## MINUTES OF RAVENNA CITY COUNCIL COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE July 16, 2012

The Meeting of the Ravenna City Community & Economic Development Committee came to order at 5:00 P.M. Present were: Bruce Ribelin, Sharon Spencer, Jack Ferguson, Fred Berry, Amy Michael and Fran Ricciardi. Also attending the meeting were Finance Director, Kim Cecora, Todd Peetz representing Portage county Regional Planning and Nick Dudek of 328 North Prospect Street, Ravenna, Ohio.

Mr. Seman noted the first item on the agenda is Mr. Peetz talking about fair housing and the New Horizons Grant.

Mr. Peetz said the first thing he needs to talk about is fair housing. As part of the Community Development Block Grant program, they are required to do a certain number of fair housing training sessions. This is one of those training sessions. The city of Ravenna gets CDBG money so that training needs to be provided. The Portage County Commissioners contracted Portage Regional Planning to administer the Community Development Block Grant for Portage County. The cities of Aurora, Ravenna and Streetsboro contract with Regional Planning to administer the fair housing program. He continued on explaining the history and background of fair housing and gave a brief training session. They need to go to the local communities, work with their development code, the real estate agents, residents, landlords, elected officials to make sure they are current with the Ohio Revised Code and/or following practices that are consistent with fair housing requirements. As part of that the New Horizons Grant. By the city of Ravenna participating, they are eligible to pick up an additional \$5,000.00 in the grant. The county itself will get \$15,000.00 and then it looks like, hopefully, now include city of Streetsboro in this process. When they did the first ten, there was a lot of concern as to what they are trying to strive for. There isn't any requirement for the city do anything. They need to make communities aware if they are lacking certain requirements of the Ohio Revised Code. The only big thing that stood out when they reviewed other communities is that they didn't have reasonable accommodations. That is a new term. That means, as an example, there have been some cases where some people who are elderly and need a handicap ramp in front of their house but the house is already built to the front lot line. To build that ramp, it encroaches onto the setback of the front yard. They would have to get a variance to do that. Reasonable accommodations says that a handicap ramp is reasonable for a person to enter their home, their should be no fees to that and they should be permitted to be reasonably accommodated. The key word is reasonable. It's not meant to be unreasonable. It doesn't supersede the zoning code, it just has to allow for reasonable accommodations. It's a mild change but he doesn't believe it is in Ravenna's code because none of the ten communities they reviewed had it in their codes. They are asking for Ravenna's support to participate in joining with their next phase. The first phase, the State thought they did an excellent job. In fact they are going to have them do a statewide training on it in the near future and they're going to get an award. That's all very nice but he doesn't think their job is done just yet. They still want to work with the other communities and continue on. If they are willing to participate, what they are hoping to strive for, not necessarily have an official decision tonight, but to have it on the agenda for the August 6 regular Council meeting, supporting the new horizons grant going forward and joining in their application.

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Mr. Seman noted there is no cost involved.

Mr. Peetz said it's zero cost to the city. It doesn't detract from the other CBDG or the county's CBDG.

Mr. Seman said he doesn't know why they didn't participate in it last time.

Mr. Peetz said there was a concern that they were going to force something on to the city, which they aren't. The next thing they mentioned last time was that there were too many rentals already and they didn't want to create any changes to occur that would force more renters. That is not the purpose of this review.

Mr. Seman said in terms of the accommodations, how is that placed in zoning codes; where does it appear and if they have the right to file for an appeal and granted routinely by the zoning board, is that sufficient?

Mr. Peetz said that the state has recommended that it be a staff administrator's responsibility for a person to come to the city and ask for reasonable accommodations. If there is a gray area, then the staffers can punt it back to the zoning commission. The city currently administers its own zoning code. The idea was that because this is a handicapped person and is just trying to reasonably accommodate the residence the state strongly encourages no cost for that or a conditional use permit or a variance process, especially associated with a fee, to do this.

Mr. Seman asked how to get it removed when it's no longer needed.

Mr. Peetz said they have to make sure when they write it in their code, that when the person moves or no longer lives there and the reasonable accommodation is no longer required, they can ask for it to be removed. That's something that would be determined by the city; how they would like to see the reasonable accommodation go away.

Mr. Peetz noted there was a case in Ravenna where they weren't allowing children to live on the second floor because the children were making noise on the tenants below. That case didn't come through Portage County. The family actually went to the Akron Housing Authority because they were coming from Akron. The state called the landlord a couple of times and asked. The landlord said they couldn't rent to them because they have children. Then the federal government called and acted like they wanted to rent two different times and they were told they can't rent to them because they have children. That's when they came and acted against that landlord. It cost him \$60,000.00. That is why it's important to reach out to the landlords in the community and better educate them. Some of it seems pretty subtle.

Mr. Seman said Regional Planning has been administering the city's fair housing with the grants; have they run into any problems as they are doing that work?

