

Aiken City Council Minutes

July 11, 2013

WORKSESSION

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Dewar, Diggs, Ebner, Merry and Price.

Absent: Councilman Homoki

Others Present: Richard Pearce, Stuart Bedenbaugh, Glenn Parker, Alicia Davis, Tim Coakley, Charles Barranco, George Grinton, Ed Evans, Kim Abney, Sara Ridout, and Amy Banton and Maayan Schechter of the Aiken Standard, and 15 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 4:00 P.M and welcomed those present for the discussion. He stated the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Northside Redevelopment Initiative. He pointed out the wonderful packet of information that was prepared by staff for Council's information.

NORTHSIDE REDEVELOPMENT INITIATIVECrosland ParkAsheton OaksChesterfield NorthToole HillGovernor Aiken Park

Mr. Pearce stated that in 2003 Council undertook the Northside Revitalization Initiative. The goal in 2003 was to build 350 homes. He reviewed some of the highlights of the program. The program started with Asheton Oaks, which used to be Camellia Trailer Park. The park was not a pleasant place, with run down and dilapidated trailers. Today there are 26 lots where the park was located. Those lots have all been sold and have beautiful homes on them.

In 2004 Chesterfield North was developed with 18 homes. In 2003 Council approved an ordinance to encourage Public Safety Officers to live in Chesterfield North through a mortgage incentive program. Today one of our Investigators lives in Chesterfield North.

One of the larger projects targeted for improvements was Toole Hill. This was an old neighborhood, and there were concerns about crime and vacant and dilapidated buildings. A partnership was formed with Aiken Corporation and the Community Development and Improvement Corporation (CDIC). Initially 31 parcels were purchased in Toole Hill. The project was mostly new construction, with some renovation to existing homes. When the homes started selling, the community saw positive changes occurring in this neighborhood. The Toole Hill area has an active neighborhood association, and a community garden was planted in 2010. The Toole Hill redevelopment project was a \$3.64 million investment. To date 44 new homes have been built in the area. The Toole Hill redevelopment efforts have been recognized at the local and state levels.

In Governor Aiken Park the City did a number of infrastructure updates, including water, sewer, stormwater lines, and the detention pond area. Last summer there was very good publicity about the community garden in Governor Aiken Park. There is a very strong neighborhood association in Governor Aiken Park. A new playground area was created in Governor Aiken Park.

Mr. Pearce stated with the success experienced in the neighborhoods, City Manager Roger LeDuc came to Council and talked about Crosland Park. There are 550 homes in Crosland Park. At the time over 300 of those homes were rental homes in various states of repair. He talked to Council about undertaking an effort in Crosland Park, understanding it was the largest project as far as the Northside Revitalization Initiative. At that time, Council also talked about Edgewood. For Crosland Park Council approved a loan to Aiken Corporation, as well as a loan to the City of Aiken, where we borrowed

\$1.5 million from the Utilities Equipment Replacement Fund. That loan comes due April, 2014. An interest rate is charged on that loan of the LGIP plus 1%. Interest payments have been paid on the loan every year, and some principal payments have been paid on the loan. There is about a \$1.4 million balance on the loan.

Mr. Pearce stated the interim occurrence for Crosland Park has been the financial reversal and the recession, with the real estate market basically coming to a standstill. He said in working through that we realized that the house prices were too high for the current market. We had entered into some options to purchase property. Instead of exercising the options we let those expire in the fall of 2011. We looked at the price for the houses and talked about what to do to try to market the properties. We tried a couple of different approaches. Today the houses are priced in the \$70,000 range. We have four real estate agencies that are listing the properties for sale. Discussion with the realtors show that the houses are priced in the right range in the current market. Now we have to look at marketing the houses. We have had open houses in the past; we have publicized the houses on the university campuses. We have worked with local lenders and will continue to do so.

Mr. Pearce said the reason for the work session today is to look at not just where we have been, and where we are today, but where we need to go in the future. At the Council meeting on July 8, Councilmembers mentioned that they would like to see some proposals from staff on how we can go forward. He said staff would like to go through where we are in Crosland Park, Edgewood and some of the choices that would be available to Council. He said staff would appreciate any direction Council can provide.

