



Richland County Council

DEVELOPMENT AND SERVICES COMMITTEE

September 22, 2020 – 5:00 PM

Zoom Video Conference

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Allison Terracio, Chair; Jim Manning, Gwen Kennedy and Chakisse Newton

OTHERS PRESENT: Bill Malinowski, Michelle Onley, Clayton Voignier, John Thompson, Ashiya Myers, Leonardo Brown, Angela Weathersby, Stacey Hamm, Elizabeth McLean, Dale Welch, Sandra Haynes, Dwight Hanna, Ashley Powell, Michael Zaprzalka, Kyle Holsclaw, Tamar Black, Brian Crooks and Dante Roberts

1. **CALL TO ORDER** – Ms. Terracio called the meeting to order at approximately 5:00 PM.
2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
 - a. July 28, 2020 – Mr. Manning moved, seconded by Ms. Kennedy, to approve the minutes as distributed.

In Favor: Terracio, Kennedy, Manning and Newton

The vote in favor was unanimous.

3. **ADOPTION OF AGENDA** – Ms. A. Myers requested Item 4(a) be deferred until the next committee meeting, as the briefing document in the packet was the incorrect document.

Ms. Kennedy moved, seconded by Ms. Newton, to adopt the agenda as amended.

In Favor: Terracio, Kennedy and Newton

Opposed: Manning

The vote was in favor.

4. **ITEMS FOR ACTION**
 - a. I propose the change of the Animal Care Officer's official title to that of "Animal Welfare Officer" within our County's ordinances. "Animal Care Officer" tends to be a bit confusing for those in the public who do not fully understand what they do, and "Animal Control Officer" tends to have derogatory connotation. The field of animal welfare/care has dramatically changed within recent years. A title of "Animal Welfare Officer" offers a broader understanding of what their duties entail. [MALINOWSKI, DICKERSON, JACKSON, MANNING and McBRIDE] – During the Adoption of the Agenda, this item was deferred to the October committee meeting.

5. **ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

- a. I move to evaluate affordable housing options to include the option of establishing an Affordable Housing Trust Fund for Richland County as a benefit to the public. Housing is considered to be “affordable” when 30% or less of one’s income is spent on housing and utilities. In Richland County, nearly half of renters pay more than a third of their income on rent and utilities [TERRACIO] – Mr. Crooks stated, since the last committee meeting, their task has been to develop a purpose, and possible structure, for an Affordable Housing Advisory Committee. The recommendations are contained in the agenda briefing document.

Ms. Terracio noted there are a lot of similarities with these recommendations and the task force that she currently sits on with the City of Columbia. She hopes we can be efficient and work together to use each other’s time effectively.

Ms. Newton inquired if each step need to be completed to move to the next step, or does exploration on some of these items occur concurrently.

Mr. Crooks responded the first step of the advisory committee would be to vet some of the additional actions to ensure it goes through a more full vetting process and is aligned with the overall goals or objectives of the County.

Ms. Newton inquired about how staff sees the initial formation of the advisory committee.

Mr. Crooks responded they have been looking at a structure similar to how the Blue Ribbon Committee is set up with Councilmembers, citizenry and outside entities. We would be looking for individuals who have interest and/or experience with affordable housing.

- b. I move to direct the County Attorney to work with the County Administrator to research and draft an absentee landlord ordinance. The ordinance should provide potential remedies for individuals who violate county ordinances and provide, via supplemental documentation, a comprehensive review of the legal impacts [potentially] associated with the adoption of such an ordinance [NEWTON and DICKERSON] – Ms. Powell stated they have had an internal work group vetting this. We have tried to quantify and qualify the impacts of enforcement of this item.

Mr. Zaprzalka stated the work group includes the internal stakeholders (Building Inspections, Zoning, Business License, Assessor’s Office, Animal Control, Waste Management, Sheriff’s Department and Special Services). The timeline is located on p. 47 of the agenda. It is going to be imperative that a timeline is kept, and allowed, so we can thoroughly refine the ordinance. One of the biggest barriers in establishing this ordinance is identifying the rental properties.

Ms. Powell stated the recommendation of staff is to take the 18 months, spelled out on the timeline chart, to further refine the ordinance, to engage, and continue conversations, with Council about what resources (i.e. staff, funding, technology, etc.) are necessary for the implementation of the ordinance.

Ms. Newton stated, for clarification, the working group would bring back an ordinance that takes into account all of the things discovered during their exploration.

