

CITY OF FREEPORT BLIGHT WORKSHOP MINUTES

City Hall Council Chambers
Freeport, FL
August 25, 2020 5:30pm

1. Meeting Called to Order

The Council Workshop was called to order at 5:30 pm in City Hall Council Chambers by Mayor Barley.

Council members present: Amanda Green, Elizabeth Brannon, Mayor Russ Barley, Eddie Farris, Mark Martin, and Elizabeth Haffner.

Staff present: Finance Officer Sara Bowers, City Attorney Clay Adkinson, Planning Director Latilda Neel, and City Clerk Malani Robinson.

2. Blight Workshop

-City Director Hughes-Neel opened the meeting by distributing packets with resources on the topic of blight. City Director Hughes-Neel posed the question to the Council on their definition of blight and asked them to distinguish blight from a nuisance. As City Director Hughes Neel reviewed the packet, she discussed possibly identifying areas in the city and scaling them for priority to address. Following review of the blight guidelines City Director Hughes-Neel turned it over to City Attorney Adkinson who discussed statutory for review. City Attorney Adkinson pointed out that the City was currently using an outdated nuisance ordinance, 96-1, which was written when the city only had twenty employees. City Attorney Adkinson noted to the Council that the current ordinance was a reactive approach to addressing blight and opened the discussion for code enforcement procedures, referencing other municipalities for guidance. City Director Hughes-Neel remarked that there must be tact and diplomacy when addressing blight and getting community involvement would be ideal. City Attorney Adkinson explained the pros and cons of taking a proactive versus reactive approach to addressing blight, noting that a proactive method would not be a feasible at this time due to the lack of a robust enough blight ordinance. To create a sufficient ordinance to pursue a proactive approach City Attorney Adkinson recommended instating an active code enforcement and using language within the ordinance that assigned categories

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of blight with the appropriate ramifications. Furthering the discussion City Attorney Adkinson spoke about the appellate body that would handle the violations, informing the Council of having a Magistrate or a Board. City Attorney Adkinson asked for the Council's guidance on the issue of blight to start the conversation. Councilwoman Brannon asked for clarity on the topic of the Workshop, noting she was under the impression that the Council would be addressing an issue along Highway 20, other Council members agreed. Councilwoman Brannon stated her stance on the issue of blight as not being in favor of a proactive approach to protect residents who chose not to join an HOA community. Councilwoman Haffner also disagreed with the proactive approach noting the importance of not overstepping boundaries. City Attorney Adkinson informed the Council as to why the subject matter of the meeting could not specifically address the Highway 20 issue, noting that it would need to be addressed in a different type of meeting. City Attorney Adkinson gave clarity to the Council as to why the conversation of blight in the City needed to be addressed, noting that the current ordinance needed updating due to the harsh implications given to violations. Councilwoman Green sought advice on alternative steps that could be taken to remedy blight problems rather than follow the current ordinance guidelines which called for legal measures, noting that there needed to be structures to assist the City in managing blight issues. The Council began to discuss volunteer efforts and church organizations that could get involved to assist the blight violators that were disabled or elderly, thus lacked assistance. Councilwoman Brannon noted her approval of volunteer efforts, noting that the current ordinance was complex and severe in its recommendation of pursuing a lawsuit or lien. City Attorney Adkinson observed that the penalties listed in the 96-1 ordinance were one size fit all and identified the flaws within the ordinance. City Attorney Adkinson recommend the Council to implement a sliding scale for the penalties, engage in remedial procedures, and to outline the expected course of action by offenders. To be proactive City Attorney Adkinson reminded the Council that there would need to be more detail within the ordinance otherwise they would need to draft a new one. Councilman Farris remarked that a proactive approach implemented excessive government involvement, therefore he suggested that the Council revise the current ordinance. City Director Hughes-Neel asked the Council for approval to work with City Attorney Adkinson in updating the ordinance with current Florida laws and to make it user friendly. Councilman Martin disagreed with moving forward so rapidly and cautioned the Council against mirroring an HOA, suggesting that complaint driven code enforcement protected the City

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from getting involved in nasty legal battles between neighbors. City Attorney Adkinson suggested to the Council to begin revising ordinance 96-1 under sections two, five, and six. City Director Hughes-Neel and City Attorney Adkinson noted that the Council needed to clean up the language to stay complaint driven when addressing blight and to keep the complaints anonymous. The Council agreed to update the ordinance along with the appropriate penalties and assigned the task to City Attorney Adkinson. City Attorney Adkinson noted that the ordinance needed to do a better job at creating the boundaries of City involvement. Councilwoman Haffner asked City Attorney Adkinson for clarity on the changes that would be made to the ordinance. City Attorney Adkinson clarified, noting that the ordinance would be progressive with flexible guidelines and that the Council should not be the appellate body to review.

Mayor Barley adjourned the meeting at 6:25 PM.



Mayor

ATTEST:



City Clerk