Mr. Pearce reviewed a map of Crosland Park showing the houses the city has for sale, which are scattered throughout the entire subdivision. He said the homes were some of the worst homes. He said the thought was that if you began to develop in the neighborhood that would potentially encourage the private sector to come in. He pointed out the houses that the city bought were completely renovated making them more energy efficient with insulation, new cabinets, new appliances, etc. He pointed out the houses that were marked on the map on which the city previously had options. The initial concept in Crosland Park was to redevelop some homes, sell those and redevelop more homes, etc. With the houses the city owned not selling we had to let the options expire. Today we have over half a dozen properties sold, two lots were conveyed to Habitat for Humanity to build houses, and there is a community garden. The city has some vacant lots and some houses that have not been redeveloped yet. He pointed out that Tim Coakley's group has worked with the Planning Department. At the intersections of the roads we found that stop signs were covered with vines, undergrowth and trees. They have cut out the undergrowth and mulched the area which makes a nice landscape appearance. Mr. Pearce stated the city had focused on getting the houses up to the 21st century standard, making them energy efficiency with an affordable purchase price and affordable monthly payment and some grant money to help buy down the price of the house. However, the problem is that we were focusing on the inside, and driving by one would not see how the houses looked on the inside. It was decided we need to focus on the outside also and make the area more inviting. He pointed out there are not a lot of street lights in the area. He pointed out in working in Toole Hill the city installed a lot of street lights. He said that the entrance street to Crosland Park does not look attractive. It has a lot of potholes. He stated the city had worked on infrastructure in Crosland Park, as there had been a lot of sewer backups in the park. The city has been taking the sewer lines out of the backyards and putting them down the center of the street. When the sewer line is moved, we put in curb and gutter, storm drains and sidewalks. That makes a dramatic difference. Mayor Cavanaugh stated he had seen where some of that work had been done, and it makes a great difference.

Mr. George Grinton, Engineering and Utilities Director, stated there were 9 phases for rehabilitation of the sewer lines. Phases 6, 7, 8 and 9 are in the Capital Projects Sales Tax III funds for sewer replacement. Mr. Pearce pointed out we need to get the sewer lines replaced so we can hook that up and go ahead and put in the sidewalk, curb and storm drains.

Mr. Grinton stated the timetable for work on the other phases depends on when we will be permitted to spend Capital Projects Sales Tax III money. He said if money could be advanced for all 4 phases, all the phases could be done at the same time. If all were done at the same time, it would probably take six months to install the lines. By the summer of 2015 we could coordinate with the State contract to start paving the roads. The schedule now is to do one project per year, starting in 2014 through 2017, and then do the paving coordinating with the State. Mr. Grinton stated he felt it would be cheaper to do all the phases at one time as opposed to doing one phase at the time. However, he was concerned about the estimates for the work, as they were done several years ago, and how much prices have increased and will increase in the future. He did feel that doing phases together and doing them sooner would save money, as construction costs will continue to increase. Mr. Grinton explained the way the state paving works with the city giving them a listing each year for paving the next year. He pointed out that Aldrich from York to Hahn is currently number one on the list for paving. The other roads are not on the list and will not be added until the sewer and water line work and curb and gutter work is done.

Councilwoman Diggs expressed concern that Aldrich Street be on top of the list for paving. She pointed out that this street is the entrance to Crosland Park, and that street needs to make a good impression. She pointed out when a person wants to buy a house, it makes a difference as to what is in front of you. She said if the roads in front of the houses that the city purchased and renovated are deteriorated, that will cause a problem in selling the houses.

Mr. Pearce stated the focus could be on Aldrich Street. He said Crosland Park is almost three different characters—there is the northern portion, center portion and the southern portion. He pointed out that in addition to Aldrich there are road condition issues on Croft Avenue, which is also a major entrance to Crosland Park. He said work had been done on the sewer lines on Croft sometime in the 1990's. Those lines should be good for another 10 to 15 years. Mr. Grinton stated the number of calls for service on Croft in 2012 was 11 with 19 in 2011. He pointed there is nothing in the Capital Budget for work on Croft.

Mr. Pearce stated there is a road condition on Croft. He pointed out the two access points that Leadership Aiken County worked on into the North Aiken Elementary and Aiken Middle School. As part of the sidewalk, curb and gutter, and storm drainage installation the city went down Croft for a few blocks. He said a consideration could be to go ahead and extend the sidewalk, curb and gutter, and storm drainage down Croft to Wire Road and then pave Croft. Later the infrastructure could be replaced.

Mr. Pearce stated Council had asked for proposals. He said we need to look at paving, sidewalk, and curb and gutter for Croft. We had about \$700,000 for the Safe Routes to School program, and have spent about \$100,000. We are working with SCDOT to sign off on the money we spend. We have had a conversation with the School District officials. We have a comprehensive recreation facility at the north Aldrich entrance. However, that is some distance from those living on Croft and that area. He said what we are considering is that, with the access to the school grounds, with sidewalk and curb and gutter, that we look at some recreational facility in this area such as a playground. There is some land available in that area.