Ms. Powell responded in the affirmative. We are offering an iterative process, so instead of bringing you a briefing document that asks the committee to take a specific action, we would like to continue to update this issues briefing with our research, so we can continue the conversation about what might be the best path forward, and refine the ordinance based upon that conversation.

Ms. Newton inquired if they will be reaching out to landlords, property owners, etc. to get their input, and would that be in the public awareness and input briefing.

Ms. Powell responded in the affirmative. They have allotted a time for that conversation, with the community, but it does not start and stop there. Public engagement should continue throughout the 18-month timeline.

Ms. Terracio inquired if the other governmental bodies took a similar amount of time to get their ordinance in place.

Mr. Zaprzalka responded, in talking with other jurisdictions, they did theirs in a 6-month period and felt they did not take enough time.

Ms. McLean noted that legal staff did not appear to be included in the working group, and you may want them involved since this will involve an ordinance.

Ms. Powell stated Legal has been involved. They received input from Ms. Hogan on Monday; therefore, it was not included in this document, but will be included in the updated issues briefing.

Ms. Newton stated, her understanding is, when the original motion was made, and legal came back, they essentially took the City of Columbia's ordinance and made it a Richland County ordinance. The briefing document identifies some of the questions that poses, and would potentially need to be changed. She inquired if there are things not included in the briefing document that we want to look at, or change approach for, to make sure this is fully contextualized for Richland County. We are looking at 3 times the number of properties that the City of Columbia is looking at. We are looking at different codes than those that may be in place. She wants to make sure we get the best ordinance.

Mr. Zaprzalka stated Ms. Powell gave them specific instructions to make sure that we are not just copying someone else's ordinance. The ordinances for the other jurisdictions are all over the place, and we have tried to suggest language changes to fine tune it for Richland County.

Ms. Newton stated the original intent of the motion was to draft an ordinance that had the property owners, whose tenants may not be following Richland County codes, also bearing responsibility for the code violations. As she understands it, this document is a vastly broader inspection and permitting regime. She inquired why the more robust home inspections is a part of this ordinance.

Mr. Zaprzalka responded, when the work group approached, they took that into consideration. With this process it allows everybody to look at the property upfront, and how many violations it has on the property. The recommended system allows them to track the violations. The permitting process is strictly between the County and the owners, and the tenants are not involved any longer. The owner is held accountable for activity on the property.

Ms. Newton inquired about all of the things that would be inspected upfront for a property owner to receive a permit.

Mr. Zaprzalka stated, on p 28 of the agenda, it gives an overview of what they will be looking for when they do the initial review.

Ms. Newton inquired as to the reason, the benefit or best practice for including some of these more structural, mechanical items.

Mr. Zaprzalka stated the inspection form would be the property maintenance portion of the permitting. They go out and look at “habitable space”. All other areas are reviewed upfront. Each area will determine if the past violations have been abated, then they will stamp their approval to allow the permit move forward.

Ms. McLean stated, when this first came to Legal, Mr. Smith was told to turn the City of Columbia’s ordinance into something for Richland County, as a starting point. It sounds like what Ms. Newton was looking for is not exactly what she has been given. We can structure the ordinance more around what Ms. Newton’s initial intent was.

Ms. Newton noted her intent was something that was not as sweeping as this, but she is also not a professional inspector or planner. She is certainly open to things being improved by people who do this work every day.

Ms. Powell stated what is before the committee is the City of Columbia’s ordinance, with slight modifications for Richland County. Then, there are recommendations from staff about further changes to make it more context specific. We can certainly back off some of the things here.

Ms. Newton stated the intent of her motion was to respond to the concerns she is getting from communities across her district where there are homeowners that live in neighborhoods and take care of their homes. Then, there are renters down the street who are flagrant violation of Richland County ordinances, and when they receive notifications they do not respond because they do not feel like they have to because it is not their property. She wants to also make the landlords responsible, so we can have people following Richland County ordinances. What we all want is to have good looking communities.

Ms. McLean stated she can make modifications to the proposed ordinance and forward them to Ms. Newton and other Council members to ensure they are better capturing the spirit of the motion’s intent.

Ms. Terracio stated she would be interested in drafting an ordinance and policy that could be nimble enough to address large parties in residential neighborhoods, as well as Ms. Newton’s concerns.

Chief Cowan requested that we consider some of the ancillary issues the committee members brought to the table to help the Sheriff’s Department address matters they have no mechanism to deal with.

Ms. Newton noted she has no issue with addressing needed matters, but she does want to eliminate any bloat from the document.

6. **ADJOURNMENT** – The meeting adjourned at approximately 5:48 PM.