

HOUSING TASK FORCE MEETING

TUESDAY – OCTOBER 28, 2008 – 6:00 PM

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Hach at 6:01 PM. The City of Painesville Housing Task Force Meeting convened in a meeting in Courtroom #1, with the following in attendance: Andrew Flock, Chair Paul Hach, Richard Tibbits, Father Vellenga, Assistant City Manager Doug Lewis, and City Planner Russ Schaedlich with guests Police Chief Gary Smith and Sgt. Dan Waterman. David Komjati, Abby Dela Motte and City Manager Rita McMahon were absent.

Motion by Mr. Tibbits, seconded by Mr. Flock to approve the minutes of the Tuesday, September 30, 2008 Housing Task Force Meeting. By voice vote, all members answered “yes”. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Mr. Hach stated he would allow public comments during the meetings up to two minutes per resident on the topic of their choice. There was no public comment.

Mr. Hach moved on to the next item on the agenda, Crime Free Rental Housing Program, and introduced Police Chief Gary Smith and Sgt. Dan Waterman. Chief Smith explained Sgt. Waterman recently went in Chicago for training on this issue.

Sgt. Waterman stated that he had reviewed the minutes from the last meeting and could provide some clarification for the members. He stated Crime Free Multi Housing did not cover one, two and three-family units. The new Crime Free Rental Housing Program will. Until this program became available, there were no background checks. The new program will allow for these checks. The required training will be for non-professional managers and it will train them how to run background checks. Sgt. Waterman explained that, initially, property owners will not be forced to participate in the program. The Painesville Police Department is proposing that it be voluntary to provide for gradual training.

Mr. Flock asked what the incentive would be for smaller rental property owners to voluntarily want to participate in the program?

Sgt. Waterman replied that he felt most would because they do not know how to evict bad tenants. If they do not know how to evict, it impacts their income. Many property owners don't have leases and they aren't receiving rent. Basically, there is lack of knowledge in dealing with problem tenants.

Mr. Flock said it helped with his neighbor's across the street.

Sgt. Waterman explained there are 715 individual rental housing owners in the City of Painesville. This information was gathered through the refuse collection company and obtained through Public Service.

Mr. Flock asked if we cross referenced this information with utility bills?

Mr. Lewis said he was not sure if it had been cross referenced and we could look into it.

Mr. Tibbits stated that when he checked back with utilities when he had tenants that had left, and he found they left their deposit. There was no forwarding address on where to send it. With the new program, the tenant and owner are on the registration.

Sgt. Waterman stated that with 715 new owners that could potentially participate in the program, changes will be required. The Crime Free Rental Housing Program could take years to train the all these property owners. The overall purpose is to abate the problem, and not to charge the owners (landlords) with violations.

Mr. Flock asked if there will be a budget impact?

Sgt. Waterman stated yes; the impact would be the hire of an additional Community Service Officer, especially for the evenings.

Mr. Tibbits asked Chief Smith if there was any grant monies available?

Chief Smith replied he is not sure, many of these programs have been cut back.

Mr. Lewis stated a Community Service Officer has been recommended in next year's budget. The position was budgeted in 2008 and was not filled.

Mr. Flock stated he would like to see any grants that may be available. He would prefer that the position be funded through grants given the budget situation.

Chief Smith again stated grant funds have dwindled, particularly at the federal level.

Sgt. Waterman explained that the Crime Free Multi and Rental Housing Programs do include domestic violence. Eviction will not be possible with domestic violence, unless the tenant is the perpetrator and the victim does not live there. This is the only exclusion allowed in the program. To evict would only punish the victim more if they lived at the same address.

Mr. Tibbits asked about people with multiple offenses?

Sgt. Waterman stated that if there are numerous other offenses such as for disturbing the peace, those can be enforced. Continual problems won't be allowed to bring the housing complex down.

Mr. Tibbits asked about notification and what is being done?