Mr. Pearce pointed out that at the Aldrich entrance, the city owns the lot at the corner of Brentwood and Aldrich. Some sewer lines run through the lot, and it is not very attractive. He said the Recreation Department is looking at the possibility of a dog park at Aldrich and Brentwood similar to what was done at the SPCA. That would give another amenity for the neighborhood—a playground, walking track, dog park, along with the existing basketball courts and shelter facility.

Mr. Pearce asked what we should do about the houses. He said the city had renovated 12 houses. He said the question is the next steps, when we take the next steps, and what do we do for the next steps. He said in looking at the area and discussing the matters with people in the neighborhood association, we are hearing from the residents in the neighborhood that they would like to see the city take a serious look at new construction.

He pointed out there are some new houses in Crosland Park. He said that two-thirds of the houses in Crosland Park are rentals. He pointed out the transition on Sommer into Crosland Park from Osbon Drive. He noted the house that the city did on Sommer at Osbon with four bedrooms and two baths. He said that house fits in with the houses on Osbon. He stated what if we continue that transition from Osbon into Crosland Park and down Sommer where we had options and look at clearing the lots. He pointed out that is what the city did in Toole Hill. We bought the lots, cleared the lots, reconfigured the lots, and rebuilt houses. He said in considering the retirees and young professionals who don't want the responsibility of mowing and maintaining a yard, that we consider patio homes and new construction of single family homes in the middle of the area that has the highest percentage of rental homes. A market analysis could be done on that. He said Sommer is part of the northern third.

Mr. Pearce then talked about the middle third. He said previously the city had several options on George Street. We have some houses there that we have not redeveloped yet and a rental house. He said the opportunity there is possibly creating some green space by tearing down some houses, renovating some houses, or building some patio homes. He said that is a proposal from staff.

Mr. Pearce said the city had received about 40 applications for the Special Projects Coordinator, and interviews have been set up for next week. A decision should be made this month. Over the course of the summer we will have that person come on board. That position will be back under the City Manager's Office. We want to double our efforts to get back out in the community. We want to take the ideas from the work session to the community and see what they support.

Councilman Merry stated on the idea of tearing down some homes and building new homes, he would assume that it would be more expensive than renovating an existing house. He wondered how that would be funded. He said he felt a brand new house is a more saleable product.

Mr. Pearce responded that there is about \$1.5 million in Capital Projects Sales Tax III, but that is for all the northside. He pointed out Edgewood is another area to consider. He stated the city had built three houses in Edgewood, and there are about another 10 lots where houses could be built. However, there are stormwater issues in the area. It was pointed out that the three houses in Edgewood sold immediately.

Mr. Pearce stated if we renovate the existing vacant houses, we will have to abate the asbestos, which is about \$5,000 per house. If we tear the houses down the cost will be \$5,000 for abatement of asbestos and about \$3,000 in demolition cost for a total of about \$8,000 per house.

Councilman Merry stated the idea of tearing down houses and building new ones is suggested for houses that the city currently owns. He said he liked the idea of creating a corridor like on Sommer. Mr. Pearce stated the nice thing about Sommer is that it is a corridor from Osbon Drive, which has some nice larger homes. However, that would involve acquisition cost, demolition and abatement cost and new construction cost.

Councilwoman Price stated the discussion earlier had been that until we see a corridor where anyone coming in can see a visible improvement on a street, she felt there will not be the energy and excitement for buying. She pointed out that there are houses across the street and next door to some of the houses that the city owns that are not in the best repair. She said we need to offer some sort of façade fund for owner-occupied. Councilman Ebner felt we need to go owner-occupied in the future because we don't want to sell to someone who will rent the houses.

Councilwoman Price stated another thing talked about was creating a "yard of the month" award. She said there are some beautiful yards in some areas. It could be a gas card, etc. for the person who receives the "yard of the month" award. This might encourage others to take pride in their homes and yards. It was suggested there could be the "street of the month."

Councilwoman Price and Councilwoman Diggs stated they felt the city needs to meet with the landlords and let them know that a change is taking place in Crosland Park and that we expect to see a difference in the appearance of their properties.

Councilman Dewar asked if there is an ordinance for landlords to maintain certain standards. Mr. Pearce stated there is a property maintenance code.

Mr. Pearce stated when work was started in Crosland Park, the idea was to convert the neighborhood to a higher ratio of owner-occupied homes.

Councilman Ebner said if the renters are at 350 and we include the vacant lots, we would be at about 70% non-homeownership. He said the numbers are big.

