

JOHNSTOWN CITY COUNCIL  
WORKSHOP MINUTES  
Thursday, January 31, 2019

City Council met in a stated session for the general transaction of business.  
Mayor Frank Janakovic called the workshop to order at 5:00 p.m.

George Hayfield, City Manager; Jonathan Rosenthal, City Economic Development Director; Melissa Komar, Executive Director JRA; Katie Kinka, Senior Planner, Cambria County Planning Commission; Jennifer Burkhart, Administrative Assistant; Katherine Purelli-Webb, City Fiscal Officer; Renee Daly, Executive Director Cambria County Redevelopment Authority; Jacob Zerby, City Economic Development Specialist; Robert Statler, City Fire Chief; and James White and Don Buday, Planning Commission, were present.

Councilmembers Marie Mock and Reverend Sylvia King stated the workshop was called to clarify plans with regard to demolition of blighted properties.

Mayor Janakovic stated the workshop would be a good way to address some of the blight issues and educate everyone involved. He suggested a good starting point would be to review the UDAG funds to obtain a better understanding of the possible uses of the funds. Restrictions with regard to DCED funding and State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) requirements were reviewed.

Mr. Vitovich noted there is "a lot of knowledge" present in the room and applauded those involved.

Jonathan Rosenthal, Economic Development Director, provided a brief history of the UDAG loan program. He stated the City gave itself an \$850,000 loan out of UDAG funding, which was repaid 15 months ago.

Mr. Rosenthal referred to the emergency demolition of the Sherman Street property and the building on Fairfield Avenue that was burned out this past December, which is going to cost approximately \$100,000 to raze. He noted the Public Safety Building, which is in need of repair, is not an eligible expense.

He discussed uses for UDAG revolving loan funds. There is currently a little over \$1 million in the UDAG bank account, and there are outstanding loan balances being repaid to the City in the amount of \$236,000. He stated there was no money for matching grants.

Mr. Rosenthal explained CDBG funding which is another program under HUD.

Melissa Komar, Executive Director, JRA, commented that a press release from the Governor's office indicated that the Governor plans on investing \$5.4 billion in infrastructure projects over the next four years, including broadband, blight elimination and emergency management.

She noted that the partnership between JRA and the City through interceptor agreements allows for elimination of blight along the interceptors, including the Ohio Street and also the Fairfield Avenue project that will begin over the next year. There was discussion regarding blight elimination along Franklin Street through funding provided by UDAG, the Community Foundation, and a private donor. Mrs. Komar suggested that Tax Claim Bureau workshops be promoted to educate residents with regard to ownership of vacant parcels and properties up for sheriff's sale.

There was further discussion regarding the positive impact on a neighborhood upon the demolition of a blighted property. It was suggested that the public be made aware of the number of buildings that are being demolished and made aware of how UDAG funds can be used.

Renee Daly, Executive Director, Cambria County Redevelopment Authority, explained the County's criteria for determining what properties can be considered for demolition. She referred to Act 152, which is legislation that allows for the County Commissioners to incur an additional \$15 cost with every deed transferred in the County that would go into a fund that could be used by a municipality such as the City of Johnstown, Cambria County Redevelopment Authority, Johnstown Redevelopment Authority, the Sewer Authority, GJWA, and any publicly-owned entity. There was further discussion regarding the funding.

Mrs. Mock suggested that City residents be instructed to contact the City to begin the process if interested in purchasing a blighted property.

Mr. Buday and Codes Officer Leroy Palov "walked Conemaugh Borough" to identify properties that would or would not need sewer taps in light of the upcoming sewer project. He noted that out of 68 properties, which does not include the bigger commercial properties, "54 could be demolished tomorrow."

Jennifer Burkhart, City Administrative Assistant, noted a historic zoning overlay ordinance that applies to Cambria City whereby a property owner would need to pay a \$250 fee and present before the zoning hearing board in order to tear the property down.

Mr. White commented that the historic overlay district was established to preserve the historic culture of the Cambria City neighborhood. He did not recall any property owner being turned down by the Zoning Hearing Board.

There was further discussion with regard to ways to make the public aware of the different options available when purchasing a blighted property, including partnering with the Tax Claim Bureau, inserting flyers with billing and including information on the City's website.

Katie Kinka, Senior Planner, Cambria County Planning Commission, Alleghenies Ahead Comprehensive Plan, commented on two action items, including exploring ways to "up the budget" for demolition to get to a place where 80 to 100 properties would be demolished per year and then discuss new and modern housing for the County. She noted that DCED and the State could be contacted to secure the funding to do a full market analysis.

There being no further business, the workshop adjourned at 6:05 p.m.