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- Mr. Peetz said typically the kind of calls they get are where the Ravenna residents call is because their heater broke or there is a leak or something like that. They can usually get those resolved pretty quickly. Sometimes the landlord is dragging their feet and the tenant wants it resolved right away. They will get involved and in some cases, the landlord isn't going to fix something until the rent is paid and the renter is saying they're not going to pay the rent until it's fixed. They get into those kind of squabbles. They often get the prosecutor involved to get proper legal advice as to address that particular issue. The tenant has to continue paying the rent and then the onus is on the owner to provide them adequate facilities.
- Mr. Ricciardi said he's looking at a table that indicates 43% rental occupied housing units in Ravenna. He's heard the rentals were more around 70%.
- Mr. Peetz said that was a table from the state that they previously did. That's not actually Ravenna City; it's both. Ravenna City has 53% renters.
- Mr. Ricciardi said that the table states renter occupied housing units is 43% where the monthly cost is greater than 30% of the household income, it's 53.2%. The numbers he received from the administration is in the area of 70% renter occupied units in the community.
- Mr. Peetz said all he can tell him is that they got the information from the American Community Survey. They didn't acquire that information themselves.
- Mr. Seman said he thinks it's how they count. If it's the number of houses, the thinks they are going to find apartment complexes have a lot of people in them. The actual number of people might be 70% renters. The number of units is probably 53%.
- Mr. Ricciardi said this was 2005 to 2009. They are well beyond that at this stage of the game. He's not sure which number is accurate.
  - Mr. Peetz said the number is accurate based on the data they received.
- Mr. Ricciardi said he means current as to opposed to accurate. He's not sure which number is right. Obviously, this is not current information.
- Mr. Peetz said there is some good news. They do have the County Auditor's information that came to them where they can tell which is an owner occupied unit vs. a non-owner occupied unit for a more thorough study in the City of Ravenna. The study is not about creating more rental housing. The study is not to create and say rental housing is desirable. It's just saying this is the number of people currently renting.
- Mr. Ricciardi said he understands and is wondering how it's determined as to where to place these folks in terms of the various areas of Portage County.

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Mr. Peetz responded that's not what they are trying to do; to place people. They are just trying to offer fair housing to people the opportunity to go where they want to go as long as they can afford to go there. It's not trying to say you have to have X number of units here or X number of people who have certain incomes. That's not the purpose of the fair housing laws or of the study.

Mr. Ricciardi said he hears that but he is just wondering what the percentages are in different areas of the county in terms of folks who are low income or fair housing or somewhere along the way. At some point, there is an impact on a community, any community. If there is a disparity of how these things are spread around, there tends to be a negative impact at some point, either on the schools or on the housing market or in other areas. He is wondering how that is determined. Obviously, everybody sort of washes their hands. The man from PMHA basically said that they don't tell them where to go. They tell them to find a place and if they meet our criteria, they take care of it. That's not real helpful in terms of coming here and asking for support. It would be nice if they had more information on who is going where because he thinks there is an impact to the community and they have to look out for that as well.

Mr. Peetz reiterated that this is a fair market system. It's not like these are government subsidized houses they are talking about; people go where they can find livable housing. He can get that data. He can tell them how many owner occupied units there are vs. renter occupied units.

Mr. Ricciardi asked if Mr. Peetz can information as to how this low income housing is spread out throughout Portage County.

Mr. Peetz responded in the affirmative noting that's inconsistent with what the New Horizons grant is trying to do.

Mr. Ricciardi noted that may be but he is just asking if he can get that information.

Mr. Peetz responded in the affirmative. He said it's just data. It doesn't tell them how they get placed there or how they make those determination and if they are low income. He can't answer those questions.

Mr. Seman noted that if you read the headers, it talks about percent of renters occupied units where monthly cost is greater than 30%.

Mr. Peetz said why that is important is they are talking about fair housing and then they start talking about affordable housing. Housing that is greater than 30% of your rent or mortgage is considered not affordable. That's why that number is important because then you run into a situation is where the housing where you are living is not affordable.

Mr. Seman asked if the people that aren't counted are less than 30%.

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Mr. Peetz responded in the affirmative, people who are paying rent that is less than 30% of their mortgage or rent.

Mr. Seman said then there are people left out and it could change the percentages.

Mr. Peetz concurred stating they can go back to the County Auditor's information. This is from the American Community survey which is a sampling of individuals between the census periods. Even though the U. S. Census Bureau provides the information, it's not as complete as it could be. They can give the most accurate information they can find. He doesn't have a problem doing that.

Mr. Seman said he would like to thank Regional Planning for the work they do on the grants. He appreciates it. It's a difficult thing to administer and stay out of trouble and they've done a good job with it.

Mr. Peetz said that the purpose of the study is not to try to force anything but to analyze what they have and see if there is a way to do it better.