There was discussion about the number of rental homes in Crosland Park and the rental rate. It was stated that \$675 per month is the going rental rate for homes in Crosland Park.

Mayor Cavanaugh asked what are we hearing from the residents about Crosland Park. He said some of it is Public Safety. A reason some people don't come even to look is the appearance of the entrance to Crosland Park on Aldrich Street. It was also pointed out the street lighting needs to be improved. He felt one of the first things that needs to be done is complete the sidewalk, curb and gutter and street paving. Also, the safety needs to be improved.

Ms. Tonya Stroman, President of the Crosland Park Neighborhood Association, stated what Council had been discussing was what the Neighborhood Association had discussed with city staff. She pointed out that Aldrich Street needs to be improved to have a nice entrance. She pointed out there are some nice houses in Crosland Park, but people will not know that if they don't get into the Park. She pointed out on the entrance if there are houses with abandoned cars, high grass, and pot holes in the roads, people won't come on into the Park. She said the Association had talked about improving the entrance to Aldrich Street. Another idea was instead of renovating, build new houses. Other items mentioned as issues were street lighting, landlords, and crime in the area. She pointed out that we do need the help of the landlords in order to help improve the appearance in Crosland Park. She said if the landlords don't care who they put in their houses, what the city is trying to do to improve Crosland Park will be wasteful. She said if she takes care of her house, but the house next door is not taken care of, that will devalue her house. She said if improvements are made in Crosland Park she was sure some of the current residents would be willing to talk to others to encourage them to buy in Crosland Park.

Ms. Stroman told her story of why she is in Crosland Park. She said she had the opportunity to buy a house anywhere. After looking around a friend suggested Crosland Park. She said her first thought was that she did not want to live in Crosland Park. Later she thought about it and what the friend said. If you want to change a community, how are you going to change it if you don't want to go in it. If you don't go in, you can't change anything. She thought about that comment and said that was a point. However, her first impression was Aldrich Street, but as she got more into the Park she realized there were some nice houses in Crosland Park. We just need to improve the entrances. She said on the vacant houses, if they could be boarded up and painted and pressure washed to clean the outside. The vacant houses need some maintenance to improve the appearance—landscaping, cutting the grass, trim the bushes. She pointed one thing the city was doing was keeping the recreation park clean, and they were doing a good job with that. Public Safety is helping keep people out of the park after dark. She said they are seeing changes, but we just need to continue and be persistent to get everyone to buy into the program. She said it will take a while, as the Park did not get in the shape it is in overnight.

Mr. Pearce stated when the Neighborhood Association had discussed improvements on Aldrich, he asked what the Association would think about Sommer and the possible opportunity to do something in that area. Ms. Stroman stated they would be interested in work along Sommer Street.

Councilwoman Price stated that Ms. Stroman could be a good candidate for marketing the houses in the Park with her testimony. She pointed out that there were three ministers present at this meeting also.

Councilman Merry stated he felt an improvement in lighting would also help. Mr. Grinton stated a lot of lighting would go in with the Safe Routes to School. Lighting would be through the woods as well as up the street in the area where the work is done for the Safe Routes to School. It was pointed out there is no proposed lighting improvements in the other areas of Crosland Park at this time. Mayor Cavanaugh stated in looking at the Park there may be some areas where extra lighting is needed. There was some discussion on the city's street lighting policy. Mr. Pearce stated once we get approval from SCDOT for the lighting for the Safe Routes to School area, we can see what that will look like, and then look for appropriate other areas for improved lighting.

Councilman Ebner stated all the things mentioned can have a cost put on them. He pointed out there is a history on what it costs to build houses and tear them down. He said on the inventory of 10 vacant houses left, if they were all torn down would be \$40,000 to \$45,000. He said those houses were bought at the higher market. He felt any purchase of homes now would be in about the \$30,000 range. He felt a new house of 1,100 sq. ft. could be built at \$65 per sq. ft. He said that is the numbers we would be looking at. Mr. Pearce stated it would be about \$460,000 for the 10 vacant houses that the city owns.

Councilman Merry asked if there was an incentive for a private developer to buy a house and fix it up, such as for asbestos abatement, etc. Mr. Pearce responded there are incentives for qualified buyers. Qualified buyers through the state can get \$5,000 towards closing costs and \$5,000 towards the equity in the house. A veteran, school teacher or law enforcement person may get some additional incentives.

Councilman Merry stated he was just thinking if there was an incentive where we could get the results we wanted by partnering with some private money, the less city money we would use.

