

University Neighborhood Partnership Steering Committee Meeting Minutes

Revised & Approved for Distribution – 3/20/07

WHEN: Tuesday, February 20, 2007, 2-3:30PM

WHERE: University United Methodist Church

WHY: Regular Meeting

Present: Barbara Karper, Le Moyne College
Julie White, ESF
Beth Rougeux, SU
Giancarlo Moneti, Owner Occupant Resident
Joanne Stewart, Owner Occupant Resident, Secretary
John Potamianos, Other Property Owners
Gordon Hershberger, Syracuse Property Owners Association
Kelly Attridge, Le Moyne Student
Tom Wolfe, Facilitator

Absent: Paul Roth, ESF Student
Fernando Ortiz, City of Syracuse

UNP Plus: Members Present:
Beth Theiss, Owner Occupant Resident (SEUNA Representative)
Barbara Humphrey, Owner Occupant Resident (WENA Representative)

Members Absent:
Van Robinson, City of Syracuse (Common Council)
Peter Kavanaugh, Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today (TNT Representative)
Karen Billings, Owner Occupant Resident, Study Session Coordinator (Management Analyst, City of Syracuse)

WHAT: Tom W. called meeting to order at 2:03 PM.

Quorum

Yes

Minutes

Meeting minutes for 1/23/07 were reviewed and modifications suggested. Joanne S. will make changes to minutes and request approval by consensus for distribution by the group via email.

Density Reduction Study Session Review

Tom W. reported the 2/15/07 Study Session was cancelled by Van R. and the group will resume with Study Session schedule.

Tom W. asked the group to focus on “perfecting” the agenda for Study Session #2 scheduled for Thursday, March 15, 5-6:30PM, Common Council Chambers, City Hall. The topic of this Study Session will be “Health and Safety”. This topic was agreed to by consensus during the 1/23/07 Review Session.

Karen B. will prepare and distribute flier for Study Session #2.

Agenda for Study Session #2:

- **Van R.** – Welcome (Joanne S. will contact)
- **Julie W.** * – Introductory remarks will include how the UNP group came to consensus on the topic of “health and safety” and that the following question regarding “health and safety” is not unique to the University Neighborhood. (1 minute)

* Tom W. announced he will be in Turkey on 3/15/07. The group elected Julie W. to serve as Facilitator for this Study Session.

- **Jim Blakeman** * will present only the parts of the Property Conservation Code (in layperson language) that relate to “health and safety”. He can also suggest proposed solutions using the Code and discuss why it works, why it does not work, and what he needs to do his job more effectively. (10 minutes) (Gordon H. will contact)

* Chuck Ladd will be invited by Gordon H. to serve as back-up for Jim B. during discussion portion of Study Session.

- **Panel Question:**
As a result of your experience and knowledge of health and safety concerns, what would you or your constituency like to see accomplished with relation to code?
 - Greater Syracuse Tenant Network (educate regarding tenant rights) (3 minutes) (Barb H. will contact)
 - NYPIRG (represent student perspective) (3 minutes) (Beth R. will contact)
 - Investor (representative) (1) (3 minutes) (Gordon H. will contact)

- Owner-Occupant (representative) (2) (6 minutes) (Beth T. and Barbara H. will contact) * Beth T. reports that Annetta Turk has agreed to serve as 2nd owner occupant. Annetta resides at 834 Livingston.

- **Questions & Answers**

Giancarlo M. formulated a series of questions he proposes to ask at the 3/15/07 Study Session.

I studied the City Property Conservation Code and the Zoning Rules and Regulations, to see if strict enforcement of the existing Code and Regulations may alleviate the problems of density and possibly reduce the density where it is really excessive.

In this respect the use of the CERTIFICATE OF SUITABILITY is quite important and I found that definition of the Certificate of Suitability, distributed by Beth R. at the Jan 23 meeting, is not quite correct. The Cert. of Suitability is NOT permanent. Has a validity of 5 years. It must be issued prior to each transfer of title, and upon a violation of the terms. This certificate is specific for rental properties, and I consider many of the conditions for issuing it quite important. It requires compliance with the definition of "single housekeeping" (q.v.). [... at least 35% of the total floor area of the dwelling unit is readily accessible and available for gathering and common use by guests and any and all residing therein. This 35% common area includes rooms or areas such as kitchens, dining rooms, living rooms, parlors, dens, family rooms, and libraries but does not include hallways, closets, bathrooms, porches, garages, bedrooms or sleeping areas, or non-habitable areas such as found in basements, cellars, and attics...] [Sec. 27.22 (a) Every dwelling unit shall contain a minimum gross floor area of 175 sq.ft. for the first person, 125 s.ft. for the second person, and 100 sq.ft. for each occupant thereafter.] It also requires that the number of occupants be consistent with the number of on-site parking spaces provided.

Problem with "LODGE, TOURIST HOME" in RA1 zone. In working at the above, I found confirmation of a serious problem of which I already had some premonition. The City administration contradicts itself classifying dwellings in RA1 zoning as Class 418 (Inn, Lodge, Tourist Home), where Class 418 is forbidden. I saw many instances of this looking into www.ongov.net/Realproptax/taxinformation.html We should find if the use of this classification (factually correct, but forbidden) is the initiative of individual officer or an approved policy.

To the purpose stated at the beginning, I prepared a set of questions to be posed to appropriate City officers.

1.

The current definition of family include a limit of no more than 5 unrelated persons. Can you give examples of instances when the ordinance was enforced? What does the city do when it receives a complaint that a household is in violation of this ordinance? [There are examples of blatant violations found by authority.]

2.

When a rental property in the University Special District doesn't have a valid certificate of suitability, can it still legally be rented and occupied? If no, can you give examples of properties that were cited and fined? If yes, how was that decision made and when?

3.
What does the city do to make sure that there are no interior alterations in violation of the certificate of suitability after the certificate has been issued? Is what was discovered at 813 Comstock likely to be going on in other houses in the neighborhood? [We know of subdivisions of "common areas" into individual bedrooms, transformation of porches into bedrooms, bedrooms in third floor (Fire Rules), bedrooms in basement.]

4.
In 2005 the city passed the new Certificate of Sufficiency ordinance which requires that all rental properties in the University Special District be inspected every three years. The deadline for all rentals to have their first inspection is January 2008. What percentage of rentals have already been inspected? What is the city doing to ensure that the January 2008 deadline is met? What will be the penalty for rentals that aren't inspected by January 2008? Will the city allow rentals to be occupied if they haven't been inspected? Please note: the Certificate of Sufficiency is suspending pending appeal per Jim Blakeman.

5.
There are serious safety concerns when student rentals are overcrowded. Students sometimes are living in basements or third floor bedrooms that could be deadly in a fire. We've heard the city explain that it can be difficult to determine how many tenants are in a rental. Now that SU has access to the complete list of off-campus student addresses, for both SU and SUNY-ESF students, will the university be warning students when it appears there are more than five students in a single residence? Will the university help the city identify properties that are over-occupied?

6.1
In issuing the Certificate of Suitability, is compliance with the definition of "single housekeeping" strictly enforced?

6.2
In issuing the Certificate of Suitability the following should be considered: the "Number of occupants in the premises compared to the number of on-site parking spaces provided." How is this translated in numbers?

7.
Is the rule on parking surface coverage enforced: "Maximum permitted parking surface coverage on a lot shall be 30% for RA1 and RA2, 35% for RA and RAA."? Will the violations be fixed and the lot area returned to lawn? [I can cite examples of violations found but not corrected.]

8.
A question to the University administrators: What has the University administration done, and what will it do, to help the City Code Enforcement in so far as the houses rented to students? Now that SU has access to the complete list of off-campus student addresses, for both SU and SUNY-ESF students, will the university be warning students when it appears there are more than five students in a single residence? Will the university help the city identify properties that are over-occupied?

Snow Removal Pilot Progress Report

Gordon H. reported Greg Allen, Karen Ventrone and he, the UNP Snow Removal Pilot Team, met for the first time on 1/31/07.

Minutes from the UNP Snow Removal Pilot Team with regards to implementing the pilot were distributed and discussed. The UNP decided the best way to move forward would be for Greg A. to visit only those

properties not in compliance with the City's Snow Removal Ordinance. Greg A. would then review the pamphlet and explain the program and consequences to the tenant(s) at each property. Greg A. stated he encountered challenges in declaring a standard for how to gauge snow removal compliance, in particular:

- How long do people have before they shovel?
- What if it is icy?
- What if snow is firmly packed down?

The team decided Greg A. should use his best judgment to decide which sidewalks he felt were "shoveled" and which were not.

On 2/7/07, after the first week of observation, Greg A. explained he encountered some unanticipated challenges:

- What if everyone's sidewalk is not shoveled, but most are still easy to walk on?
- What is the safest type of sidewalk to walk on (melted or compressed snow)?
- Is it fair to expect people to go out and break up ice (since the UNP is only notifying them weeks into the winter season)?
- Does the UNP have free shovels and/or salt to give away?

Gordon H. responded that since the weather has remained consistently cold and has not given the snow a chance to melt, Greg A. should expect to get much more conclusive results as the weather changes and snow melts. The team decided Greg A. should visit only the properties he feels are unsafe and run through the prepared routine with tenants.

Karen V. stated she has received phone calls from SU students living off-campus who read the article in the "Community Connection" newsletter about the pilot, and are interested in working as a snow removal coordinator along with Greg A. After discussion, the team decided to wait and see how the coming weeks progress, as adding another member now might complicate the process.

**Next
Study**

Session: Thursday, March 15, 5-6:30PM, City Hall, Common Council Chambers

**Next
Review**

Session: Tuesday, March 20, 2-3:30PM, University United Methodist Church

**Next
Meeting
Agenda:**

Review/Approve **February** Meeting Minutes

Review of **March 15** Study Session

Snow Removal Pilot Progress Report

UNP Financials

**Prepared
By:**

Joanne Stewart

**Approved
By:**

UNP - 3/20/07