ortman asked if we could interject prior to pipes blowing up. Westlund suggested maybe requiring a

certification by a certain date. Baichtal stated that if water is still turned on but there is no usage maybe someone could drive by with a heat sensing camera. Kallio mentioned the 1201 9th Avenue W house where a lady left, her friend never watched the house, pipes exploded, and the house was totally water damaged. It has been sitting there since before he started working here. He cannot get ahold of anyone so he hires someone to cut the lawn and bills this to the property taxes. Baichtal mentioned that lis pendens indicate to someone potentially about to buy that there is about to be a massive lien on the property. If we can find a way to find the lis pendens that helps. Ortman asked about lis pendens. Baichtal stated that they warn of a pending lien. Mackenzie asked if this is something to take a look at. Ortman thinks we can look and see if we can do anything. Westlund stated that if there is a way to have a relationship with the lenders that would help. Baichtal answered that the same lawyers handle all of them. If we could reach them that would help. Mackenzie asked how many new homes were built here. Wiley answered only about four so only a handful. Baichtal stated that 50 new units on the east side will have an impact. Ortman asked how we ID mortgage foreclosures. Mackenzie answered that we have to see if we can do it and if WI law allows it. Then identify how many houses and which ones. If it is worth looking at make a recommendation to the Council about moving forward. Ortman stated that we could shut the water off at the street. Baichtal stated that you also have to drain water in house and drain the boiler, etc. Mackenzie explained that new meters will be able to trip an alarm and shut off water for excessive usage. Buzzi stated that the new meters can be tracked remotely. Ortman asked if it was a possibility to evaluate the deeds through AI. Wiley answered maybe in theory. Mackenzie asked to keep this item on the agenda. Buzzi asked if the county knows about bank foreclosures. Wiley answered yes since they are filed there and are a legal action. Mackenzie stated that tax foreclosures usually go through the zoning committee and then they decide which ones should be sold. Baichtal stated that there were some cases where the bank wants all of their money back and some where they do not care if they get all of their money back. Mackenzie explained that if you sell a house on tax foreclosure the proceeds go towards the debt on the property first based on a recent ruling. Ortman suggested determining whatever we do want to determine sooner rather than later so by October to prevent houses blowing up. Baichtal suggested using dates that utilities cannot turn off service.

c) Rooming House – Discussion

Wiley provided an update and explained that he had found three ordinance examples. Ortman asked if the Committee wanted to take it to the Committee of the Whole. Mackenzie suggested we look at the ordinances and perhaps come up with an ordinance of some sort prior to going to COW. As a committee then we could conduct a public hearing and give the public a chance to let us know where they are at beforehand. He asked members to look at the ordinances and provide input to Wiley so he could incorporate it. Baichtal stated that landlords cannot rent out by the room to four students. One student has to find others for example. This is a distinction between rooming houses and not.

d) Main Street Housing – Discussion

Mackenzie explained that he had asked Mr. Kucera to look at garbage pickup for Main Street. We have commercial but not residential. We can look at whether to include Main Street in residential pickup. The current contract with Eagle Waste does not permit this. Ortman asked if this was blocking people from renting. Mackenzie stated that it was hurting one person who came to him. Westlund asked if this would require tenants to have separate water bills. Baichtal explained that whomever has the water bill would just tell them how many garbage cans are needed. Mackenzie stated that the City was also looking at

how to incentivize people putting in units downtown. He mentioned the Opera House project. Westlund has a survey of local employers in the works to determine how many positions are open, how many people are commuting, etc. She is also looking at a community land trust as an option. She explained the land trust concept and that she hopes to have it incorporated by the end of the year. Ortman stated that they would need land. Mackenzie stated that there is some grant money available for different properties. When we are talking about Main St. housing we are talking about above the stores.

e) Empty Buildable Lots – Discussion

Ortman asked if some of these could work for the Community Land Trust. Wiley answered that some may work. Mackenzie suggested also looking at what these parcels could be worth. As more development occurs by the Ore dock St. Clair parcels could be worth more. Wiley mentioned the two City-owned parcels that the Fire Department is looking at using for training and demolishing. Mackenzie mentioned a potential New Homes program and Wiley explained that this program could provide developers with a forgivable grant/loan to help offset the costs of redeveloping a residential lot. Baichtal asked what is wrong with two homes we are demolishing. Mackenzie explained that they were not winterized and now are uninhabitable. He explained the asbestos abatement, siding removal, etc. The plan is to get them out of there.

5) New Business

Ortman asked if we will look at signing onto the Housing Coalition at next meeting. Mackenzie answered that he had given it to Wiley and Kucera to decide.

6) Announcements

a) Update on progress with CDBG, HIP and property maintenance

Mr. Kallio provided an update. He explained that lawns and unregistered vehicles are big lately. With the HIP program we have done a few projects. These include getting a house painted, and having two windows replaced on one property. With several CDBG properties we are in the process of paying contractors for work. Kallio talked with his cousin at Associated Bank about getting us more money. Westlund shared the WHEDA site with revolving loan programs. The only communities eligible are ones that have updated their ordinances in 2023 and updated the housing element in comp plan in last five years. We need to work on these so people can use the programs.

7) Adjournment

Ortman moved and Baichtal seconded. Meeting adjourned at 2:42 pm.

It is possible that members of and a possible quorum of members of other governmental bodies of the municipality may be in attendance at the above stated meeting to gather information or speak about a subject, over which they have decision-making responsibility. Any governmental body at the above stated meeting will take no action other than the governmental body specifically referred to above in this notice.

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Rooming/Minimum Housing Standards - Examples

City of Medford Rooming House Ordinance

https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/medford/latest/medford_wi/0-0-0-3417.

City of Ripon Ordinance – Minimum Housing Standards

https://library.municode.com/wi/ripon/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=TIT21MIHOCO

City of De Pere Ordinance – Minimum standards and Rooming House ordinance

https://library.municode.com/wi/de_pere/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTIIMUCO_CH94BUPRM_ACO