Mr. Pearce stated that was something Councilman Merry had experience with and that is something that had been discussed since Horizons. What we have seen in our other developments is that if the city gets it going and show what can be done, then the private sector gets interested. He said to Councilman Ebner's point, the County assessed value is what it is. He said the County has looked at about \$7,600 a lot. If a house is in the \$20,000's and the lot is worth about half of the value, it may be something that Council will want staff to look at in going forward with the project. He pointed out the options were for \$40,000 to \$60,000 for the houses.

Councilman Ebner stated he felt we would be wiser today buying houses than we were before and negotiate differently. He said there are rumors of 30 to 40 houses from one landlord being sold to another landlord at \$20,000 apiece. He pointed out we are five years older and no maintenance so we are continuing to degrade the value of property. He said the other thing you would almost have to finance a developer at \$65 per square foot. He said a developer would not want to put any of his money in it because he would not know about the sales. A developer wants to build 8 to 12 when they come in a neighborhood like they do in any neighborhood.

Mr. Pearce stated there may be an opportunity for a better purchase price, and may be a better public-private partnership opportunity.

Councilman Merry stated there could be a lot of creativity in working with a private developer, and he did not know how many, if any, private developers would be interested. He said he just wondered if staff had looked at that. Mr. Pearce stated we have looked at it. It has been done and several other communities have done it. Typically it takes a fairly major capital commitment from the local government.

Councilman Ebner stated we have to keep the figures in mind that were mentioned. He said you have to look at each lot, and those involved have said we would have to look at

each individual house on its own. The amenities that we have done were part of the Capital Projects Sales Tax II. He said we would look at each lot and not the amenities and other things being done. He said you have to look at each house to house and get them in sequence as has been discussed. Councilman Merry stated the figures were actually lower than he would have thought for acquisition.

It was pointed out that we have learned a lot in dealing with this in the last couple of years.

Mr. Pearce stated with the deteriorating market things changed almost daily. He said what made sense five years ago does not make sense today.

Chief Barranco stated Mayor Cavanaugh asked if he thought Crosland Park safety is improving. He said the answer is yes. He said he wanted to quantify that with the information he would share with Council. He pointed out Crosland Park did not become that way overnight, and it won't change overnight either. He said working with Aiken Safe Communities approach we have tried to look at it as a holistic point of view. It is not just the lighting. It is not just the presence of law enforcement officials. It is not just the park. It has to be a holistic approach. Along with the holistic approach there has to be a relationship with the community. He said in March, 2012, two Public Safety Officers were assigned to Crosland Park to start building the relationship, with discussions, patrolling, investigating, etc. He said with the Aiken Safe Communities the data is small, but he felt we had seen a little bit of difference. He presented several maps with one showing the numbers for calls for service throughout Crosland Park. He pointed out the calls for service could be anything, such as a barking dog, shots fired, etc. He pointed out that the Chief from High Point, NC had told him last year that the number of calls would go up. He said we have to start looking at the types of calls. Chief Barranco stated he had pulled the month of April, 2013 and compared it to April, 2008, and April, 2012. He said the figures show that the calls for service are up to 379 in Crosland Park. In 2012 the calls were 322. He said, however, the calls were for civil complaints such as a tree hanging over driveway. In April, 2012 there were 5 civil complaints and in 2013 there were 60 calls. He said it is the types of calls that are changing. He said he believes that is part of the relationship building. People want to call. They want to see Public Safety and the other city staff address their issues. They are taking notice and want to make the community better. He said some other examples are traffic. He said he thought that shows the visibility of law enforcement in Crosland Park. In 2012 there were 32 traffic calls and in 2013 there were 76. He said for suspicious persons the calls went from 17 in 2012 to 23 in 2013. He said he felt that is a showing of the change of the culture within the neighborhood and they are going to call if they see something that does not look right and find out what is going on. He said we have to start somewhere. By taking small steps and an holistic approach by building relationships, putting Public Safety in Crosland Park, and analyzing the data, he felt we are making a difference. He said this was not an in depth presentation, but from the reports that come across his desk he is not seeing as many of the higher more public interest reports from Crosland Park as we did a year ago. He said they are glad the citizens are calling when they see or hear something so the police can come and investigate. Some of the calls have been substantiated, but some have not. He said it takes everybody working together to make a difference.

Councilman Dewar asked if he thought the increase in calls is facilitated by having two Public Safety Officers in Crosland Park and the confidence the residents have that the officers are in the Park. Chief Barranco stated he did feel that the relationships build with confidence that law enforcement is going to help. He said the two officers who were initially in Crosland Park have been promoted, but there are other officers in the area. He stated Sergeant Matt Braxton is currently assigned to Crosland Park.

