PARKS, RECREATION, AND COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

The Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Committee meeting was held on August 10, 2015, at 3:29 p.m. with Chairman Anderson presiding. Members present were Mr. Hosfelt and Mr. Caldwell. Mrs. Horsey and Mr. Lewis were absent. Councilman Hutchison and Mayor Christiansen were also present.

AGENDA ADDITIONS/DELETIONS

Mr. Hosfelt moved for approval of the agenda, seconded by Mr. Caldwell and unanimously carried.

Exception Request to Allocate Down Payment Assistance Outside of the Downtown Development District Target Area

During the Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement meeting of March 9, 2015, members considered the Review/Scoring of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Applications. Members recommended awarding $60,000 of the City's CDBG grant allocation for public service activities to the City of Dover Homeownership Assistance Program and that priority be given to the Downtown Redevelopment Target Area as designated in the Dover Code until January 2016, with funding to be re-evaluated at that time to see if there are funds left over for the remainder of the City. The Committee's recommendation was approved by City Council during their Regular Meeting of March 23, 2015.

Mrs. Tracey Harvey, Planner I, stated that staff was requesting an exception to the Committee's recommendation to allow $20,000 of the approved funding for the City of Dover homeownership program to be reallocated to a first time homebuyer who was experiencing a hardship and was currently under contract to purchase a home outside of the Downtown Development District (DDD) Target Area. She explained that without the funding, this individual's contract would be canceled and she would not be eligible to purchase a home for at least 10 years. Mrs. Harvey advised members that Ms. Tomeka Crawford, the housing counselor for this client, was present to speak on this individual's behalf.

Staff recommended allocating $20,000 in down payment assistance outside of the DDD Target Area to a client experiencing a hardship.

Responding to Mr. Hutchison, Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Director of Planning and Community Development, stated that the request had not been reviewed by the City Manager.

In response to Mr. Hutchison, Mrs. Harvey stated that the request was supported by staff.

Responding to Mr. Anderson, Mrs. Harvey stated that the home being purchased was a townhouse located behind the Redner's Warehouse Market on Route 8 in Dover, and if this $20,000 allocation were approved, $40,000 in funding would remain in the homeownership program for FY 2016. She stated that $60,000 had been allocated for the entire year.

In response to Mr. Anderson regarding pending applications, Mrs. Harvey stated that there was one (1) application pending for the downtown area.

Mr. Caldwell questioned the reason for this special case outside the DDD area. Responding, Mrs. Harvey stated that Ms. Crawford could better explain the hardship of the client.

In response to Mr. Hosfelt's request for clarification regarding the CDBG program, Mrs. Harvey explained that CDBG funds are typically used City-wide, but because of the City's DDD designation, the Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Committee chose to allocate all of the funding for the City's homeownership program for the downtown area.

Mr. Hosfelt questioned if a request of this nature would be an unusual use for this money if the property were located in the downtown area, and Mrs. Harvey indicated that it would not be.

Mr. Hutchison requested Mr. Scott Koenig, City Manager, to comment on this item. Responding, Mr. Koenig explained that it was a goal across the City to promote homeownership in general. Although these CDBG funds were intended to focus on the DDD as the target area, he had no objection to staff coming to Council to expand beyond the DDD since this would go toward the overall goal of the City. Mr. Koenig noted that he did not have the benefit of knowing the location of the subject property.

Ms. Tomeka Crawford, Homeownership Specialist, National Council on Agricultural Life and Labor Research Fund, Inc. (NCALL), 363 Saulsbury Road, explained that this client had approached her nearly a year ago wanting to purchase a home in Dover. She indicated that her client works and lives in the City and would like to remain in the City by using the City of Dover down payment and settlement assistance program. Ms. Crawford stated that this individual had worked very hard to become mortgage ready by selling a mobile home that was sub-standard and no longer meeting her family's needs, paying off debt, improving her credit score, and saving money. At the point of becoming mortgage ready, the underwriting guidelines changed, which made it impossible for the client to buy without using the City of Dover program. If unable to use the $20,000 down payment and settlement assistance program, this client would have to look at a much longer term of over 10 years to purchase a home. Ms. Crawford requested members to visualize having a ready-to-move-in dream home and having that dream disappear all at once. She stated that this is what would happen if this client were not approved for the CDBG funds.

Ms. Crawford explained that she was present as a voice of the client who was not present to represent herself. She advised members that she worked with this client and saw the hardship, challenges, and the dream in front of her, noting that this dream was almost to the point of disappearing. She requested approval for the client to utilize the City of Dover program, which would allow her to move into the home by September 15, 2015.

Mr. Caldwell indicated that he was 100% in support of helping the client but questioned if providing assistance for the purchase outside of the designated area would set a precedent for the City in the future whenever someone has a hardship and cannot buy a home. Responding, Mrs. Harvey

reminded members that the Committee had agreed to revisit the allocation of funds if all of the funds were not expended in the target area by January 2016, and to determine then if funds would be used City-wide. She noted that the City's CDBG program was normally a City-wide program and had not targeted the downtown area previously.

Mayor Christiansen reiterated that this program had always been a City-wide program and was made site-specific when the City was designated as a DDD to strengthen that program. He advised members that the City had partnered with NCALL in revitalizing downtown Dover and the Restoring Central Dover initiative. It was Mayor Christiansen's belief that NCALL, a partner in good faith with the City, would not have stepped forward and asked for this exception if they were not in support of assisting this client in becoming a homeowner in Dover. He stated that the opportunity to make someone a homeowner is a great opportunity for the City, noting that this could be used as an advertisement for people considering moving to the City. He stated that NCALL's presence helps strengthen the City's commitment to restoring homeownership in the City.

Responding to Mr. Hosfelt as to whether the funds would be recouped by the City, Mrs. Harvey explained that the funds would be a forgivable grant and the City would only recoup these funds if the homeowner chooses to buy, sell, or rent the property within 10 years.

In response to Mr. Anderson, Mrs. Harvey stated that if the recipient homeowner buys, sells, or rents the property, they will be required to pay back a percentage of the loan on a sliding scale, based on the type of loan and the length of the loan.

Mr. Anderson explained that the City's homeownership program is funded out of the CDBG program to help with the City's goals related to low-income housing. He stated that this is federal money and the City determines where it is spent within the federal government's guidelines.

Mrs. Crawford stated that she was committed to the downtown Dover initiative and that she had another client who was in a position to purchase a home in the target area and would be taking advantage of the funding available through the City's CDBG program as well.

Ms. Denise Freeman, Housing Counseling Director, NCALL, explained that NCALL had long been a supporter of City of Dover initiatives and a huge supporter of the City's homeownership program. She stated that NCALL was fully committed to the Restoring Central Dover initiative. Ms. Freeman explained that NCALL had participated in many related events in Dover, including workshops with Central Delaware Habitat for Humanity, Inc. She noted that events had been scheduled or held at locations such as Bibleway Temple Church of God in Christ, Solid Rock Baptist Church, and Holy Trinity Church. Ms. Freeman stated that NCALL was also fully committed to providing assistance to help families purchase homes, particularly first-time home buyers. She explained that this particular client had remained committed to becoming a home buyer. Ms. Freeman stated her pleasure that Ms. Crawford was serving as housing counselor for this client, noting that Ms. Crawford was passionate about wanting this family to succeed.

Responding to Mr. Anderson as to when the client entered the program, Ms. Crawford explained that this occurred in June of 2014 and confirmed that the criteria for the mortgage process had changed since that time.

Members were made aware that the loan officer working with the client had provided a confidential letter outlining the client's hardship.

Mr. Hosfelt moved to recommend approval of staff's recommendation to allocate $20,000 in down payment assistance outside of the Downtown Development District (DDD) Target Area to a client experiencing a hardship. The motion was seconded by Mr. Caldwell and unanimously carried.

Recreation Needs Assessment

During the Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Committee meeting held on July 13, 2015, members considered the Draft Recreation Needs Assessment and recommended continued discussion of the Recreation Needs Assessment at their next meeting. The Committee's recommendation was approved by City Council during their Regular Meeting of July 27, 2015.

Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Director of Planning and Community Development, recommended that members take action on the Draft Recreation Needs Assessment, noting that the assessment could be fine-tuned moving forward.