Sgt. Waterman stated the City will not come down heavy and will wait to see if the property owner is making a good faith effort. The goal is to work with management and landlords.

Mr. Flock asked if there will be signs posted on the property that it is participating in the Crime Free Rental Housing Program? If done for single family, it could show that it is a safe place to live.

Sgt. Waterman stated this is not yet done for single-family. Council may see it as too much signage.

Mr. Tibbits explained that Crime Free Housing Program participation is stated in his lease and they know they will be out if problems occur.

Sgt. Waterman stated that since the program began they have rooted out long-term criminal activity.

Sgt. Waterman then distributed the last handout discussing free background checks via the internet.

Mr. Flock asked what percentage of rental property owners live in the City?

Sgt. Waterman estimates about 48%.

Mr. Lewis stated he could get the information from the refuse collection rolls.

Mr. Tibbits stated you will find that although many are not in the City, a majority are from nearby communities.

Sgt. Waterman stated the City does have strong and good owners that are not City residents. The program has moved out many troublemakers out of the larger complexes and people may find they are going to the smaller residential rentals.

Chief Smith stated in October, Officer Cueni and Officer Alan Nagy will be going to Schaumburg, Illinois Police Department, which has a nationally recognized Crime Free Housing Program. They have trained 3,000 owners.

Mr. Flock asked how big is Schaumburg?

Sgt. Waterman replied the population is 70,000.

Mr. Flock asked how the City funds their Crime Free Multi-Housing Program?

Sgt. Waterman stated there is a business license fee for those multi-housing owners with a fee starting at \$295.00 and up depending on the number of units. Sgt. Waterman stated that we recently met with City Manager McMahon and the Police Department suggests a more reasonable fee schedule for the City of Painesville : 1-3 units is \$10; 4-10 units is \$15; over 11-49 is \$20; and 50+ is \$75.

Mr. Flock asked why the fees are so high in Schaumburg?

Sgt. Waterman stated that the fee for Section 8 starts at \$1,300 per unit. There are many units to monitor and Schaumburg hired seven (7) additional officers plus inspectors to oversee the program.

Sgt. Waterman stated the idea is to streamline the program. The City would use fees to partially fund the program given the fees suggested by Sgt. Waterman. They do not feel it is fair to charge individual owners exorbitant amounts and that is why the fee structure is being proposed.

Mr. Hach asked if there were representatives from any other cities in Ohio at the training in Schaumburg?

Sgt. Waterman replied Parma and Ashtabula have explored it, but did not pursue due to funding.

Mr. Flock asked if drug money could be used for the Crime Free Housing Program?

Chief Smith replied no. Drug money can be used for training, equipment or other anti-drug activities, not salaries.

Sgt. Waterman provided a handout and explained that the eviction stated the suggested rates are a recommendation. It will be up to the Committee and Council to determine.

Mr. Hach inquired if Fairport charged for their housing inspection program.

Sgt. Waterman was not sure. They do not have a housing inspection program.

Mr. Tibbits stated this program offers a better way to take ownership of the property. Judge Cicconetti has explained that the landlords need to work together. The court evicts the same people over and over again. We should not allow these people to move from unit to unit to unit.

Sgt. Waterman replied the big problem is that single-property owners do not know how to evict or they file the eviction papers incorrectly. These landlords need to have the eviction process explained to them. He also explained that there is a new handout explaining the eviction process.

Mr. Flock stated it is a good idea to give people this information before they become landlords. They should be certified first. The business license would require them to participate in the training.

Chief Smith and Sgt. Waterman agreed and stated that rental property owners usually do not know what they are getting themselves into.

Mr. Lewis stated the Police Department is recommending that the program be voluntary to start. Only those who volunteer for the program will be trained. If the program is forced on owners, it will cause some problems.

Mr. Flock stated that if the rental property owners see the economic benefit they will join the program.

Mr. Tibbits stated there are situations where a mother dies and the son decides to become a landlord. They do not have a clue what to do to become a good landlord.