Councilman Ebner pointed out that in the City Code the city can keep the right of way as well as the utility easements open. He felt the city should also keep the utility right of way between the houses open for fire fighting. He said staff had already started clearing the right of way and that will improve the site line and make it less dark in the area. He said as a courtesy we should ask the property owners, but legally it is one of the things

the city can do with a courtesy call. He felt that should be used to its fullest to help improve appearance.

Councilwoman Diggs asked if the city could do anything to make the landlords that have empty houses and homeowners in Crosland Park maintain the yards. She pointed out she had seen many empty houses for rent and the yards need maintenance. She stated some tenants do not have lawnmowers or the money to pay someone to cut the grass. Mr. Pearce responded that we could, that there are codes pertaining to maintenance.

Councilwoman Price pointed out yard maintenance was an issue when the city starting putting people into new homes. They did not know how to care for the new homes nor how to do maintenance externally on their yards. Initially the new homes did not have storage houses for storage of equipment to maintain the yards and houses. Later storage sheds and fencing were provided for the homes. Initially those things were not part of the new homeownership plan. She said there had to be education for new homeowners as first time homeowners are not aware of the maintenance that is required.

Councilman Dewar pointed out he was in a neighborhood recently that is usually well maintained, but with all the rain some people don't have the time to cut the grass or the weather does not permit it.

Mr. Pearce stated the Public Services Department was looking at clearing the right of way and easements. He pointed out that Councilman Ebner and his wife Gail had donated many, many hours working with the students at Aiken Tech and USC-Aiken to build the storage buildings. He said there is no small part of the entire project. It shows what has been historically true about Aiken. Everybody does their part. Councilman Ebner stated they worked on the sheds about 4 years and built 23 sheds.

Councilwoman Price asked that the ministers present be introduced. Pastor Paul Bush stated they were a Concerned Ministers Fellowship in Aiken. He said he was president. He said they are about 25 to 30 strong. He said the secretary Pearl Stallworth and Teresa Felder, another minister, are present. He said they meet every Friday. He said they are in the neighborhood just like everybody else trying to do their part and trying to be a voice for those who don't know how to speak their concerns. He said they are what they said they are—just concerned ministers, not just about where they live. He said they live in the Aiken County area. He said if they know or hear of something as far as the quality of life for residents, they try to help. He said they are not looking for issues, but they know there are issues out there. If there is any way they can help by being a voice, they try to help.

Councilwoman Diggs pointed out that the group could tell their church members the city has some houses in Crosland Park for sale. Pastor Bush stated they had been talking about that for quite some time. He said there are a lot of things they hear about and are pushing. He said they are a part of the community, and wanted the city to know that they are here.

Councilwoman Price stated if we have information to get out we need to give it to Pastor Bush, and he will get it to people and the concerned ministers group. She said Pastor Pearl Stallworth is one of the best recorders of information. She takes detailed information and sends it to people so the message gets spread. She said that information goes out to a lot of people. She said they are open to people to come to their meetings and share information every Friday.

Mr. Pearce stated where Crosland Drive comes into the Park just beyond Aldrich Street could be a safety issue. He said they would like for Council to consider whether we should pursue with DOT closing the entrance to Crosland Drive which is very near the Aldrich Street entrance. He said as far as public safety, there is still plenty of access to the properties if that entrance to Crosland Drive were closed. He said to close the street would take a vote by Council.

Councilwoman Diggs stated she had an email from a Mr. Thomas who had expressed concern about the Crosland Drive entrance, which is close to Aldrich Street, being an easy in and out to Crosland Park. He suggested that part of Crosland Drive be closed. Councilwoman Price stated we started out with finishing improvements on Aldrich Street, improve the lighting, sidewalks, paving, curb and gutter.

Mr. Pearce stated proposals had been made to Council. However, there is no vote at this meeting. He said staff wanted to have Council and citizens present to throw out some ideas to see what we need to do. He said we need to do a budget analysis overall with the numbers so when it comes time for a vote it is an informed vote. He said we wanted to have the work session to let Council know some of the ideas that we have discussed with the Neighborhood Association, at the Aiken Corporation meeting, the Aiken Corporation Executive Committee, and with staff.

Councilwoman Price asked that Mr. Pearce share with the group since the ministers and others were present, the number of houses the city has and the price range for the houses.

