PARKS, RECREATION, AND COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

The Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Committee Meeting was held on February 10, 2014, at 3:30 p.m. with Chairman Dixon presiding. Members present were Mr. Hutchison, Mr. Perza (arrived at 3:33 p.m.), Mr. Caldwell, and Mrs. Horsey (arrived at 3:33 p.m.).

AGENDA ADDITIONS/DELETIONS

Mr. Hutchison moved for approval of the agenda as presented, seconded by Mr. Caldwell and unanimously carried.

UPDATE - Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program

Mrs. Tracey Harvey, Planner I, reviewed the Update of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, including the status of FY-2013 CDBG Projects - Monthly Statistics for January 2014. In addition, members were provided an update on the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP). She noted that the application deadline for the FY-2014 grant applications was February 10, 2014 and that staff would be submitting recommendations to the Committee during their March meeting. She reminded members that this would be the last year for the current program's multi-year grants since the new five (5) year consolidated plan will be implemented in FY-2015.

Referring to the NSP, Mrs. Harvey stated that the eleventh, and last, property will be sold in March 2014, which will result in the completion of the Program.

No further action was taken by the Committee.

Update - Recreation Needs Assessment

During the Committee meeting of January 13, 2014, members considered a Recreational Needs Assessment and recommended authorizing the City's Planning Department, beginning February 1, 2014, to perform a recreational needs assessment for the City of Dover, utilizing City staff to conduct workshops and other similar outreach efforts across the City to inventory park infrastructure and develop the needs of all of the City parks for future use. The objective would be to gather the necessary information from the public, study it, and deliver a needs assessment report to the Committee by December 1, 2014. For clarification, Mr. Perza stated that this motion was unrelated to the Dover Park building and that the purpose of the assessment would be to gather information from the public to determine where resources relating to the future use of all City parks should be invested. He indicated that he planned to draft a separate motion and place this matter on the Committee's February agenda in an attempt to resolve this matter.

Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Director of Planning and Community Development, advised members that background meetings and data gathering had begun to develop a Recreation Needs Assessment for the City of Dover, which would include a review of the City's outdoor recreation inventory and sampling data that the State of Delaware Department of Parks and Recreation gathered for their state-wide outdoor recreation plan, which is a planning document produced every five (5) years. She stated that staff intended to build on the current plan already developed by the State to be more specific to Dover's parks. Mrs. Townshend explained that staff would conduct a survey and schedule workshops in various locations throughout the City in late March.

In response to Mr. Hutchison, Mrs. Townshend stated that staff will consider parks and recreation provided by the County and reach out to groups such as churches, the YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, Delaware Senior Olympics, Delaware Special Olympics, Wesley College, etc. She stated that the participants in the related informal meetings of the central Delaware recreation working group consist of representatives of recreation providers. She advised members that this group is scheduled to meet later in the week and will be discussing the recreation needs assessment and how they can assist the City in notifying those interested so that they may provide input. She noted that the City works closely with the Capital School District and, although they have not attended any of the meetings, it was staff's desire for this partnership to be used to gather information as well. With regard to the age groups being considered in the assessment, Mrs. Townshend stated that consideration will be given to providing various activities and programs to a wide range of ages.

Responding to Mr. Hutchison, Mrs. Townshend reminded members that members requested that staff provide a report back to the Committee on the Recreation Needs Assessment by December 2014.

Mrs. Townshend introduced Mr. Bill Cook, Planner I, who began employment with the City on February 10, 2014 and will be working on the project and Mr. Wayne Voshell, Recreation Director, who will serve as the lead on this project.

No further action was taken by the Committee.

Future Use of Dover Park Recreation Center

During the Committee meeting of November 12, 2013, members considered the future use of the Dover Park Recreation Center and recommended demolishing the Dover Park Recreation Center and that the City Manager be authorized to earmark the balance of the construction/demolition project up to $80,000 for future capital improvements, in the City's future budgets, to Dover Park after a needs assessment is accomplished (see previously discussed agenda item). The Committee's recommendation was approved by City Council during their Regular Meeting of November 25, 2013. On November 26, 2013, the City Clerk's Office received a memorandum from Mayor Carey stating that he wished to veto the demolition of the Recreation Center at Dover Park. Mayor Carey's memorandum stated his belief that there should be a plan to proceed, including a timeline, to determine the future use at the Dover Park off of Whiteoak Road. He requested that Committee members consider some form of action to move forward at their meeting scheduled for January 13, 2014.

Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Director of Planning and Community Development, provided members with copies of photos taken earlier in the day depicting the current condition of the recreation building ***(Attachment #1)***. She reminded members that staff had not been authorized to move forward with the demolition of the building, nor had resources been made available for making any improvements to the building. She noted that the photos reflected deteriorating roofing material, mold caused by water damage to the interior and exterior, damage to the HVAC system (which had been stripped), deterioration of wood, etc. Although she understood the concerns that there were no

immediate plans to replace the building, she noted that no funds had been allocated to bring the current building up to any reasonable standard. Since there was no longer a functioning HVAC system, she stated that the previous estimates for repairs did not account for the need for an entirely new HVAC system.

Mrs. Townshend advised members that the Recreation Needs Assessment will include a review of the needs and the necessary capital investments across the City, which would include the Dover Park Recreation Center. She noted that there had been previous comments indicating that since the City had not maintained this facility, opportunities had not been provided for recreation on the east side of Dover. She explained that for the past 19 years, the City's only after school program has been held on the east side of the City; therefore, she assured members that there had been active programming held in this area. In addition to the after school program, athletic leagues had used outside facilities on the east side. Although she felt that the City may wish to consider providing an indoor facility on the east side of Dover, the current building was continuing to deteriorate to the point where repairing it was becoming less and less of an option.

Responding to Mr. Perza regarding safety issues, Mrs. Townshend stated that if the building remained in its current condition, there may be safety and hazard concerns for the City. She explained that, as she and Police Chief James Hosfelt had previously stated, vacant buildings in a state of disrepair are a safety problem and attract nuisances and vandalism, etc. She explained that there were safety issues if the building were not invested in or demolished.

Mr. Dixon noted that there had been criminal activity occurring at the building, citing the recent stolen parts from the HVAC system, and that the longer the City waits to take action, the more cost will be involved and the situation would worsen. He urged members to make a determination as to what action should be taken and then to consider what programs should be offered.

Mr. Reuben Salters, former City Council Representative, 109 Bertrand Drive, questioned the location of the after school program provided by the City. Responding, Mrs. Townshend stated that the program is offered at the Towne Point Elementary School. Mr. Salters stated that the school is located approximately one (1) mile from the Dover Park and that providing one (1) after school program does not fit the criteria for providing recreation to children who reside on the east side of the City. He understood the safety concerns, the condition of the building, and that the structure was continuously deteriorating; however, he reiterated that the front part of the building was sound. He suggested that by performing minor repairs to that section of the building, the City could provide a temporary recreation facility for the area at minimal cost. He felt that the City should concentrate on providing activities and programs for the youth rather than on the demolition of the building.

Mr. Salters stated that the Inner City Cultural League had been providing recreation activities at Manchester for the past three (3) months (Tuesday evenings) and that the youth and their parents are desperate for activities. He felt that making use of a part of the building would allow for indoor activities and programs at this time, since any final action on this matter will not occur for over a year. He encouraged members to provide renovations to the front part of the building, install a temporary heating and A/C system, and move forward with providing activities to the youth who reside on the east side of town.

Ms. Gail Tolbert, 1001 White Oak Road, advised members that in the past her grandson had visited from New Jersey and during three (3) summers she paid $60 to allow him to participate in the summer camp at the Dover Park. When she asked him what types of activities were offered, he indicated that they simply "played" outside, unless the weather would not permit, then the children would be allowed in the building. She explained that no activities, such as movies, games, etc. were offered and that the children were bored. Ms. Tolbert suggested that if a recreation facility were to be provided for activities, the City should have employees who understand what types of activities should be provided for children of all ages. She advised members that she, along with other parents in the area, visited the Center and that none of them had been asked to serve on a committee to consider the recreation needs in the area. She suggested that members "think outside the box" and challenge themselves and neighbors to develop a vision for the area. Ms. Tolbert stated that she went to residents in areas such as Manchester, Baytree, and White Oak and asked residents what their needs were for programs if the building remained open and stated that she had related petitions. She suggested that the City allow residents in the area to become involved with the future of the Center and offered to provide assistance in this way.

