

Town of Old Lyme
Anti-Blight Ordinance Investigation Committee
Record of Vote & Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, April 11, 2012 – 7:30 p.m.
Town Hall Second Floor Conference Room

Members Present: Patrick Pryor, Stacy Winchell, J. Ranelli, Joel Weisman
Absent: Ted Kiritsis
Also present: Bernard Ballard; Carol Berube; Janet Sturges; Judy Weisman.

- 1) Call to meeting by Chairman Patrick Pryor at 7:40 p.m.
Minutes from the previous meeting of March 14, 2012 were read by Ms. Winchell.

Motion to approve the March 14, 2012 minutes: J. Ranelli.

Seconded: Chairman Pryor

Favor: Unanimous. Motion Carried.

Opposed: n/a

- 2) New Business:
Members discussed items listed in the Agenda. Chairman Pryor pointed out that the current Housing ordinance does not seem to cover commercial property.

There was ample discussion concerning state statutes and other towns' blight ordinances. Mr. Weisman presented to the committee his research of the ordinances for Simsbury and Farmington. Also, there was discussion if a separate ordinance needs to be established in order for the state statutes to enforce the penalties for violations of the ordinance. Chairman Pryor acknowledged that the housing ordinance (1966) has a fine penalty as well as jail penalty but that the state statute would prevent placing a homeowner in jail. There are other state statutes which separate ordinances come under, i.e., violation of building code or sanitation code. Questions arose that maybe those existing ordinances need to include specific language and definition about blight.

Chairman Pryor advised that he was attempting to communicate with Clinton's blight officer as well as Ron Rose.

Chairman Pryor shared his discussion with the fire marshal, Dave Roberge, about his process in addressing violations and enforcement.

The members discussed what the current reporting of blight procedure is and how do violations get enforced. Questions arose about enforcing the fines and securing liens on homes without the town acting as a bank and loaning the remediation services.

It was also noted that, ZEO Anne Brown, still needs to be consulted.

Motion(s): Motion to carry to next meeting the review of the regulations and ordinances currently in place to the next meeting by Chairman Pryor.

Seconded: J. Ranelli

Discussion: Ms. Winchell advised that she would provide extra copies for the members at the next meeting.

Favor: Unanimous

Motion Carried.

Opposed: n/a

Ms. Winchell read excerpts of the news article which was posted in the Hartford Courant (3/25/12) concerning New Britain's anti-blight plans which includes commercial property and rental properties and that a group of landlords worked with the statewide Connecticut property Owners Alliance Inc. as they felt that the state tends to protect tenants more than the homeowner. Ms. Winchell mentioned that communicating with Connecticut Property Owners Alliance, Inc. may be beneficial in the event that an ordinance is established so to work with the beach and lake rental (seasonal) property owners.

3) Old Business:

J. Ranelli discussed concerns over the committee's charge not being signed. The charge was read by Ms. Winchell for review.

Motion(s): Motion to obtain signature of the committee's charge by the first selectwoman made by Mr. Weisman

Seconded: Ms. Winchell

Favor: Unanimous

Motion Carried.

Opposed: n/a

4) Public Comment:

There was much discussion about the public's frustration of not knowing whom to speak with about blighted properties or that town officials didn't seem to understand how to handle these situations. The public feels as though they are given the "run around." Residents have stated that it appears the town's "hands are tied" in dealing with the blighted properties.

Residents voiced a need for an authority on the books to help them in pursuing recourse against the blighted properties. They feel that the officials are frustrated that they cannot help our community.

It was mentioned by a member of the public that the housing ordinance doesn't seem to cover exterior premises (boats, autos, used lumber), only structures. Chairman Pryor stated that the Committee is reviewing the existing ordinances of housing and zoning to see what changes need to be made, if any, or if a separate blight ordinance is required. Chairman Pryor referred to the town of Clinton's ordinances online as a reference for the public to review to see how specific that ordinance is and the enforcement thereof.

Homeowner's are upset over the devaluation of their property due to the blighted properties.

Mrs. Sturges (Historic District Commission) voiced concern with renovations and/or construction of some properties seeming to take too long (about 3 years). The homeowners keep renewing their permits but the construction doesn't seem to come to an end. Dumpsters and supplies are being left on these work sites without penalty to the homeowner, leaving the neighbors to constantly view it. Letters from the Historic District Commission to these homeowners do not seem to affect them. HDC said they received a suggestion to pursue a legal action as a recourse.

5) Discussion:

There was discussion whether or not a separate blight ordinance needs to be created or if amendments can be made to existing ordinances to either incorporate or cite to language that constitutes a blight.

Chairman Pryor stated that any potential amendments/citations into the existing ordinances would need to be streamlined for ease and clarity for the public.

Ms. Winchell suggested that an inquiry be made into the town for a copy of a list of complaints with documentation, if applicable. Residents would also like to provide their independent lists.

6) Motion to Adjourn by Joel Weisman at 9:02 p.m.

Seconded: Stacy Winchell

Favor: Unanimous

Next Meeting: May 9, 2012

-Stacy Winchell, Secretary