Mr. Pearce stated the city has 12 houses for sale. The price range is between \$74,900 and \$79,900. The interest rate would be about 3 1/2%. The mortgage would be for 20 years. Councilman Merry stated for 20 years the payment would be \$463 a month. Mr. Pearce pointed out that would be \$463 a month with 100% financing. He pointed out there would be \$5,000 for closing. With the difference between the mortgage payment and the rental payment, the mortgage payment is just principal and interest. He said if you add on taxes and insurance, you will still be less than the rental payment of \$695. He pointed out \$75 would pay the electric bill. He said it would be even money. One would still be spending the same money, but they would be investing it, not just spending it.

Councilwoman Price pointed out \$5,000 had been mentioned for veterans, school teachers, and law enforcement and \$5,000 as another incentive. If they were to get \$10,000 off that would reduce the \$79,900 to \$69,900. Mr. Pearce stated to be clear, the \$5,000 would buy down the purchase price, so if the cost is \$79,900, the cost would be \$74,900. The other \$5,000 is for closing costs. He said the person would not have out of pocket for closing.

Councilman Dewar asked Mr. Pearce if it was his plan to give Council a comprehensive plan as to where we go from here, or does he plan on piecemealing the issues discussed at this meeting.

Mr. Pearce stated he would rather not piecemeal the plan. He said that was the idea of developing the notebook. He said we wanted everyone to come to the work session, throw out some proposals, get Council's reaction, and get some direction from Council as to what Council would want us to do.

Councilwoman Price asked if anyone present knew of one person who needs a home. Some of those present stated they knew several people who needed a home. Councilwoman Price stated we need to get the message that the city has some houses for sale and that we want to move those homes.

Mayor Cavanaugh pointed out that there had been a lot of discussion about doing something on Sommer Street, as it is an entrance from Osbon Drive. There was discussion to do something on Aldrich and Sommer Street. Councilman Merry pointed out that from the discussion tonight, the entrance to the Park is very important. He said if we pick one street to start buying houses why not do it on the same street that people will see when they first come into the Park.

Mr. Pearce stated from a planned standpoint you want to cluster the development. However, you want to look at the main corridor too. He said that is why we have been talking about Aldrich and Sommer.

Councilwoman Diggs stated you not only pay attention to the road into the Park, but you pay attention to the houses on either side.

Councilman Merry stated if you turn into Crosland Park you will drive on Aldrich Street. He said you turn off Aldrich to get to Sommer Street. He said if a person is just going through to take a look, they will probably just go on Aldrich. He said people will miss it if we put all the money on a side road. He felt the money should go on the main road where you turn into Crosland Park which is Aldrich. Mayor Cavanaugh stated one of the goals should be to fix Aldrich Street, the main street.

Mr. Pearce stated typically with city initiatives we have looked at the project in phases. He said he thought we know what the initial phase needs to be based on what we heard from the Neighborhood Association and Council's concern at this meeting, which is the main road. The next phase would be looking at opportunities to do something different if that would encourage the private sector. He said we would do the research on that. Mayor Cavanaugh stated at the same time some work will be done by Mr. Grinton on the ongoing infrastructure—water, sewer and drainage. Mr. Grinton stated we have plans, but will have to wait till the money is available or it is several years out unless we decide to accelerate the projects.

Mr. Pearce stated if Council would like to look at the numbers and look at a proposal, staff can bring the information to Council at a future meeting. He said we would have money from the Capital Projects Sales Tax III starting within the next six months. He said we have about \$3,300,000 that Council approved to advance. If we get the plans in place and bid the work out, then we could go ahead and start initially on infrastructure and start in Crosland Park if that is what Council wants to do.

Councilman Dewar stated we were already doing infrastructure work in Crosland Park. He said there were 9 phases. He asked what phase we are on. Mr. Grinton stated we have 4 phases in Capital Projects Sales Tax III. Mr. Pearce stated there are another 4 phases of infrastructure work, which includes Aldrich Street. He said we would want to get the sewer infrastructure done so we could do the above ground infrastructure work.

Councilman Ebner stated everything we have talked about at this meeting we can put a price on. He said the interest rate from the State is 2.3% inflation. He said we can put numbers on everything. He said we have enough experience from what's been done. He said Mr. Grinton can put a number on all the infrastructure. He said we know the numbers for the houses that we own, we just don't know what the new market will be. He said he felt we need to roll this altogether and come up with a number per year that we need to spend. He said it is not a small number. He said we need to get the number and start chipping away rather than talking about it. If we all have the same number, then we can figure out a way to do it.

Mr. Pearce stated so far we have spent about \$900,000 per year.

