

CITY OF URBANA
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
Tuesday, April 25, 2000, City Council Chambers

Commission Members Present: Fred Cobb, Chris Diana, Robert Lewis, Jon Liebman, Gigi Paquin, Anne Heinze Silvis, Dennis Vidoni

Commission Members Absent: Carol Westfield

Others Present: April Getchius, Karen Rasmussen, and Connie Eldridge, Grants Management Division; John Severns, Illinois Center for Citizen Involvement (ICfCI); Esther Patt and Ruth Wyman, City Council; Lester Pritchard, Citizens for HOMES; Barbara Pritchard, PACE, Inc.

Call to Order: Chairperson Cobb called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. A quorum was present.

Approval of Minutes: *Chairperson Cobb asked for approval or corrections to the February 22, 2000 minutes. Commissioner Diana moved to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Liebman seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

Chairperson Cobb asked for approval or corrections to the March 28, 2000 minutes. Commissioner Diana moved to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Silvis seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Staff Report: Ms. Getchius announced interviews for the Grants Management Division Manager will be held in May. Neighborhood Cleanup is scheduled for Saturday, May 6. Commissioners decided to hold all future Community Development Commission meetings in the City Council Chambers.

Petitions and Communications: None.

Old Business: **Draft Proposal – Visitable Home Ordinance** – Ms. Getchius distributed a memo on the Visitability Ordinance and summarized meetings with Lester Pritchard and the City’s Legal Department. Although Ms. Getchius feels visitability standards are positive, she notes there are problems such as small in-fill lots and grading issues. Ms. Getchius also mentioned problems with the first floor level being at grade, additional construction costs, and an entire subdivision meeting visitability requirements. Grants Management Division staff suggested expanding the language in current federal programs that directly tie to the Consolidated Plan. Although legal staff was concerned about the waiver process, Ms. Getchius felt a waiver process should be available. It should have specific criteria and involve the City Engineer and the Building Code Board of Appeals. Staff also suggested using Access Grant monies to offset additional costs.

In response to Chairperson Cobb, Ms. Getchius stated the Visitable Home Ordinance as written could create problems with redevelopment of Lakeside Terrace, which is an example of an in-fill development project. Ms. Getchius suggested commissioners review the current ICfCI contract requirements concerning visitability. According to Ms. Getchius, Mr. Pritchard is willing to work with the City regarding dimensions.

Commissioner Vidoni asked for clarification on tying visitability to the Consolidated Plan. Ms. Getchius responded there would be no city-wide ordinance; rather, current CDBG and HOME contracts would have language added supporting visitability. Commissioner Diana inquired if the City of Urbana was likely to pass a city-wide visitability ordinance. Ms. Getchius answered the issue of visitability has not yet reached City Council. The proposed ordinance ties visitability only to city-funded development.

Chairperson Cobb proposed that staff and Mr. Pritchard further study the issue of visitability. Mr. Pritchard stated the concept of visitability is to promote integration of people with disabilities. He sees this proposal as a first step to move away from homes that segregate. He views this as an issue of fairness and social justice. If developers are able to make an entire residential development visitable, Mr. Pritchard asks why not? However, Mr. Pritchard did not envision entire subdivisions with ramps leading to the houses. He referenced the Citizens for HOMES video that included attractive, practical visitability designs. He supports a waiver process if the contractor is unable to make a house visitable.

Barbara Pritchard announced that Illinois Center for Citizen Involvement (ICfCI) will receive a state-wide award for constructing visitable homes. Ms. Pritchard also supports the concept of visitability as an issue of fairness and social justice. It is her understanding that the HOPE VI application will require entire developments to be visitable. Concerning the attractiveness of wooden ramps, Ms. Pritchard remarked that houses with steps at every entrance are not attractive to her and segregate disabled from non-disabled persons. Besides the current owners, future homeowners benefit from houses that are visitable. Ms. Pritchard added she and Mr. Pritchard are very willing to work with staff on this issue.

Commissioner Vidoni wondered what the cost range was for the additional grading. John Severns, architect for ICfCI HomeBuild Program, discussed the impact of visitability on project costs. Originally the cost of visitability was anticipated to be \$200 for a \$70,000 house. The architects did not realize the difficulty of visitable construction on non-standard narrow or corner lots. Projected costs are \$1500 - \$1600 above the cost of steps.

Mr. Severns stated the HomeBuild Program's intent was to design a prototype house to fit on a 60 or 65 foot lot. However, many houses must be modified to fit the lot, which results in additional costs. Mr. Severns then discussed city codes regarding floor level relative to the site. He noted homebuyers in this area do not want to purchase slab-on-grade houses. Because HomeBuild 3 does not provide funds to cover these issues, both the contractor and the architect are absorbing the additional costs. He remarked that the visitability issue of one entrance at grade is reasonable. He added most homebuyers do not want to purchase homes with ramps.

Regarding ADA regulations, Mr. Severns prefers to construct “acceptable” rather than “accessible” homes. He mentioned his concerns with the term “accessible” and suggested consulting with the city’s legal department. Ms. Getchius responded that she and Mr. Pritchard had discussed the issue, and they preferred the term “acceptable route”. Mr. Severns anticipated additional costs for the acceptable issues to be \$200 on the inside and up to \$400 on the outside of the homes. He felt these costs were in line with the homes costing \$70,000. As the population ages, Mr. Severns thought visitable homes would grow in popularity. Commissioner Diana asked if any of the HomeBuild Program houses had more than one visitable entrance, such as in the garage. Mr. Severns answered no; architects must use the driveway to approach the main entrance. He discussed problems with an entrance from the garage and those sites located on alleys.

Mr. Pritchard stated Mr. Severns is envisioning the optimum--Mr. Pritchard just wants to enter a house. Ms. Getchius will set up meetings with all interested parties to define what is wanted and determine where contractors can be flexible. Mr. Severns suggested developing a system that would apply to 24 out of 25 houses. In reply to Commissioner Vidoni, Mr. Severns did not want waivers to be used extensively. However, he anticipated that as more desirable lots are used up, more waivers will be needed. Commissioner Lewis asked if the city should have specific codes that listed variables for waivers. Mr. Severns answered yes; he preferred code enforcement to negotiating for waivers. Commissioner Lewis felt it would not be difficult to list criteria for variables to the visitability ordinance. Ms. Getchius also preferred specific criteria. Commissioner Diana agreed that there should be a low percentage of waivers.

Ruth Wyman said this issue was first brought to the Community Development Commission in its role of providing policy advice to the City Council. She clarified that ADA requirements are for public buildings while the visitability ordinance relates to private homes. She supports the requirement that homes built with CDBG and HOME funds be visitable. Ms. Wyman said future families will benefit from designing houses to be visitable. She felt the visitability ordinance will help meet accessibility issues mentioned in the Consolidated Plan. In response to Chairperson Cobb, Ms. Wyman hoped the issue of visitability would be forwarded to City Council in the next two months.

Chairperson Cobb stated it is the consensus of the Community Development Commission to allow more time to address the issue of visitability.

New Business: Supportive Housing Program (SHP) Grant Renewal – Homeless Families in Transition – Ms. Rasmussen provided a brief history of the SHP program. This is the second year of a three year grant renewal. Initially, monies were spent on new construction and rehabilitation. Current funding is used for operational expenses and supportive service costs for Center for Women in Transition, A Woman’s Place, and Salvation Army Services. Ms. Rasmussen summarized the NOFA 2000 procedures and noted HUD now requires a different format. Grantees are held to a pro-rata amount. Ms. Rasmussen stated this is a very successful program with many families becoming self-sufficient. Because she is waiting for the participating agencies operational budgets, the application is incomplete. In response to Chairperson Cobb, Ms. Rasmussen summarized plans for completing the application. She also

explained that Center for Women in Transition has increased their staff ratio to about 1 staff person to every 3 or 3.5 residents, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Commissioner Vidoni asked about integrating Exhibits 1 and 2. Ms. Rasmussen answered Exhibit 1 is an explanation of the Continuum of Care system as a whole. Exhibit 2 is the application for the specific program to be funded, and there could be more than one Exhibit 2. Commissioner Diana asked if these were formula applications for the subpopulations. Ms. Rasmussen answered yes, she continued forward with the same percentages under the current Consolidated Plan. Priorities were established by the Continuum of Care Committee and by the Council of Service Providers based on community need. Ms. Rasmussen clarified the Community Development Commission needed to recommend the draft application to City Council. Discussion continued on the amount of funding being requested. Commissioner Diana was uncomfortable with recommending an application without a completed budget. Ms. Getchius suggested a holding a special meeting of the Community Development. Chairperson Cobb proposed limiting funding so it did not exceed last year's amount. Ms. Getchius assured commissioners they would receive a copy of the completed application. Esther Patt clarified City Council's schedule.

Commissioner Diana was disappointed with the participating agencies since they had not provided their budgets in a timely manner. Discussion continued on why the agencies were not responsive. Commissioner Lewis supposed the agencies were anticipating their grant allotment would be reduced. Commissioner Vidoni supported the grant renewal. Ms. Getchius proposed several possibilities to keep commissioners involved with the renewal. Chairperson Cobb suggested approval of the application contingent upon review of the budget.

Commissioner Lewis moved to recommend the Supportive Housing Program/Homeless Families in Transition Grant Renewal Application contingent on City Council's critical review of the budget line items. Commissioner Diana seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Neighborhood Improvement Fund (NIF) Recommendation – Ms. Getchius gave a brief history of the NIF program. The program has been very popular with neighborhood residents. At its last meeting the NIF Committee made two changes to the program. Because of the reduced amount of funds available, the maximum grant was changed from \$2,500 to \$2,000 per household. In response to a grant recipient's request, the committee agreed that grant awards may be transferred to new homeowners upon application to and consideration by the Committee. Commissioner Lewis suggested adding the term "site specific" to the program requirements. Ms. Getchius replied the committee was also concerned with the applicant's eligibility, since priority has been given to elderly and disabled persons. She gave the example of a NIF grant based upon disability, and a new property owner not having a disability. Chairperson Cobb asked if the committee considered the impact of the grant on the buyer and seller of the property. Ms. Getchius replied no.

Applications will be available June 5, 2000 and have a deadline of August 4, 2000. Ms. Getchius remarked many residents had problems getting bids from contractors. After receiving approval, homeowners must complete the project within one year. The committee does not know the names or addresses of the applicants. Commissioner Vidoni questioned funding only

repairs to the principal structure except in the case of persons with disabilities. Ms. Getchius replied the committee wanted to fund a disabled person's request for an electric garage door opener. Noting that long, complicated applications may deter participation, Commissioner Vidoni liked this concise application. Commissioner Diana remembered the committee had increased the grant to \$2,500 last year to help with more costly projects. Ms. Getchius answered the committee increased the grant in the second year to address the roofing problems. She added the average grant over two years was \$1,800. Many projects exceed the limit, and homeowners use their own funds for the difference. In response to Commissioner Lewis, Ms. Getchius said homeowners may apply for a second grant; however, the committee gives priority to those homeowners who have not received a grant.

Commissioner Vidoni moved to recommend approval to the City Council of the Neighborhood Investment Fund Allocation for FY2000-2001. Commissioner Lewis seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment: Chairperson Cobb adjourned the meeting at 8:58 p.m.

Recorded by Connie Eldridge

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