MEETING SUMMARY
Neighborhood Revitalization Board

December 4, 2019, 5:00 p.m.

Call to Order/Roll Call
Meeting called to order at 5:10 p.m. by Kelly Kennedy
Roll Call by Alex Piedras:
Present: Kelly Kennedy, Alex Piedras, Marge Ramsey, Tom LaPointe, Jan Goode, Leslie Berckes, Frank Owens, Molly Hanson, and Kari Warren
Absent: Greg Lewis
Staff: Chris Johansen, Director and Tyler Hall, CSR

Approval of Agenda
Motion to Approve: Tom LaPointe; seconded by Frank Owens
Motion carried (9-0)

Approval of Minutes
Motion to Approve: Tom LaPointe; seconded by Alex Piedras
Motion carried (9-0)

Chairman’s Report/City Council Actions
Chris Johansen: Just one update on City Council Action. Seth Johnson has resigned from the board. His seat was Councilman Coleman’s appointment, so I doubt we’ll have an appointment before the end of the year. That seat will be filled when the new Councilman is seated in January.

Neighborhood Expansion/Mergers
Chris Johansen: On the neighborhood recognition policy, this policy shows an addition on page 5. There’s a highlighted section. I’ll give you a few minutes to read through it.

Tom LaPointe: What is NBSD?

Chris Johansen: Neighborhood Based Service Delivery. At the last board meeting, the Chair asked me to come back with a discussion on this topic. This topic is just for DISCUSSION tonight. I usually give the board opportunity to have full discussion then I come back at the next meeting for a vote on it. So, I don’t have it as an ACTION tonight but just to get feedback. One of the most common requests we’ve been getting lately is for a neighborhood association to expand its boundaries. This is for Watrous Heights. If you recall, a couple of months ago they came before the board and asked to expand into a new area. The discussion around the board was what requirements do they have to meet with that new area they are expanding into. And how do they notify those residents that live there and what do we require as part of our neighborhood recognition policy. Staff and I worked up a draft. This will come back next month for approval. Then this will go in front of the City Council for approval as well.

Chris Johansen: I wanted to highlight a couple of concerns that we had. One of the things we’ve always struggled with is how do they notify that area/residents that they’re looking to expand and have them become a part of their neighborhood. Over the years, we’ve done petitions that come back with the number of signatures that are in favor. But it’s
always been pretty loose on how we’ve done it. One thing we talked about was sending out a postcard (which costs about $0.50 per household) alerting them to attend a public meeting that the neighborhood association that is looking to expand is hosting. The city will pay for the cost. Usually the average size of the expansion is about 400 households. So, that would cost roughly $200 to send out the postcards, which is doable. And it assures that everyone gets notified. First, the neighborhood association would come and meet with us. We review the area and make sure that they’re not overlapping onto other boundaries. We give them out feedback. We ask them to host a public meeting; inviting individual households to that meeting. Then at that meeting, we do ask them to take a vote. We did not include the working percentage of those in favor that is required to pass.

I don’t know what the percentage will be but that will come back to the NRB to weigh in on. One thing we’ve always asked, if there’s an expansion into a new area, is for the neighborhood association to include members from the new area on their board. Before we approve it, we ask what their intentions are and if they’re going to do that. This is our recommendation. It will come back next month for more discussion. If you want to talk about it, or if you noticed anything that I missed, please feel free to let me know. With Watrous Heights, this would be the direction I would give back to them on how to move forward, if they want to move to expand. This happens a couple of times a year. This is newer current topic. It becomes newer when neighborhood associations are thinking about dissolving. Or when they want to become part of another neighborhood, we’d use this in that situation also.

Frank Owens: Maybe you’ve already stated it, but I think I’ve got most of the procedure down about the meeting where residents show up and they vote on it. And whether or now there’s a clear percentage. The assumption is that the people that were there are the people in the existing neighborhood and the proposed neighborhood? So, there wouldn’t be a separate venue where the existing neighborhood associations can sit down and be notified about this? And then take a vote and decide if they’re in favor or not in favor. Should there be?

Chris Johansen: That’s a good point. I see where we could add there’s a vote by the neighborhood association board before they come to us. The problem we run there is how good of an outreach are they going to do to all the board members?