It was decided by those present that a tracking sheet would be submitted for Finance Committee approval.

Mr. Seman said the next item on the agenda is the Downtown Farmers' Market Manager contract. They are all aware that Sally Kelly resigned. They are looking at two contracts. One would be to a person who would run the day to day operations of the Farmers' Market. The other would be a person to put together something on a social network. He and Mr. Ribelin spent a good hour meeting with the mayor, Kerry Macomber and Mr. Cimino going over it and get it straight in their minds. In the terms of the grant and what's written for the grant, these positions are necessary in order to fulfill the grant. His feeling at the time was that they recommend these contracts. They have to have this in order and they do not want this grant to fall on its face. It's important to the community. He hopes eventually, it's tied in with the health advisory board work. The idea of it and location of it is to provide more nutritional food, making it available for the people in the area of town where it might be hard to come by. Of course, people come in from other places. Just from the information he has, they are set up to handle 21 vendors and there are now 21 vendors enlisted at this time. They are getting into the time of the year where they will be able to get a lot of the local fresh vegetables and products. This through fall is a good time to have that in operation. They have two years to get this successful. They are concerned with sustaining it. These two contracts would help to satisfy the needs of this grant.

Mr. Ribelin said he thinks the important thing is to make it self-sustainable and they're going to need sponsors in order to do that. The grant is for two years. They need to get this in place. He really believes that; and as quickly as possible.

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- Mr. Berry said it seems to him they did their part to go forward with the grant. How they spend those funds really, he thinks, is up to them.
- Mr. Seman said that part is up to them and who they hire is up to them. But the contracts have to be approved by Council. That's what they are doing, recommending the two contracts.
  - Mr. Berry asked if the salaries are in place.
- Mr. Seman said that those are still being negotiated. They will have the amounts before the meeting in August. He made it very clear Council was not telling them who to hire.
- Mr. Ricciardi said that he agrees they can't tell them to hire but they certainly can ask with reference to qualifications and what makes those people desirable to those positions so that they don't hear "lack of skill set" six months from now.

There being no further questions or comments, it was decided by those present that a tracking sheet would be submitted for Finance Committee approval.

- Mr. Seman said that the next item is a discussion of the Tax Incentive Review Compliance Reports.
- Mr. Cecora said each year they do a reiteration of the Tax Incentive Review Council's overview of those companies that were granted tax abatement to make sure they are in compliance with State standards in terms of jobs created as agreed. This is simply acceptance of the report.

There being no further questions or comments, it was decided by those present that a tracking sheet would be submitted for Finance Committee approval.

- Mr. Seman said the last item is the Brownfield Assessments and EPA application. This involves the two properties that currently belong to the county, the old County Engineer property and the former Unemployment building on West Main Street. Ravenna will need to request the brownfield assessment because the party that owns the property cannot request those assessments that they may have created the problem. They don't allow the creator of the problem to request an assessment.
- Mr. Finney said he thinks they are only good for six months. Therefore, they would be required to redo it.
- Mr. Seman said what they need is permission to move forward on these. As they know there are plans in the future where they would like to eventually put the Center of Hope in the former unemployment office. The other piece of property is a significant part of the plan for the Cleveland Road corridor that they are in the process of cleaning up at this time. Hopefully, they can get some businesses on that property when everything is the way it needs to be.

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- Mr. Ferguson said he got a call about that area and that piece of property. The gentleman alleged that there were so many toxins out there that probably four feet of that dirt and gravel will need to be removed and all new stuff go in. The figures he had were outlandish as far as costs.
  - Mr. Seman said they want to know this before taking ownership of the property.
  - Mr. Finney asked if the person is willing to identify himself.
- Mr. Fergusons said it was Bill Davis. He rented part of that property at one time. How he came up with this information, he doesn't know.
  - Mr. Seman noted that is why they want the assessment.

There being no further questions or comments, it was decided by those present that a tracking sheet would be submitted for Finance Committee approval.

- Mr. Finney said they are in kind of a Phase III of the White Rubber project. The first was the asbestos, environmental issues. The second was demolition. The third is remediating soil that is expected to be contaminated. At one point, he heard about a truckload worth of dirt. They need to authorization to advertise for this portion of the project. They are going to authorize the mayor to enter into a contract eventually.
  - Mr. Seman asked if this is an additional expense not covered under the grant.
- Mr. Finney said that it's covered under the grant but for whatever reason, they area being done as three separate projects. He doesn't have the answer as to why.
- Mr. Seman said he doesn't think there is a problem in taking care of it. It's got to be taken care of but let's find out who is responsible for that portion of the project.
  - Mr. Finney said he would have an answer by Finance Committee.

There being no further questions or comments, it was decided by those present that a tracking sheet would be submitted for Finance Committee approval.

There being no further business before the Committee, the meeting adjourned at 5:40 P.M	
Clerk of Council	Frank Seman, Chairman Community & Economic Development Committee
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