

Canton, Georgia

*110 Academy Street
Canton, Georgia 30114*



Minutes - Final - Final

Thursday, March 25, 2021

1:00 PM

Blight/Code Compliance Committee

Public Call In: 1-508-556-4397 PIN: 268 356 693#

City Council

1. Call to Order*Members Present:*

*Councilmember Shawn Tolan
Mayor Pro Tempore JoEllen Wilson
Councilmember Nick Estes
City Manager Billy Peppers
Assistant City Manager Nathan Ingram
City Attorney Bobby Dyer
Code Compliance Manager Merrick McClure
City Clerk, Annie Fortner*

2. Consideration to Approve Agenda

Councilmember Tolan asked for any amendments to the agenda. No amendments were made.

3. Consideration to Approve Minutes - March 10, 2021**A. Blight/Code Compliance Committee Draft Minutes - March 10, 2021 - Attachment 3A**

Attachments: [Minutes - Blight-Code Compliance Committee - March 10, 2021](#)

Mr. Tolan asked is there were any changes to the minutes. No changes were made.

4. Brief recap of discussions to date

Councilmember Tolan gave an overview of the last meeting and informed a good understanding of the difference between blight and code enforcement was determined. Mr. Tolan informed that he had spoke with Mr. Dyer concerning the agenda and his research of a potential funding program.

5. Discussion of a potential funding program for those that would like to make improvements but need financial support

Mr. Dyer stated that he along with Mr. Peppers, Mr. Patton and Mr. Ingram researched other cities and how they were handling blighted properties. He further stated that no one has any other great ideas than what Canton has discussed. Chapel Hill, NC and Savannah has housing trust fund programs and many other cities do also however, some may use the funds to rehabilitate properties as much as they do for creating new affordable housing units. One of the issues of an unfit building process is, will the City be willing to spend the money needed. Will it be budgeted or a source of funding and will move forward without needing to hold meetings for Council approval. The City will need to tailor a program for unfit buildings and find grants or loans that are available to someone who cannot afford the repairs. HUD is offering funds for this to keep up appearances so that neighborhoods do not become blighted.

Councilmember Tolan informed that the Committee has discussed prior two potential housing funds. Mr. Dyer informed that the City could set up only one fund and have different programs being funded from it. Mr. Dyer further informed that the development ordinance can be set up as voluntary instead of mandatory for developers, if they wanted to be in the program to receive the incentives the City offered, contributing money, or reserving affordable units. Some cities increase the percentage in density for incentives for reserving a portion for affordable units and others reduce setbacks, parking requirements or no sidewalks.

Mr. Peppers stated that developers can apply with DCA (Department of Community Affairs) for low-income housing tax credits and feels the City should not allow incentives to someone that is building something that needs a federal threshold. The properties that the City has that is already in some part of code compliance or the blight process, there needs to be way to put a demand on the landlords to maintain the property or provide an opportunity for individuals to become homeowners. This could solve problems of housing affordability and blight.

Mr. Tolan questioned the timing of the mechanism to establish a housing fund within the City budget. Mr. Dyer stated if given the direction to move forward by Council, an ordinance could be written to establish the fund. Mr. Tolan asked where would the funding come from? Mr. Peppers informed that existing funding sources could be considered during the budget process or new sources such as increases in fees and taxes and donations as well. Mr. Ingram asked how much of a budget does the Committee feel is needed. Mr. Tolan stated just enough to establish a fund to solve the blight issues.

Mr. Dyer stated that larger cities receive federal funds directly. We must find a scale that fits for Canton because funding is difficult. Councilmember Tolan asked Councilmember Estes if he had any comments. Mr. Estes stated that he feels the City has a good strategy and approach to begin. Councilmember Wilson stated that she agrees with following up with landlords for them to get involved with these areas. Mr. Peppers informed that to have control with rental properties, the City needs to require that all utilities be in the landlord's name. The City loses revenue from final bills of tenants because we have no control but would if the property owner were responsible. Councilmember Tolan informed this could be added to an agenda as a Council Introduced Item to discuss. Mr. Ingram informed that was a discussion at the retreat and it would require a couple of actions from Council due to an ordinance change, fee structure change and management policies.

Councilmember Wilson stated that the City should pursue blighted properties that are rentals. Mr. Peppers stated that if the City had a fund then it could be used to assist owner occupied units for improvement or for code compliance. Mr. Dyer stated that a housing fund could be used to demolish or repair but, a process is needed to first decide if the house is inhabitable and what does the City do from that point. A Council action is needed to set up an account for funding. Councilmember Tolan stated that the Committee does not have a problem bringing an action item before Council, the challenge is where does the funding come from. Mr. Peppers stated that he feels instead of money, the question is what does the City want to target the money at? Discussions have included rental assistance, incentives, tearing down homes and grants or loans to help repair properties. If staff can be given one of these items as a starting point, then they can begin. If Council wants all these items funded that has been

discussed, then that is a larger budgetary item discussion. Mr. McClure has been given Council support to be more aggressive with residential code enforcement that does not require any more money. Councilmember Tolan informed that Council does agree with more aggressive enforcement. Councilmember Wilson and Estes both agreed. Mr. Estes stated to prepare a formal package to Council of an overview of discussions and have a public forum to align with some feedback and move forward.

Councilmember Tolan stated the Committee will take Mr. Peppers recommendations to Council and will present a draft at the next meeting. Councilmember Wilson requested that Mr. Peppers reiterate his recommendations. Mr. Peppers stated the following:

- 1. Encourage Code Compliance to reach out to residential rental properties with code issues to start the process.*
- 2. Make sure funding is in current budget, particularly for condemnation cases and what is involved from the City's side to move forward.*
- 3. Creating a housing fund through the ordinance process and during the budget process, funds be set aside, and that fund might have a number of programs associated with it, depending on Committee/Council discussions.*

Councilmember Tolan informed that he would put a packet together to circulate and bring items to Council for discussion on how to move forward. He then asked for any questions or comments. Hearing none, he informed that agenda items that were not covered during this meeting will be moved to a future meeting.

- 6. Discuss qualifications and where the funding might come from. And, how soon could the fund be established?**
- 7. Discuss program utilized in the 80's in Canton - Repair loan forgiveness after 10 years of remaining in the home (after repairs are completed). Additional code violations after repairs are completed = disqualification for loan forgiveness.**
- 8. Discuss rent-to-home ownership as well as wrap-around services, e.g. fiscal responsibility education**
- 9. Set date/time for next meeting**
- 10. Adjourn**

Committee meeting was adjourned.