Ms. Dee Anderson-Blackman, 7 Starboard Court, indicated that there were aesthetic issues involving the building that needed to be addressed to attract people to the area, as well as safety concerns, noting that activities were held in the building for groups of women who felt unsafe. Not knowing the costs involved to refurbish and upgrade the building, she suggested that steps such as landscaping, trimming shrubs, installation of a gate, etc. could be taken at this time to address some of the aesthetic and safety concerns. She felt that the City should concentrate its efforts on the east side of town, acknowledging the success of its efforts on the west side of town with Schutte Park. She suggested that action be taken now to make the Dover Park area more attractive and that the police make themselves more visible so that people will know that there is a new perception of the area.

Mr. George Kinser, 129 Nixon Lane, stated that his property abuts the Dover Park and he felt that the City may have the "cart before the horse," explaining that it did not matter what was torn down or built, because he felt that it will be in the same state of repair as the building is today since the City does not maintain the property. He stated that the park was in deplorable condition and that the worst tenant ever to utilize the facility was the YMCA during the previous summer, which brought "garbage and filth." Mr. Kinser advised members that as he walks his dogs through the park several times each day, he picks up garbage and cleans up limbs and damaged trees, and closes the gate at sunset every night and opens it at sunrise every morning. He also takes the dumpsters out to the roadside to be collected when they are full and then puts them back afterwards since the park personnel are not doing their jobs. He explained that no matter what the City decides to do, it will be in total disrepair if it is not maintained. Mr. Kinser stated that after Hurricane Sandy, he removed three (3) oak trees that were damaged and that the City had marked 15 trees with an "X" to be taken down since they are dead. He stated that no action was taken to remove these trees and that the City returned this past fall, marked these trees again, and still no action had been taken. He stated that tree limbs are falling constantly. Mr. Kinser advised members that he had been cleaning the storm drains in the park for 30 years and that he had recently contacted the City when there was flooding due to storm drains not being maintained and was advised that the City was not even aware that there were storm drains in the park.

Mr. Kinser stated that there were formerly park benches throughout the park and steel barbecue pits for every park bench. Now some park benches are missing and no barbecue pits remain in the park. The water faucets throughout the park are no longer operational. He reiterated that the City is taking no action to maintain the Dover Park and suggested that prior to considering building new structures, consideration should be given to budgeting and providing staff for maintenance of the Dover Park. Mr. Kinser noted that, currently, there were holes in the fencing and that the leaves had not yet been raked. Although the City does plow the sidewalks around the building after a snowfall, City staff does not pick up the trash, rake the leaves, remove limbs, repair holes in fences, etc.

Referring to the ball diamond, Mr. Kinser noted that in years past, several baseball/softball games were held every day and, most recently, there were maybe four (4) games held. He stated that a nice, large, swing set had been located at the entrance of the park for 30 years; however, it was removed during the past summer and nothing was put in its place. Mr. Kinser also indicated that several pole lights were not in operation and questioned why, if the park closes at sundown, there would be a need for the lights. However, he stated that basketball courts were being used every day, from sun-up to sundown, and that if there was adequate lighting, perhaps the children could continue to use the basketball courts after hours.

Mr. Kinser advised members that there was no longer any police presence at the Dover Park and that a blacktop section of the roadway had been closed from inside the park to Nixon Lane due to the drinking, shootings, rapes, stabbings, and murders that had occurred in the area. He stated that illegal activities, such as drugs, prostitution, homosexual sexual activities, etc., remained. As a result, he understood the safety concerns regarding the Dover Park and recalled machine gun fights several years ago and other shootings that had occurred at the Park. He reminded members that this was once a vibrant park utilized by many. He urged members to consider their priorities and provide maintenance for whatever action is decided.

Mr. Roy Sudler, Jr., 353 Rita Wilma Drive, stated that he serves as Chairman of the Dover Human Relations Commission (DHRC), a member of the Social Action Commission (SAC) Community Task Force of Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church, and was a Fourth District constituent. He advised members that "you can take the person out of the ghetto but you can't take the ghetto out of the person." He suggested that there was a need to change the mindset and way of approaching this matter to provide a long-term result and solution to benefit all. Mr. Sudler inquired if staff had thought about reaching out to churches in regard to determining recreational needs.