Councilwoman Price stated we should recognize Aiken Corporation, especially Wade Brodie. She said this started some time ago with Mr. Brodie getting involved with so many projects, starting with the downtown area. She pointed out Mr. Cozad from the Aiken Corporation was also present. She asked if he had any comments.

Mr. Cozad stated he wanted to endorse or express appreciation for Mayor Cavanaugh's clarification about making sure we will do the Sommer-Aldrich concentration. He stated at the June meeting of the Aiken Corporation Executive Committee, Tim Simmons made a remark about why we have spun our wheels for so long with both Aiken Corporation and City Council on trying to get somewhere on Crosland Park. Mr. Simmons made the remark that made all of them realize that it has not been concentrated enough to create a mass in one particular place in Crosland Park. The other things that we have done in the past were not so big that the number of things we could take on were such that we could reach a tipping point, whereas Crosland Park is so big that we have not been able to reach the tipping point. He said all of a sudden he has been impressed as the city staff was either way ahead of the conversation, or a lot has happened since that conversation at the June meeting of Aiken Corporation. He said he wanted to endorse the idea of a very concentrated critical mass approach.

Mr. Wade Brodie pointed out that Reverend Bush, Councilmembers Price and Ebner are on the Aiken Corporation board. He said as Council moves forward with the plan, keep in mind that the Aiken Corporation has several hundred thousand dollars that they would be willing to use to do some houses as they fit into the plans.

Councilwoman Price pointed out that all of the areas that were talked about including Edgewood, Toole Hill and others have been initiated through the Aiken Corporation in terms of housing and other improvements with Wade Brodie's leadership.

Mayor Cavanaugh thanked Mr. Brodie for his efforts over the years to improve the community. He pointed out that nothing can be done without working together, and the more we work together, the more we can get done.

Reverend Paul Bush asked if there would be any discussion on the existing recreation park at Crosland Drive and Aldrich Street.

Mr. Pearce stated there had been some discussion about recreation opportunities in Crosland Park. We have the existing facility. We talked about a possible dog park. Then through the access to the school possibly we could put a playground and walking track in that area.

Reverend Bush asked if there would be any discussion on Willow Run and the northside recreation area. Mr. Pearce responded that would be a separate discussion, and no date had been set for that meeting.

Ms. Kimberly Robinson stated regarding building relationships with community members, she spoke a year or so ago at Smith-Hazel with a proposal to form a Youth Coalition, which would consist of all the youth services and programs that are already in existence. This coalition would come together at the table and talk about the services they provide, take a community needs assessment to see if we still need these types of services and try to come together to form a coalition that can address the issues in our community.

Chief Barranco stated he felt that suggestion fit in with the Aiken Safe Communities program as a part of how we can move forward.

Mr. Pearce pointed out that the Northside Revitalization Initiative is a whole area. He said Crosland Park and Edgewood are a part of the northside. He said we wanted to have the discussion on Crosland Park. He said Mr. Parker's staff is working on some opportunities. They have a strategic plan that they have developed. He said we have done a limited survey. We will take that information and try to come up with ideas.

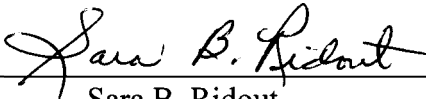
Councilwoman Diggs stated she was inviting all those present and asking for their participation and prayers for a program being held on July 27. She said she and Councilwoman Price are hosting a program on parenthood. She said the program is in response to the increase in crime that we have seen in our community. It is hoped to find some answers and solutions to the problems. There will be some speakers who grew up in Aiken who have messages for the young people in the community. There will also be breakout sessions for parents, elementary, middle and high school students. She said the program will be held at the River of Life Church. The church has reached out to the community. River of Life is providing child care. There will be a community resource fair along with the workshop, where people who have services for children as well as adults will set up booths. The workshop is from 12 noon to 4 P.M. on July 27, 2013, at the River of Life Church. It was pointed out the information will be in the newspaper.

Councilwoman Price stated the amount of support they have received has been overwhelming. Aiken Technical College and others will be present with information for those who want to go to college. Lower Savannah Workforce Development will be there to provide information.

Councilwoman Diggs encouraged those present to spread the word and get teens, parents, etc. present at the meeting. She said the workshop is free.

Councilwoman Price stated that River of Life had an anonymous donor give \$100,000 toward the purchase of a home in Crosland Park. She pointed out the church will actually have parenting classes in the neighborhood. She pointed that River of Life Church has a gym that they open to the community and they stay there with the kids until they get ready to leave. It was pointed out as long as they are off the street and in a safe place, they will stay there with them.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:50 P.M.



Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk