

Aiken City Council MinutesJanuary 12, 2004WORK SESSION

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Clyburn, Cuning, Smith, Sprawls and Vaughters.

Absent: Councilwoman Price

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Gary Smith, Bill Huggins, Leasa Segura, Sara Ridout, Philip Lord of the Aiken Standard, Josh Gelinas of the Augusta Chronicle and about 3 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M. He stated Council had one item that they would like to discuss in the work session.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANTEmergency Repair Program

Mr. LeDuc stated since the 1980's the City of Aiken has helped citizens with the rehabilitation of their homes through the Community Development Block Grant funds (CDBG). In the last five years the Federal Government has added major regulations which have dramatically increased the cost of rehabilitation. These include asbestos removal and removal or covering of lead based paint in the house. These regulations have increased the cost of rehabilitation from around \$10,000 to over \$35,000 per home.

The Community Development Committee for the City of Aiken has reviewed the escalated cost versus the opportunity to put new homes in many of these neighborhoods. After evaluating this trend over the last several years, they now feel that the money would be better spent on new homes rather than major rehabilitation. Currently, only one to two homes are being rehabilitated a year, and we have a waiting list of approximately 60 homes, or fifteen years or more, for the rehabilitation of homes. Applications are currently being taken knowing that we will probably never get the funding to rehabilitate them.

We discussed the possibility of eliminating this program with Council last year and Council suggested an alternative program that would allow us to make emergency repairs when necessary. The Committee has discussed this and is recommending a program which will allow up to \$5,000 for any one-time emergency repair. This would include repair or replacement of leaky roofs, water heaters, broken water or sewer lines, inoperative heating systems, serious structural problems, repairs of electrical hazards, or other repairs for unsafe or unhealthy conditions. Leasa Segura, of the Neighborhood Services Division is present to answer any questions that City Council has, and upon Council's approval we would begin notifying those on the waiting list that the funds would only be available for any emergencies that they currently have at their homes.

Mr. LeDuc stated United Way has a team of volunteers that will also help with renovation under a program called HRVI, which is an acronym for Home Repair Volunteer Initiative. He said this program will allow an individual who has more of a serious problem, such as a major structural problem such as the floors due to rotting or termites, with the cost over \$5,000. United Way brings a crew of volunteers in and replaces the floors or whatever is necessary to make the house habitable. He said the City can team with them and give them money for the materials if United Way provides labor for the project. The HRVI program has some funds where they can provide the materials and the labor if necessary. If Council agrees with this policy change, we would begin notifying those individuals on the list what can or cannot be completed based on the proposed program eligibility. He pointed out this is a policy change in the rules of the Community Development Committee and not an ordinance change. He said he wanted Council to be aware of the proposed change.

Council discussed the proposed program and asked questions regarding the program. Mr. LeDuc pointed out there was about \$30,000 to \$40,000 for the program. Councilwoman Clyburn suggested that possibly the City could partner with some of the neighborhood associations, and volunteers from the associations could help work on some of the homes in their areas. She also pointed out Project Vision which is made up of volunteers who set aside a time each year to go into neighborhoods and do repairs to homes in a neighborhood. She pointed out that the cost of this would be less than paying contractors to do the work. She asked if the city could partner with the groups and coordinate some type of volunteer program which would make the funds go further with repairs.

Ms. Segura pointed out she had looked at a program in Rock Hill where every summer they work with the World Changers Program, which is a volunteer youth program where a large number of teenagers come in and work on houses in the city for a week. She pointed out Rock Hill has a large amount of their work done that week and Aiken has applied for that program.

It was pointed out the program change is going from major repairs to emergency repairs up to \$5,000 and the repairs are a grant not a loan.

Councilmembers felt the proposed change was a good program and felt the staff should go forward with the proposed program change.

ASHETON OAKS

Hampton Avenue
Camellia Street
Williamsburg Street

Mr. LeDuc pointed out the City has two signed contracts for houses in Asheton Oaks and this matter will be on the next agenda for Council's action since the City would be selling property.

TOOLE HILL

Mr. LeDuc also stated the city has a signed contract on one of the homes in Toole Hill. He said the city is making progress in selling some of the homes in the area. He stated staff will also want to talk with Council in executive session regarding some properties which the staff has had a difficult time in trying to purchase.

SALES TAX COMMITTEE

Capital Projects
Referendum

Mr. LeDuc stated Aiken County has selected three members for the One Cent Sales Tax Committee. He said Aiken and North Augusta each need to select a member for the Committee. He said Council needs to select a member for the committee at the next Council meeting. He said the Committee would review projects from the cities. He said the proposed one cent sales tax would have to be a referendum in November.