Mayor Christiansen requested clarification regarding the splash park concept. Responding, Mrs. Townshend explained that, based on the information from the public, staff would be looking toward locating splash pads at Silver Lake and Dover Park. Based on the needs assessment, the City would move into doing master plans for the parks, including the amenities. She stated that it had yet to be determined which location would be first for a splash pad since this was not part of the assessment.

Responding to Mayor Christiansen regarding the time frame for the opening of the splash pads, Mrs. Townshend stated that, because of the desire for the City to deliver more opportunities on the east side of the City, she felt that staff should move forward with the master plan for Dover Park as the location for the first splash pad. She indicated that this splash pad could not be constructed next fiscal year but probably the year after.

Noting that the Capital School District had a new superintendent, Mayor Christiansen questioned if it was expected that the City would be able to continue to use the District's two (2) facilities on the east side of the City. Responding, Mrs. Townshend stated that the City uses the Capital School District's facilities routinely, noting that the City uses the field at the old Dover High School and runs an after school program at Towne Point Elementary School. She stated that the District had been very supportive in working with the City on other programming as well. Regarding expanding the City's programs to East Dover Elementary School to accommodate the needs of youth on the east side of the City, Mrs. Townshend stated that this had not yet been discussed but it was something she could look into.

Responding to Mr. Hutchison regarding working cooperatively with Kent County Levy Court, Mrs. Townshend stated that the City was working with Kent County and planned to meet with County staff to discuss recreation needs and working together. Additionally, she indicated that the City works with the YMCA routinely, and that this was increasing. Mrs. Townshend indicated that the YMCA was currently conducting swim lessons for the City's Camp Small Wonder and provides transportation to and from their facility for these lessons.

Mr. Caldwell moved to recommend acceptance of the City of Dover Recreation Needs Assessment, seconded by Mr. Hosfelt and unanimously carried.

Mr. Anderson expressed his thought that strategic planning and goal setting goes hand in hand with the Recreation Needs Assessment in that they are both plans to improve various aspects of the City, revitalize the downtown, and improve recreation opportunities. He asked for members of the Committee and the public to review the information provided and offer suggestions and priorities regarding what needed to be done. Mr. Anderson noted that some improvements would be easier than others, such as adding trail stations at Schutte Park, and some would be more difficult and more costly, such as a splash park. He pointed out the importance of determining which park would have which amenities and noted that different funding proposals must be considered. Mr. Anderson stated that there had been a proposal to change the open space requirements and to also review the fee system dedicated to the Parkland Reserve Fund, noting that there is no funding stream for capital improvements in this area, and that most of the funding currently comes out of the General Fund, with approximately $100,000 coming from fees.

Responding to Mr. Caldwell as to how the City's recent tax increase would affect park funding, Mr. Anderson stated his belief that this revenue would be applied to public safety and infrastructure.

In response to Mr. Caldwell as to whether parks and recreation funding was being received through grants, Mrs. Townshend explained that the City had utilized grant funding through the Delaware State Parks from the Land and Water Conservation Trust Fund; however, she indicated that there may be other opportunities for projects that would help to improve public health. Mrs. Townshend stated that she recently discussed looking for other grant opportunities with her staff.

Mr. Anderson stated that grants may be available for the expansion of trails and updating of fitness stations.

Mrs. Townshend stated that a lot of the fitness classes offered at the YMCA and Club Fitness use barbells, which the City's programs are lacking, noting that they are expensive to purchase. Some of the instructors that staff had spoken with indicated they could offer a wider variety of classes if barbells could be incorporated into the programming. Mrs. Townshend advised that staff was looking into researching grant funds for these types of small projects, noting that last year Nemours donated $1,000 to purchase four (4) bicycle racks. She indicated that although grant funds may not help with large projects such as splash pads and restrooms, there are probably untapped funds for some projects.

Responding to Mr. Hosfelt, Mrs. Townshend advised that the fees collected for the parks and recreation programs do not cover the cost of the programs and that fees only account for about 20%, when considering only the Parks and Recreation budget. When the Grounds Division, which maintains all of the parkland, is factored in, the revenue from recreation only pays for approximately 8% of the combined budget. Mrs. Townshend confirmed Mr. Hosfelt's understanding that the majority of the needs assessment survey respondents felt that fees collected should help fund the programs. She stated that most of the respondents indicated that there should be a fee differential for residents versus non-residents, particularly some of the field and pavilion rental fees which had not been adjusted in a number of years and were very labor intensive for the Grounds Division. Mrs. Townshend stated that the softball leagues that rent the fields are some of the larger money makers; however, the fees collected do not cover the cost to maintain the grounds.

