

City of Ashland - Housing Committee Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Ashland Housing Committee was held on **Wednesday, January 13, 2021 at 8:00 a.m. via GoTo Meetings.**

Committee Members Present: Sam Ray, Ana Tochterman, Elizabeth Franek, Kathy Beeksma, Kaas Baichtal, and Megan McBride

Committee Members Absent: Eric Lindell

Staff Present: Chris Luebben, Mayor Lewis

Citizens Present: Millie Rounsville

Mayor Lewis opened the meeting at 8:00 a.m.

Agenda

1) Consent Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda by Elizabeth Franek. Seconded by Kaas Baichtal. Passed unanimously.

2) a.) Approve minutes from the December 9, 2020 Housing Committee meeting

Motion to approve minutes from December 9, 2020 Housing Committee meeting. Motion made by Sam Ray, seconded by Kaas Baichtal. Passed unanimously.

3) Citizen Comments

None.

4) Old business

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

Megan McBride noted that there were 11 new CDBG Housing loan applications and one down payment assistance project in 2020.

Megan McBride updated the committee that she will be submitting an application to the Chequamegon Food Co-op to have HIP be one of their Round Up partners for a month later in 2021. If selected, this is anticipated to raise between \$800- 1,200 to support future HIP projects.

Chris Luebben reported that there are currently 32 active HIP applications. She will continue to work to identify contractors to ensure projects will move forward in the spring.

b) Review and revision of City Housing Plan: Part 2 (Need: Increase Affordability and Expand Affordable Housing Units for All Income Groups)

Megan McBride moved several completed items to the “Completed” section of the Strategic Plan document. Based on the City’s 2020 acceptance into the Wisconsin Main Street Program, McBride recommended adding the following two (2) action items to the plan:

1. Complete a downtown housing study with Wisconsin Economic Development Corp. as one of the City’s free technical assistance projects.
2. Explore potential funding sources for a Downtown Building Improvement RLF or Grant Program to support build out of new residential units in downtown projects.

Kaas Baichtal noted that construction of new downtown housing can be cost prohibitive to bring historic buildings up to code and meet accessibility requirements.

Ana Tochtermann commented that there are other benefits to rehabilitating downtown buildings for housing, including historic preservation as well as the vibrancy and economic vitality that additional downtown density brings.

Discussion of E. 3. Hold public listening sessions to gauge housing interest and needs of various populations. Millie Rounsville, Director of Northwest Wisconsin Community Service Agency, commented that community education is needed and could be incorporated through this process as well.

Millie Rounsville commented that CARES money can be used for renovation. She explained that she has been speaking with the owner of a private residence which was damaged by fire this past winter. This is a small single-family home, and NWCSA would potentially like to convert it into a warming shelter. She will work with the Planning & Development Director to discuss the zoning to see if this would be feasible. If so, she emphasized that COVID-19 precautions and planning will be especially important for any future use.

Mayor Deb Lewis noted that the topic of warming shelters and other needs to address homelessness is an important community concern which the Housing Committee simply does not have the capacity to adequately address given the many other housing needs which also need attention. She will be proposing the creation of a Task Force to address homelessness at the upcoming City Council meeting, and updates about Task Force activities will be provided to the Housing Committee. She will also likely reach out to one or more Housing Committee member(s) to serve on this Task Force.

Housing Committee members were very supportive of starting a Task Force to address homelessness in Ashland.

5) New business

- a) Discussion of potential Unified Development Ordinance amendments related to transitional/emergency housing in light industrial zoning districts

Megan McBride told the committee that she met with Rich Larson and Carla Ward, representatives of Crossroads Outreach Human Services, at the end of 2020 to discuss their hopes for their existing building at 3600 Ellis Avenue. The building currently consists of light manufacturing space, which works with their rehabilitation program to

provide skills training and interim employment for participants. They would like to add a residential component to their building, to better support people first entering their program who would be able to both live and work in this supportive environment.

Mayor Lewis asked what the building is currently zoned, and what changes would be needed to facilitate this use.

Megan McBride stated that the property is zoned Light Industrial (LI), and the best way to allow this mix of uses would likely be through a text amendment to the City's Unified Development Ordinance to allow for emergency residential facilities in industrial districts. Another notable property which would be impacted by this would be the former New Day Shelter building, which currently is a nonconforming use and therefore could not be used as an emergency residential facility if the use were to lapse for more than twelve (12) months.

Sam Ray agreed that finding emergency residential units is very difficult in Ashland, so she would support exploring zoning changes to expand these options.

The committee supported McBride taking action to work with Center on WI Strategies staff to explore the health implications of allowing emergency residential facilities in industrial districts as part of the City's Health in All Policies project.

6) Announcements

a) Updates on Healthy Neighborhoods project and partnership with Northland College

Megan McBride updated the committee that she is working with professor Nicole Foster in the Sustainable Community Development department at Northland College to develop a pilot Healthy Neighborhoods project. The details are still being worked out, but the project will identify one neighborhood to engage around interests, neighborhood assets, and initiatives which could improve quality of life for residents. McBride will provide additional updates about this project as details are identified.

7) Adjournment

Next meeting scheduled for February 10, 2021 at 8:00 am.

Motion to adjourn made by Sam Ray, seconded by Kaas Baichtal. Passed unanimously.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:22 am. Minutes by Chris Luebben and Megan McBride.