

Blight Commission Meeting
January 21, 2020 @ 1:00 pm

In Attendance: Dennis Marker, City Manager; Ken Murchison, CEO & Zoning Administrator; Penny Thompson, Tax Assessor & Building Official; Paul Camping, Chair of Citizens Advisory Board for Residential & Urban Renewal; Phil Cyr, Caribou Nursing Home Administrator; Robert White, Planning Board Chairman; Christine Solman, Planning Board Secretary; Denise Lausier, Executive Assistant City Manager's Office

The Commission worked on developing categories for blight. Penny Thompson shared with the group a depreciation - physical condition matrix used in assessing as being a good overview of what they are looking for. Penny also shared TRIO coding and condition guidelines as well as physical and condition rating indicator guidelines that she currently uses to highlight conditions that are observed at properties.

Penny Thompson and Ken Murchison looked at the main corridors this past week to view how others see Caribou as they are coming in.

Ken Murchison shared maps where values were assigned to different parcels that he and Penny put together. Also marked were well kept properties to have as a guide.

Paul Camping added that this is more than a beautification effort, but health and safety as well.

The Commission reviewed and discussed the depreciation – physical condition matrix and assigned ranking and point values to use as a scoring sheet for blighted properties.

Robert White suggested keeping the scoring simple so the meaning of the numbers doesn't get lost.

Ken Murchison stated that some properties out buildings are falling apart and that there is a difference between primary structures and out buildings.

Discussion on tax liens being a precursor to being tax acquired and perhaps tax liens could be a factor for consideration. Robert White commented that perhaps tax liens could be used as a tool - to go out and check on the property that has a lien.

Categories were determined out of a 100 score. Robert White stated that once scored, we will be able to tell if the scoring system is effective or if it needs to be adjusted.

Dennis Marker stated that they want to show properties on the GIS map with notations of the score and summary.

The Commission came up with these categories of scoring for blight.

- 30 – Visual (primary structure)
- 30 – Visual (grounds – includes accessory structures; barns, sheds etc.)
- 15 – Occupancy (vacant/occupied)
- 15 – Building Services (utilities)
- 10 – Use as Intended

*Lower point scores will be the more blighted properties.

The Commission also took some time to brainstorm tools.

Christine Solman brought up TIF and working it into economic development.

Phil Cyr stated that it would be nice to have some sort of positive recognition as well to encourage mediocre to get better. He brought up the Caribou Garden Club and Caribou Arts Council and the different programs they have used. In the past, Caribou Garden Club had a contest to recognize properties that had the best gardens in the community.

Paul Camping recommended licensing vacant buildings and certificates of occupancy for tax acquired properties. Ken Murchison recommended licensing rental units as well.

Paul Camping also stated that the Maine Statute on Dangerous Buildings is being amended which gives municipalities the right to apply for a 'writ of attachment', the court would issue.

Phil Cyr also offered for possible home maintenance – CDBG funds, Fort Fairfield Housing Authority and the USDA. Also, for volunteer help; Retired Seniors Volunteer Program (RSVP), Methodist Church, and Penny mentioned Calvary Baptist Church, faith based help. Stakeholders; ACAP, Area on Aging.

Paul Camping mentioned the Housing Program – Ken Murchison stated that Housing's Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) program provides money for education or to buy a house, monies go into escrow.

Paul Camping stated that transparency of what the Commission is doing is important; ordinances being written, properties under blight action. He also brought up the possibility of closing the Caribou Trailer Park – there are twelve trailers, ten are occupied.

Tools the Commission came up with are below. Dennis Marker stated that these tools will be put into a spreadsheet and it will be worked on over the next few meetings – such as; 'Do we have these or do they need to be adopted? How effective are they?'

Tools
Beautification Top 10 List of Shame
Liens
- Tax
- Mechanic Work
Property Maintenance Code
Code Enforcement
- Notices of Violation
- Work Plans
TIF Zones
- Revolving Loan Funds
- Façade Improvement
- Rental Assistance Program
Landlord Laws
Education
Communication
- Public Notice
- Ordinances
Home Occupation Regulations
Affordable Housing
Vehicle Registrations
License Absentee Landlords
Register Rentals
Certificates of Occupancy
- Tax Acquired Properties
Blight Funds
- Demolition
Eminent Domain
Land Banking
Vacant Lot Policy
Adverse Possession
Dangerous Buildings
- Writ of Attachment
80K Certifications
Caribou Garden Club - Contest
Caribou Arts Council
Blight Commission
Blight Survey
CDBG Funds
- Home Maintenance
- Seed for Land Bank
Fort Fairfield Housing Authority
- Winterization
USDA
CEGC
Matching Funds Opportunities
RSVP
ACAP
Caribou Housing
- Family Self Sufficiency
Rotary
Planning Board
Police
Area Agency on Aging
Faith Based Help
- Caribou Methodist Church
- Calvary Baptist Church
Property Ombudsman

Next meeting; Wednesday, February 5, 2020 at 1:00 pm. The Commission will look at the details of different tools as well as the pros and cons.