Frank Owens: Maybe it would more of a notification that they would get when there’s a change being made in your neighborhood. Everyone within a certain distance is notified that a change is taking place. Then it’s their responsibility to be there and say something about it. Maybe that’s a CYA that I’m suggesting. Not only that, but from the standpoint that there are always people who say they weren’t notified, when they were. Does there need to be a notification? I don’t know. I’m good with whatever we decide.

Tom LaPointe: Do you have a sense of what Frank is talking about? And can you incorporate that as an item six?

Chris Johansen: We can. The way I would state is we would require them to have a vote of their board before approaching the City on whether to expand into this area. You guys can help me wordsmith it.

Leslie Berckes: Question. As it’s listed now, is the voting that would take place simply whoever chooses to attend that meeting?
Chris Johansen: Yes.

Leslie Berckes: That’s what I thought. How else would you do it?

Chris Johansen: We’ve struggled with it. That’s the easiest thing. I’m planning to have our staff attend a public meeting just to witness what happens. Not to run it or to do anything else, but just to be a member in the crowd.

Kelly Kennedy: When are you thinking that this will go into effect?

Chris Johansen: I think after our next meeting and after we approve it, we’ll go to the next City Council meeting to have them approve it. At that time, it will be effective as soon as they pass it. What we would do then is send out the revised neighborhood recognition policy to all our neighborhood associations. We’re going to meet with Watrous Heights again to explain the process.

Jan Goode: Are they looking to expand with an already recognized neighborhood?

Chris Johansen: We’re only over the recognized neighborhoods. If they’re not recognized we don’t acknowledge them.

Molly Hanson: Do the expansion requests often go into an area that does not fit into a recognized neighborhood?

Chris Johansen: Yes. The thing to always remember about this is that they’ll approach their City Council member about the expansion. And if the neighborhood is really in favor of it, nine times out of ten the Council member will tell us they’re in favor of it. And we kind of need to move forward. But our reasons are a lot different. We struggled a little bit with Beaverdale/Meredith – geographically, how big it is. Beaverdale has a strong sense of community. Geographically, it never quite made sense to us. So, we didn’t support that but obviously it happened. We’re going to work with them as long as there’s council support. A couple of years ago, Watrous Heights was looking at expanding. We had a meeting with Councilman Gatto and Councilman Moore. We had concerns and they had concerns about them expanding, because they were such a new neighborhood. So, that didn’t go anywhere at that time.

Jan Goode: But they’re still looking at it.

Chris Johansen: They sure are.

Jan Goode: They did a really good job of promoting what they’re looking for and what they wanted to do at the SW 9th event on that Sunday in September.

Chris Johansen: Geographically, we look at the housing types, school districts, sense of community, but if someone comes to us and says “Hey, I really feel this is a part of Watrous Heights,” who are we to judge their sense of neighborhood when we don’t live there. Any more questions about this.

Tom LaPointe: I move we table this and consider it a first reading. If people have any
questions or comments they want to make, they can run it through you, share it with everybody else. And then we’ll take action on it at the next meeting.

Kelly Kennedy: There’s a motion to table this.

Motion to Approve: Tom LaPointe; seconded by Frank Owens.

Motion carried (9-0)

Shared Neighborhood Boundaries History

Chris Johansen: This is a little bit more of a history. But also, I wanted to assure you that in our neighborhood recognition police that we just looked at, we do not allow neighborhood boundaries to overlap. As of now if a new neighborhood came in to expand, we’d say yes but you cannot overlap boundaries. If you look at this memo, there are four bullet points, those are the four neighborhood areas that have shared areas that currently exist. These areas were shared before our neighborhood program came into existence, except for Douglas Acres & Fairmont Park and Waterbury with Ingersoll Park & Westwood. Beavardale and Drake is the most popular shared area and the largest one. That one came into our program that way. You know, every three or four years, we’ll get a question where someone wants to say well this area should be part of Drake or part of Beavardale or Waveland. What I’ve always said is this up to the neighborhood associations to decide. If there’s an agreement where they’re fine with it being another part, that’s fine with us. We’re not going to decide on what neighborhood they feel they’re a part of.