Responding to Mr. Sudler, Mrs. Townshend stated that staff would begin discussing outreach once a recommendation is provided by the Committee and assured him that Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church, as well as others, would be contacted.

Mr. Sudler reminded members that subsequent to the Committee's meeting held on January 13, 2014, he provided members with the results of a survey entitled "Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church's Social Action Commission's Community Survey of Dover's Recreational Park Programs and Facility Assessment" and questioned if this information had been reviewed by staff. Responding, Mrs. Townshend stated that this information had been included with the data being collected to be further reviewed. Mr. Sudler explained that the survey was gathered from the

community on the east side of Dover and that over 350 surveys were provided. He felt that the people must be heard in order to meet the needs of that community. Since the future use of the Dover Park Recreation Center was a matter of great concern, he suggested that the City wait for Councilman Anderson to return to allow for full representation in the voting regarding this matter. *[City Clerk's Office Note: Councilman David Anderson is currently serving in Afghanistan as a member of the Delaware National Guard.]* As a 4th District constituent, Mr. Sudler felt that representation on City Council was unfair since the 4th District had only one (1) voting member serving on Council at this time and all other districts had two (2) votes. He reiterated that the Social Action Commission was very much interested in playing a significant role in assisting the City in this process to ensure that the east side "voice" will be heard.

In response to the comments regarding Council representation, Mr. Hutchison indicated that although he was elected for the 1st District, his role as a member of Council is to represent the entire City and that he, along with all other members of Council, had just as much responsibility to consider the needs of the residents located on the east side of Dover.

Mrs. Townshend clarified that there had been no significant review of any of the data that had been received, including the State's survey. However, regarding the surveys provided by Mr. Sudler, she noted that the surveys were not just from residents of the east side of Dover, explaining that several had a 19904 zip code and others had residences listed in other municipalities, such as Magnolia, Felton, and Newark. Therefore, she explained that it will be clearly understood where the information was gathered for any data to be used, including that collected from those residents within a certain radius of the Dover Park. Responding, Mr. Sudler requested that staff review the material to determine the exact number of responses from County residence and those who reside within the immediate area, explaining that the survey began in Manchester Square, Town Point, Mapleton, etc.

Ms. Gail Tolbert assured members that the building could be used by the residents of the area every day and suggested that the facility be community based, including its maintenance. She suggested that those in the community could be involved in cleaning and raking leaves in the Dover Park. She urged members to allow for the community to be made a part of whatever action is decided.

Mr. Perza explained that the City was attempting to determine how to best use the City's resources to improve the Dover Park. He stated that the ideas shared during the meeting were exactly what members were looking for before committing to spending any money. He reiterated that there should be no preconceived notions regarding the expenditure of funds at Dover Park. The Committee was attempting to make a decision whether money should be set aside and if the community wanted to invest in the Dover Park with those resources. He stated that a building may not be necessary, explaining that as a youngster growing up on the south side of town, there was no community building; however, there were parks for children to play baseball, basketball, etc. and that the City provided maintenance for these parks, including backstops, grass cutting, etc.

Mr. Perza assured everyone that the City will do whatever the community asks and that there would be no objections to the community becoming involved in cleaning up the park. If the community needed help with this, he felt confident that any member of Council could be contacted for assistance.

Mr. Perza reminded members that a lot of information had been provided to them in order to make a decision regarding this matter. Based on the conclusions made by the community, he stated that the City was not prepared to maintain the building in its current form, nor was it willing to invest the resources necessary to repair the building. He explained that if the building were repaired, upgraded, and all environmental issues resolved, there would still be another problem since the building was not suitable for modern use in accordance with the statistical analysis maintained by the Parks Department, or with what had been relayed by that community. He anticipated massive attendance when needs assessment meetings are held and participation providing input; this would allow for the City to respond to the energy provided by the citizens in the community and would benefit senior citizens, middle-aged residents, and children. He stressed the need to decide what action should be taken with regard to the building, and then what to do once the building is gone, whether it be replacing the building, installing a swimming pool or a soccer field, installing lights, bathrooms, fencing, flowers, and committing resources to make sure there is full-time staffing if this is the desire of the community.

