

Minutes for TGS&A Special Meeting
October 5, 2015 7:30 p.m.
Employee Lounge
9 of 13 members present

Present were:

Patrick M. Keane, Clara C. Sartori, Christopher L. Camuti, Frank B. Kemp, Joseph D. Miceli, Harry D. McLachlin, M. Caroline Luz, Marlene (Marli) Hayes, Bert von Stuelpnagel. RTM Moderator Sarah Seelye was present for parts of the meeting.

Absent were:

Lloyd Plehaty, Celia Mundt, Eugene F. Coyle, Kenneth A. Fiveson, Jr. (note that Ken is a new Dad this week, and intends to attend the next meeting)

The first item on the agenda was to approve the minutes of our September 21st meeting. The minutes were approved unanimously.

There was some discussion about the origin of our charge and whether the charge is simply to “look into” blight conditions or actually draft an anti-blight ordinance. RTM moderator Sarah Seelye clarified that we are charged with drafting an ordinance and that the request had been discussed by the Board of Selectmen, passed along to the Rules Committee, and then sent to TGS&A. Our discussion noted that estimates of current blighted conditions range from 4-20 incidents. Several town officials feel an ordinance would be helpful to define the issue as well as give them enforcement powers to resolve the issue.

There followed brief reports from members of the committee, who had researched different facets of blight ordinances.

C. Sartori: Advised that the preferred term is “blighted premises.” She discussed the ordinance template for all CT towns, noted that they require specific definitions, rationale, etc., and discussed how they differ. She pointed out that since the idea first came up in Darien 8 years ago, many more towns have passed ordinances and that is the trend.

C. Camuti: He spoke to Olive Hauser, Director of the Department of Human Services. Olive freely has reservations about an ordinance, but she mentioned that in her professional experience, she has encountered only about four instances of blight. She is often able to help people by getting them financial assistance or other services.

C. Luz: Spoke with Paul Zeiss, Stamford Anti-Blight Officer. Stamford updated its ordinance this year to streamline and make the process much faster. Discussed that Stamford also has a committee that reviews blight complaints quarterly. Noted that Norwalk just updated its ordinance to include commercial properties. Some towns limit ordinances to residential properties. Noted that in Ridgefield’s first year under the ordinance, 14/23 complaints (60%) were deemed NOT blight.

P. Keane: Compiled an ad hoc list of nine properties in town that might qualify as blighted on a first look. It was agreed that Patrick would keep the specifics of the properties (and their addresses) undisclosed for now so our discussions were general and not related to particular properties. Patrick said two properties were clearly unoccupied. The conditions included boarded up windows, overgrown

vines and shrubs, peeling paint, and vehicles parked on grass (not driveways). He noted nothing obviously dangerous.

J. Miceli: Spoke with Town Counsel Wayne Fox, who felt that the last blight ordinance effort failed because people felt it would bring hardship to elderly town residents.

M. Hayes: Marli, with Frank Kemp, met with various town officials and reported those meetings. Her impression is that the agencies all try to work together to address blight issues but they have very little enforcement power. She noted that most of the agencies are asking for an ordinance so they can measure blight and have some enforcement teeth. The tax collector does not report any abandoned properties – the town has no problem in identifying the owners of the troubled properties.. The fire department sees hoarding as an indicator of the blight issue but has little power to address this as it takes multiple visits and the intervention of Town Counsel and the process drags on. The building department has no recourse to enforce maintenance unless there is a “hazard to human life.” The police rarely get involved with blight. Planning and Zoning feels that without a definition, it has no way to approach potential blighted premise owners. P&Z is also concerned with unregistered cars.

H. McLachlin: Has looked at the state statutes and the CT task force, which is not expected to be particularly helpful to our efforts.

Next Steps

We will ask for a meeting with the First Selectman and heads of P&Z, Human I Services and Town Counsel, ideally just before to the next RTM meeting on October 26. Prior to that, we will circulate questions to those invitees, for their review and consideration. Frank Kemp suggested we review other towns’ ordinances and decide on a few templates we prefer for consideration – he mentioned Newtown as having a short, streamlined ordinance.

Respectfully submitted by Caroline Luz, Clerk, TGS&A