Responding to Mr. Hosfelt, Mrs. Townshend advised that league fees vary, depending on the season, and noted that each team pays a fee. The softball registration fee for the fall was approximately $500 per team, but can be as high as $800. She noted that a current challenge was a decline in interest for softball and there were fewer teams registering. Mrs. Townshend stated that Mr. Steve Pickering, Sports Coordinator, had been working to expand leagues and the City had been doing a lot more in regard to bringing in leagues for growing sports, such as field hockey and lacrosse.

Mr. Anderson suggested ultimate frisbee as an option.

In response to Mayor Christiansen regarding State contributions, Mrs. Townshend advised that the State contributes very little to the parks and recreation programs and the only State funding the City receives is from grants, such as matching grants. For example, having submitted a pre-application, the City recently received an invitation to fill out a grant application for the Mallard Park improvements project, which would cover approximately $33,000 of a $66,000 project.

Responding to Mayor Christiansen regarding utilizing Delaware State University's (DSU's) School of Business to find grant money for other projects, Mrs. Townshend indicated that this was something she could look into. She also stated that, in the spring, the City always utilizes an intern from DSU who has to work 400 hours and she could have this intern research grant funds.

At the request of Mayor Christiansen, Mrs. Townshend and Mr. Anderson agreed to meet with the Mayor to discuss grant research and resources. Mayor Christiansen noted that the DSU School of Business is a great untapped source of reference that the City could use.

Mr. Anderson stated that he would also like to meet with the City's counterparts at Kent County.

Mr. Anderson posed questions to members regarding their thoughts on what areas staff should be asked to look at first in relation to the needs assessment. He noted that staff desired to look at building a new master plan for east Dover and to look at the expanded area in Schutte Park, which he felt were both important. Mr. Anderson stated his desire for the Committee to come back to this issue, noting he would like more of the Committee members to be present to discuss this.

Strategic Planning and Goal Setting (Restoring Central Dover Strategic Plan)
Referring to the Executive Summary of the Restoring Central Dover - Our Vision for Vitality plan, Mr. Anderson questioned if members had any particular points to discuss in the plan or areas to prioritize, such as housing, community economic development, recreation, or youth programs.

Mr. Hosfelt stated that he would like to hear from Mr. Joe Myer, Chair, Restoring Central Dover Steering Committee, and staff, and expressed a desire to meet with this committee. Mr. Hosfelt stated that he was one (1) of the original members of the steering committee years ago when the process started. Noting that many things had occurred since that time, he felt it would be important for Council as a whole to get an overview of how it started and where things stood currently in order to determine a direction for the future. Mr. Hosfelt indicated that the Restoring Central Dover Steering Committee was the driving force behind this effort.

Noting that the Restoring Central Dover Steering Committee had grant funds but no legislative authority, Mr. Anderson expressed his opinion that they needed the Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Committee in this regard. He felt that working together, great things could be accomplished. Mr. Anderson stated that members of the Restoring Central Dover Steering Committee had reached out to members of the Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Committee, and suggested issuing an invitation to the Restoring Central Dover Steering Committee to meet with the Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Committee.

Mr. Hosfelt moved to issue an invitation to the members of the Restoring Central Dover Steering Committee to meet with the Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Committee, seconded by Mr. Anderson and unanimously carried.

Mr. Hosfelt moved to defer this item for further discussion during the September 14, 2015 Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Meeting, seconded by Mr. Caldwell and unanimously carried.

Mayor Christiansen advised members that Mrs. Horsey was on the way to recovery and should be able to attend the next meeting.

Mr. Anderson moved to send official speedy recovery and get well wishes to Mrs. Horsey from the Committee, seconded by Mr. Hosfelt and unanimously carried.

Mr. Caldwell moved for adjournment, seconded by Mr. Hosfelt and unanimously carried.

Meeting adjourned at 4:11p.m.

David L. Anderson
Chairman

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