Mr. Perza moved to recommend the following: 1) authorize the City Manager to execute necessary contracts to demolish the former Dover Park Building at White Oak Park; 2) direct that an earmark of $80,000 be placed into the 2014-15 draft budget for capital improvements to White Oak Park, with the specific allocation and expenditure timetable of the said earmarked funds to be determined by the 2014 Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Study; and 3) authorize placement of temporary toilet facilities at White Oak Park effective immediately. The motion was seconded by Mr. Hutchison.

Responding to Mr. Salters regarding consideration of modifying the building at Dover Park, Mr. Perza explained that there had been no application at any time to modify the building; the analysis had been whether to restore the building. He explained that several meetings were held during the past six (6) to seven (7) months, including a meeting held at the Dover Park Recreation Center, reviewing the building and reports submitted by engineers and environmental remediation professionals, and discussion with members of the public who had an interest in the building and statistical uses of the building. The Committee and Council previously made a decision on what to do with the information and the application before the Committee was to consider removing or restoring the building. Mr. Perza noted that there had been no further ideas brought before the Committee during any of those meetings or this evening that would give members a reason to consider taking any other action for the use of the building. He assured members that all decisions regarding this matter had been made in open meetings held by the Committee and City Council.

In response to Mr. Dixon regarding the need for community involvement, Mr. Perza stressed the need for input to come from the community and felt that if the community did not provide the City with direction, the City should not take any further action.

On a call for the question by Mr. Hutchison, the motion to recommend the following: 1) authorize the City Manager to execute necessary contracts to demolish the former Dover Park Building at White Oak Park; 2) direct that an earmark of $80,000 be placed into the 2014-15 draft budget for capital improvements to White Oak Park, with the specific allocation

and expenditure timetable of the said earmarked funds to be determined by the 2014 Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Study; and 3) authorize placement of temporary toilet facilities at White Oak Park effective immediately, was unanimously carried.

Mr. Hutchison moved for adjournment, seconded by Mr. Perza and unanimously carried.

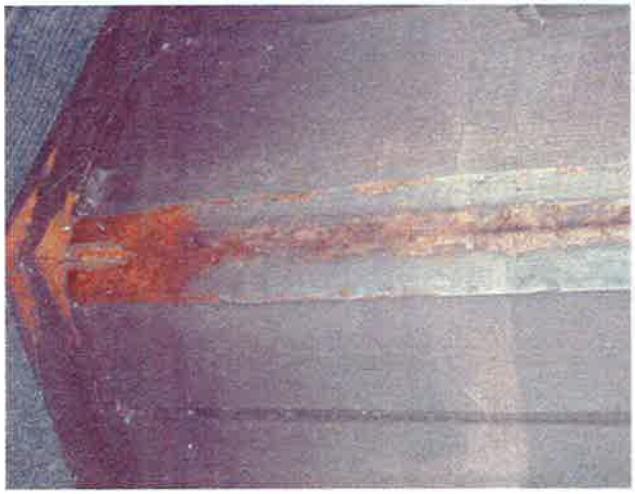
Meeting adjourned at 4:32 p.m.

Wallace R. Dixon
Chairman

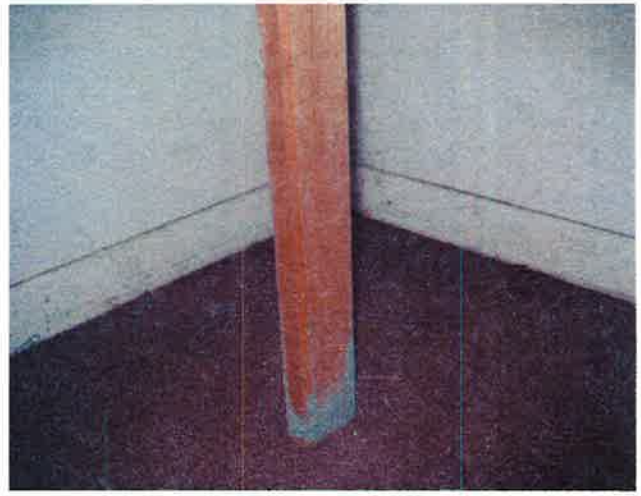
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Attachment
Attachment #1 - Photos of Dover Park Recreation Center





ATTACHMENT #1
PR&CE Committee Meeting of 2/10/2014











