

Minutes for Kansas City Neighborhood Advisory Council on 1/6/2004

*** Budgetary meeting ***

KCNAC members in attendance: Lynda Callon, Dennis Carroll, Forestine Beasley, Rodney Sampson, Steve Eklund, Jay Stock, and Cynthia Canady (late). Bruce Pennington, and Greg Hugeback were not present.

NCSA staff in attendance: David Reynolds, Renea Nash, Les Washington (late).

Meeting called to order at 3:50pm by Lynda Callon.

Jay brought up an article from Colorado about a dog mauling; he said they have to make it uncomfortable for the Council not to fund things like this. Lynda mentioned two blocks in her neighborhood that the Post Office will not deliver to anymore because of the dog problem. **They have to go in with facts and pictures, and go for more total dollars rather than accepting that NCSA is going to be cut every year.** "It has to be dollars or shame."

Jay mentioned going after all neighborhood problems like that, with short presentations and concrete cases in dollars and cents for each area. Vacant lots, demolitions, money spent chasing people through housing court. Charlie Willard was brought up was a case in point of how housing court has been unable to affect change.

Lynda asked when the public hearings are for the budget; she explained that she was able to attend the hearings in the last few years, and made an impact by going in and testifying. However it can be difficult to find out when those dates are. **When Les showed up, he said that the dates should come out next week, and will probably be around the end of January.** This leaves very little time.

Lynda suggested going through the areas of the NCSA budget: Animal Control, Neighborhood Preservation, Dangerous Buildings, Center for Community Services, Tow Services, etc.

Starting with Animal Control, Jay suggested he could do something proactive to try to help that division.

Regulated Industries is fee-supported; they have the capability to have 9 positions, they were down to 3, but are going to be able to get back up to 7 or 8. **Lynda suggested talking to Jeff Williams with Legal Aid; but he may not be able to testify at budget hearings because of contractual limitations.** Dennis Carroll sits on the Liquor Ordinance Review Committee, and feels that industry has pushed around RI for a while now. It would be hard to document concretely though. Judy has openly said that the Appeals Board is all industry-represented.

Dangerous Buildings has \$1.2M to tear down buildings; **how does that relate to Code Enforcement? Can we document it?** Neighborhood preservation has not been a priority, so it leads to the deterioration of buildings to the point where they need to be torn down. For years they have pillaged NP; why will we pay for demolitions but not for the code enforcement? Steve had an example of a bungalow that has a hole in the roof, and now the walls have sprung out. It will cost about \$7000 to demolish; what is the loss in dollars in tax base versus a similar house, which has been kept up? **Nathan Pare will have a list of the top thousand buildings that need to be demolished.** Forestine asked where the \$1.2 million figure came from; it seems to be the average/reasonable amount the City can afford to pay for demolishing buildings.

This will not be able to come close to catching up with the backlog. **Steve will try to make a case based on his bungalow.**

Tow Services is self-sustaining as well.

Social Services handles things like Senior & Adult Services and other programs, but a lot of their money comes from grants, so the money in the actual budget tends to go to staffing. They also have the Homeless Coalition, Foster Grandparent Building, Linwood Multi-Purpose Center, etc. They want to upgrade and repair the LMPC, for example.

Municipal Corrections has been faced with having to close down wings due to short-staffing and budget cuts. Les has had a hard time balancing this division's needs; there are trains of thought that support privatizing the jails, or paying a daily fee for being incarcerated. Some people get arrested in the winter for the cheap "room & board". The Clay County Sheriff's office thinks they've fixed the dental work of every person they've ever arrested.

Les Washington showed up with information from a meeting with the City Manager. He said that several years ago, DB has \$3-5 million from casino money and other sources and was able to take care of all of their backlog cases. The general fund support has dwindled as well, from \$1.8M to \$282,000. The \$1.2M only takes care of the backlog of single-family homes. **They have been able to stretch their funding through recycling of building materials, but that extra reserve is gone now.** They will have to combine CDBG funds with General Fund support just to keep up with the emergency demolitions, and they will still be accumulating a backlog once more. This leads to blight and crime problems. The Fire Department sees a strong correlation between their fire calls and the abandoned/dangerous buildings. Les says this is going to be the message he takes to the Council on the issue of DB/NP.

Supposedly there is a \$6M shortfall in Housing & Community Development, but Les said this is not likely to turn out to be true, and no one in the neighborhoods is buying it either, apparently. However for now this is putting a serious cramp on trying to use CDBG funds for supporting NCSD services.

Lynda suggested scheduling a Neighborhood Roundtable meeting between now and the budget hearings to get the neighborhood people riled up.

Jay wants to see the actual numbers on FD calls for residential fires, total vacant buildings, and total abandoned buildings that fall within that number.

Les also mentioned the plan to move \$300,000 from the Municipal Court Fund (out of \$450,000) to fund existing inspectors in Neighborhood Preservation. **This was unacceptable both to Les and the KCNAC members; he wants to see if they can charge it to CDBG funds instead.** Taking it out of the MCF would reduce the number of homes they can help from about 120 to 40 homes, and there is already a multi-year backlog (which also leads to blight while those homes wait). **They cannot balance the budget on the backs of the poorest of the poor.** Budget should be responding to Les by Friday.

Jay again made the point that if they can show the program is making a profit (i.e. bringing in revenue versus being an expense), it will not be cut. Programs that are an expense tend to end up on the chopping block. Les's position is that the MCF is so small already that not robbing it will not make or break the budget problem.

Jay suggested looking for a neighborhood that has made great improvements in their housing stock and standard of living, without accepting any public dollars. This would give a benchmark for the City to measure against when they look at the difference in the tax base there. Steve pointed out that the source of the money is not as important as the fact that they're investing at all, and the housing stock and neighborhood benefits regardless. Dennis spoke up about the way they are leveraging lines of credit from local banks with small (\$8-12,000) contributions from the City through CDBG funds to help make renovations possible for a relatively large number of houses.

CDBG review hearings will start on at 11am on January 14th, 21st and 28th. These are the public hearings for addressing your funding level and trying to appeal it; there should be a lot of people there so get there early.

MCI is dealing with violent cases that they probably should not be housing. Mike Sanders from the Prosecutor's Office says that they are choosing not to file these cases in state court because City Ordinances are another option if they think they stand a better chance of convicting them in City Court. **Domestic Violence Offenders, those who Assault Police Officers, and the like should probably not be housed at MCI, and Les wants to look at closing that section of the ordinance.** Once you remove those extraneous cases, then you can start to genuinely look at whether or not it is cost-effective for the City to provide municipal corrections service, or whether it should be privatized. He is also concerned with what happens when the City Jail is full and someone who has been convicted and sentenced is released to make room for someone who has just been picked up but cannot post bond. Les challenged this practice and the judge said that they had to fulfill their obligations and threatened to hold him in contempt of court and put him into MCI. The policy needs to be changed at the City Council level, not at the Director level. He wants to see the detainee responsibilities be turned back over to the police department. **He wants to close another wing of MCI down and change the policy of holding detainees.** 2 wings are closed now out of 8 total. 1 is dedicated to holding 'bad boys'.

Lynda asked if Les had talked to Immigration; she said she has experience with a sweep when they collected 20 illegal immigrants and stored them in county jails until they could fill up a planeload to ship them back to their countries of origin. This could be a possible source of income, because the government pays the jails to hold them. **Les said they are possibly looking at marketing the available space at MCI to surrounding communities, if they do end up closing down half of it.**

Jay made the radical suggestion of looking at the portion of the police budget that is over 20% (the amount the City is required by the state to fund them at), and any or all of the fire budget, or aviation; **it's not a politically popular decision, but every bit of the budget has to go through the process and should not be considered 'sacred' or untouchable.** Les said that it is up to the Council to decide what the City is responsible for funding and taking care of.

Les has compiled a list of every activity the City performs, and breaks it out by program and what the dollar amount is that is spent on those activities. **He is going to get it cleaned up and verified and then turn it over so the neighborhood people can identify their priorities and what they are willing to live with.** This creates a proactive process of identifying priorities, rather than reacting to proposed cuts.

Meeting adjourned; **next meeting will be held in one week for regular business again.**