Chris Johansen: A couple of things about it, just so you know our position on it. There are some programs that are neighborhood specific. When you have a neighborhood specific program and it’s in a shared area, there’s always the question of what are you going to do about this. It’s kind of difficult for us to sometimes administer. Within NFC, when they did lending, it was difficult. That’s why we’ve always shied away from it. But there’s always been other problems that exist with it too. Over the time we’ve had, for example, Beavardale could be in support of rezoning request within a shared area, and you could have Waveland or Drake not be in favor of it, so what do you do? I know this example, in particular, they came into the City that way. Douglas Acres and Fairmont Park is a little bit different. We were doing a neighborhood plan up in Douglas Acres and at that time Fairmont Park was non-active. They were no longer a neighborhood association. When that happened, Douglas Acres had interest in expanding their boundaries to the southside of Euclid. Then a year or two later Fairmont Park became active again, with their boundaries going up to Euclid. It was difficult to leave them off the major corridor, because, as you’re aware, most neighborhood association like having those corridors for fundraising events, having those relationships with the businesses. That’s the background on how that happened.

Tom LaPointe: Is that the boundary that’s sort of saw toothed?

Chris Johansen: Yes. Where it goes done to the southside of the parcels. A couple of years ago I had to go to Fairmont Park and explain what happened. They had a hard time understanding how it happened and they wanted us to remove Douglas Acre’s boundaries. There’s a lot to that story.
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Marge Ramsey: I spent 45 minutes on the phone one night with Linda.

Chris Johansen: The Waterbury/Ingersoll Park/Westwood came up during their neighborhood planning process. That was done with the NRB as a part of their neighborhood plan. It was a joint decision with the other neighborhood associations. And back at that time we allowed it to happen. This gives you a little background in what we look for when we’re looking at creating neighborhood boundary lines. I’m glad my staff and I did this because this is all memory and it’s good to have historical documents to keep track on why we have this.

Tom LaPointe: I had a conversation with someone who was a former City employee from 20 years ago. He was giving me the historical framework of the Beaverdale/Waveland/Drake compromise, which is shared as you’ve discussed it. This is hearsay, but it had to do with the simple fact that there was kind of a nativist movement and these people didn’t want to be identified as one neighborhood versus another.

Chris Johansen: I’m glad to hear you say that because this predates my staff, so they don’t have the historical context of why. They just know that’s the way it’s always been. And this is how it came into our program. If NRB has a different opinion or approach, you can take that. But for my staff, we don’t want to get into the middle of that fight or try to split that up. We’ve always said if you want to work it out, come to us with the solution and we’ll gladly review it. But we’re not going to try to even that out somehow. This is history. There’s no vote on this. But it is specifically in our policy that we do not look to overlap boundaries.

Kelly Kennedy: This all came about because of Carpenter and Drake Park. They were shared, they weren’t shared. Is there in anything in there that talks about carving that special group that’s still part of Drake but is Carpenter?

Chris Johansen: If Carpenter hadn’t dissolved, it would have been on this list. If this was a couple of months ago, we would have had this conversation about Carpenter. One of the first neighborhood plans ever done, even before the City, from my understanding, Drake Park and Carpenter were specific planning areas that they wanted to focus on. For each of those planning areas, they had a steering committee made up of people that lived in that specific area. After that plan was done, that’s when they wanted to create their new neighborhood association and that’s how they worked on that through Drake. That was an agreeable thing between Drake and a new entity at the time. I do know the history of how that started.

Kelly Kennedy: But under the new rules that wouldn’t be allowed.

Chris Johansen: Right. The only thing I would say is that if someone came to us, we’d bring it in front of the board. And if the board wanted us to consider it, we would. This rarely happens.

Kelly Kennedy: I’m just thinking the business part of Beaverdale that’s on Beaver. And there’s a lot going on at Drake right now with building on University. If one of those little areas wanted to be recognized by the City as a special group, we wouldn’t allow it.

Chris Johansen: Not under our normal policy. I would bring it to the board but our policy
would be no. It would have to be a very good reason. As a matter of general policy, if you’re expanding to gain a couple of businesses to help with fundraising, I understand it’s important, but that’s not what this is for. If it serves a bigger planning need, then maybe. But we’ll leave that to the board.

**January NRB Meeting**

Chris Johansen: The first Wednesday in January is January 1st. I wasn’t planning on meeting that day, if that is alright with you. I’m proposing we cancel the January 1 meeting and meet next on February 5.

**Motion to Approve:** Leslie Berckes; seconded by Marge Ramsey.

Motion carried (9-0)

**Appointment of New Member to Rebuild Together**

Kelly Kennedy: We have an appointment of a new member to Rebuild Together. We talked about this a couple of meetings then it was tabled I believe in October. I am the current representative and I work two jobs, and I am unable to make the meetings. They deserve to have someone there who’s able to attend the meetings. Do we have anyone who is interested?

Tom LaPointe: Chairman, I’d be happy to do this. I just want to make sure there’s a nomination and it’s been first seconded. And if there’s anyone else who wants to be nominated, we go through that process. There were a series of questions that I asked at the October meeting and they were all answered.

**Motion to Approve:** Leslie Berckes; seconded by Frank Owens.

Kelly Kennedy: If no one else wants to make a nomination. I say we vote on it. I do know that it must go before Rebuild Together and then their board has to approve it as well.

Motion carried (9-0)

**Board Elections**

Kelly Kennedy: This is the time of year that we select a new secretary, a new chairperson and a new vice chair. Normally, what we do is the person in the vice chair position moves up to chair person; the person in the secretary position moves up to vice chair. That’s not the policy, it’s just what we have done in the past. My guess is that we take some nominations.

Leslie Berckes: Who are the current officers?

Kelly Kennedy: Tom is the Vice. I am the Chair, I will be stepping down. Alex is the Secretary. With what we’ve done in the past, Alex would move into the Vice Chair and Tom would move into the Chair position.

Leslie Berckes: But for the most part, we support self-nomining, right? We would make sure that this is okay with Alex and Tom?

Kelly Kennedy: Yes.
Tom LaPointe: I would be happy to do it, but we are not wedded to that tradition. If someone made the motion of the slate that has been discussed, seconded and there are no further nominations then we can just move this forward.

Kelly Kennedy: But we still need a secretary.

Molly Hanson: Is there anyone who wants to be?

Tom LaPointe: The Secretary position is not a heavy lift. You have someone from City staff that scribes these meetings. Those are the notes and the minutes that you receive. What I find challenging on this is keeping track of the motions but you work with the City staff on that. That’s the extent of your major responsibility.

Kelly Kennedy: Anything listed as an action item on the agenda, you get a filled-out form.

Leslie Berckes: I’m willing to take on the Secretary position.

Molly Hanson: I nominate Leslie.

Tom LaPointe: I move that nominations cease and I move that the slate that has been discussed is acted upon.

Kelly Kennedy: We have a motion for the slate presented before us for the new officers.

**Motion to Approve:** Tom LaPointe; seconded by Molly Hanson.

Motion carried (9-0)

**Board Liaison Updates**

**Polk Co Housing Continuum:**

Marge Ramsey: I did not attend.

**Rebuilding Together:**

Kelly Kennedy: Unfortunately, I was unable to attend.

**Housing Services Board:**

Kelly Kennedy: Greg is not here. Anything you could add Chris?

Chris Johansen: The Housing Agencies are going through their Agency Plan process. It’s the last two months. This month was just reviewing their policies. It’s very similar to our consolidated plan that we review.

**NFC:**

Marge Ramsey: We had a short meeting this month. They talked about the update from Cedar Rapids. And the update from Invest DSM proposal. We’re going through a lot of
different things right now. The 2020 budget was presented.

Jan Goode: I have a question with NFC with the new zoning changes that are proposed. The 1400 square feet. What is NFC’s square footage? Isn’t it around 1200 square feet?

Chris Johansen: They build about 10 a year. But at their last meeting, there were amendments to reduce how that’s configured a little bit, which helped them out quite a bit. Their concern wasn’t as strong anymore.

Jan Goode: My concern is strong.

Chris Johansen: To be clear, you can get anything built. You just have to go to plan and zoning. Nothing has changed with regards to that.

Jan Goode: Do you think it’s going to be hard for these eastside lots, like the one that was just torn down on East Grand. Who’s going to build a 1400 square foot home on that plot of land?

Kelly Kennedy: Am I wrong? Did I read the article wrong that what they did was carve out a rubber stamp that someone at the counter could do, if you wanted to do a 1000 square foot home, then you must go in front of zoning to get that approved.

Chris Johansen: There’s one house style that won’t work for Habitat for Humanity, for example, under our proposed zoning code. Out of the 30 they build a year, there’s one that they’ll have to go to plan and zoning commission. Remember, in the past, they had to go every single time.

Jan Goode: Because they already do the one style garage and the basement.

Chris Johansen: And the other part, we’ve met and discussed with builders. If, for example, a builder wants to build 50 homes over the next year, they bring us their housing type. And if we can’t approve it, administratively, they must take it through plan and zoning. But the square footage issues really changed a lot from early in the discussion. Tyler knows this better than anyone

Tyler Hall: With a 30% square foot reduction you can get approved administratively. A 1400 square foot home with a 30% reduction comes down to 918.

Jan Goode: I just look at some of these bungalows and some of these plots on the eastside that will never be built on. You couldn’t pass code on some of these.

Chris Johansen: Early on when it was first recommended it’s true, but right now it’s not. There are a lot of amendments that went through

Frank Owens: This doesn’t affect anything that HOME Inc would build?

Chris Johansen: HOME Inc was in favor of it. Habitat and NFC were not in favor of it until the last day, which was a special council meeting. There were a number of amendments that made them happier. I’m not going to tell you that they’re thrilled because they’re not. But they’re more in favor of it than they were. It’s not the perfect situation for NFC
but it does solve some of the issues from the initial code.

Tom LaPointe: Is it possible for you to put together a one pager on this topic?

Chris Johansen: I could do it but it is so complicated and there’s so much in this code. If you want me to stick to square footage, I could do that.

Tom LaPointe: A summary statement of what the process would be for an exemption?

Chris Johansen: That would be easy. They requested and we have up to 30% on any measurable item in the code where we can move 30% either way. But I can get you the minimums if that’s what you’re looking at? And kind of the big thing that happened the last day, was that we created a new zoning district. What they’re protecting are the Greenfield areas. That’s where they want to have the larger square footage. So, if it’s not in a specific zoning district, it’s not going to be as strict.

Jan Goode: They would have the common sense to know that this lot that currently houses an 800-square foot house and is butted up against the property line is not going to be able to fit within these criteria.

Chris Johansen: Yes. The biggest thing to is what we’re asking for is that that new house fits the character of the neighborhood. You don’t want it to stick out.

Jan Goode: It sounds like an HOA standard now. With the roof pitches and such. And I see what they’re doing but we’re not a suburb. And it’s not very attractive to private investors and private builders that want to go in and revitalize some of the neighborhoods.

Chris Johansen: The Council has seen over the years, some things that they have not been pleased with being built, to be crystal clear on it. That’s what we’re trying to protect. The whole square foot discussion, just to talk through it a little bit, it’s the same thing city council required for the last 20 years.

Jan Goode: The full basement hasn’t always been required.

Chris Johansen: Not when they come in to build a single-family house, but when they come in and do a rezoning, we’ve always required it. The developers have always known it. We just made it a standard. That was the biggest thing. All the square footages came from what we’ve asked the last decade at least. Well, our planning administrators have pitched the same exact thing the council has approved for all our new subdivisions. If its in-fill housing, it’s totally different. But for new subdivisions, it’s been consistent with what council has wanted over the last 20 years.

Tom LaPointe: Is there a document that developers are presented? I’d like to get this summarized, whether it’s one page or two pages.

Chris Johansen: I’ll give you a summary, it’s just that some things are going to be left out. You could get into short term rentals. There’s so much in this code that it’s difficult to summarize in this page. But I could easily do the square footage.

Tom LaPointe: Quickly, through the Chair, CDBG is still in the air because of the lack of a
budget resolution from the Federal Government and the Congress?

Chris Johansen: Yes.

Tom LaPointe: One other thing that someone brought up with me – an advocate from a national organization – that there is something proposed that Senator Grassley may be interested in. It’s some sort of variation on earned income tax credit for people in rental housing. Are there any trade associations or groups in Washington tracking that?

Chris Johansen: I’d have to look at the housing agency side.

Tom LaPointe: It’s some sort of income tax credit for working people in rental units. I’ll do some research on this.

Adjourn the Meeting

Motion to Adjourn: Tom LaPointe; Seconded by Frank Owens.

Motion carried (9-0)

Meeting was adjourned by consensus by Kelly Kennedy at 6:10 p.m.