Sgt. Waterman stated Officers Cueni and Nagy should join NOAH for the resources offered.

Mr. Tibbits stated they go over leases, screening, and other training that benefits a landlord.

Sgt. Waterman stated that all help is welcome. He stated that he is also a landlord.

Mr. Hach asked if the CSO Officer is budgeted next year, how soon will they be able to begin?

Sgt. Waterman stated the possibility is for January 1, 2009 if it is approved. He said they use safety socials for the Multi-Housing Program, which the management sponsors, and officers have provided information on the program. However, with the vast number of owners, they would not be utilizing socials. There is not enough manpower and typically they have found that only the nice individuals attend.

Mr. Flock asked if it would be possible to work with the school to create a program and show it on television for perspective landlords?

Sgt. Waterman stated that could be possible, however it would not leave room for questions, and there are usually many. Most small landlords do not know the terminology and it could be confusing. Most do not even have signed leases in place with their tenants. A program for landlords would have to focus on just the basics.

Mr. Tibbits stated he gets many questions about evictions and the landlord does not know what to do. He can spend 15-20 minutes on a single call.

Father Vallenga asked if the Crime Free Housing Program was a trademarked name? He expressed concern that the name provides a negative overtone given that it implies that there has to be crime to participate.

Sgt. Waterman replied that it is a trademarked.

Mr. Hach asked for any other questions, and there being none, moved on to the next item on the agenda, the Crime Free Housing Program.

Sgt. Waterman stated the concern is the program is only once per year. If the program is implemented in January, it would require one class per week until all property owners/landlords are trained. It was recommended that there could be no more than 15 people per class. There is an annual refresher course for Multi-Housing on new items. The training would not be mandatory and would have to be held in the evenings to accommodate property owners. A basic packet of information is provided and a video on the biggest mistakes is shown. It is an 8 hour training class and would have to be broken down into two sessions.

Mr. Flock asked if Schaumburg had good results?

Officer Waterman replied he did have good results. Crime was reduced in many places.

Mr. Flock asked about any recommendations? Should it be more structured? What would be the cost and wording of the program?

Mr. Tibbits and Father Vallenga asked about the program from the budget standpoint.

Officer Waterman stated if the City moves forward on this, then there is a possibility of applying for grants to keep costs down. There may be some grants online; however there are no guarantees given that grant funding has dwindled. He explained that CSO's cost less than an officer, but they are hard to hire. They could also be used at community events. There is a question of if we can compare cost savings.

Sgt. Waterman explained that there is a cost savings and it is a result of having to respond to less calls at the locations with the Crime Free Multi-Housing Program.

Mr. Flock asked if the CSO was budgeted and there was a line item in the budget book. Chief Smith responded yes.

Mr. Hach moved on to the Nuisance Ordinance.

Mr. Tibbits asked if past experiences will be used or any past crimes?

Chief Smith replied that past crimes will be used mainly to gain compliance, but that we will have to base it on new violations after the ordinance is approved by City Council.

Mr. Flock asked if a partnership could be made with Lake Erie College to teach the landlords. He asked if it might be possible to make a deal with them to provide a discount on electric.

Mr. Lewis stated the idea is to be more consistent in addressing nuisance properties. He explained that felonies were removed because the Painesville Police Department cites under the Ohio Revised Code.

Sgt. Waterman stated that the Police Department will do their best with regards to enforcement of the Nuisance Ordinance.

Mr. Tibbits stated he does have experience with this and knows that it takes a long time to get people out of a property because of drugs.

The next Housing Task Force Meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, November 25, 2008 at 6:00 PM in the Courtroom #1. The agenda will be posted on the City's web site.

Motion by Mr. Flock, seconded by Mr. Tibbits, that the meeting be adjourned. All members agreed. The meeting was adjourned at 7:34 PM.

Rita C. McMahon
City Manager

Paul Hach
Housing Task Force Chairperson