

BEMIDJI CITY COUNCIL

Special Work Session Agenda

Wednesday, April 27, 2011

City Hall
Conference Room
5:30 P.M.



1. Call to Order
2. Discussion - QNI Study
3. Adjournment

QNI TOP PRIORITIES

Rita Albrecht's Response:

1. Create neighborhood Services Team
2. (6.) Target Property owners and not tenants with code enforcement issues. this will encourage landlords to monitor their properties more closely, evict problem tenants and take steps to educate future tenants to avoid problems in the first place. (including parts b. c. d. and e.)
3. (7.) Identify a Code Enforcement Officer and provide the training, responsibility, and authority to ensure they can adequately address code enforcement problems. (identify who does what!)
4. (11.) Work with BSU to develop a code enforcement and behavior educational piece that can be provided to the student at the beginning of each school year.

Jim Thompson's Response:

1. Incomplete Sidewalks
2. Degenerating homes
3. Junk cars in yards

Roger Hellquist's Response:

1. Nuisance (noise, parking)
2. Enforcement

Dave Larson's Response:

1. Enforcement directed to the Owners of rentals.
2. Monitoring of tenant activities.
3. Parking regulations/ enforcement.
4. One way traffic on some streets?

Kevin Waldhausen's Response:

1. Rental code and compliance
2. Parking (on street) "metering or permits" in high rental density areas.
3. Enforcement. Adequate and appropriate personnel to enforce policy, codes, and laws.

Ron Johnson's Response:

1. Significant fees for the conversion of owner occupied homes to rental... and applying those fees to offer incentives for persons who wish to convert rental property back to single family status.
2. Strict Ordinance and enforcement of off street parking requirements for rental properties. Consider new restrictions for on-street parking that would make off street parking necessary for landlords who are looking at converting a single family home to a rental.
3. Strict enforcement of the number of persons legally permitted in rental property and stiff penalties for BOTH landlords and renters who do not comply.

Greg Negard's Response:

1. Parking
2. Rental Ordinance (enforcement)

Recommendations in Response to the QNI Study and Council Priorities

Code enforcement and parking were the only two priorities that were listed by two or more council members.

Code Enforcement:

Rental Code enforcement is currently driven by complaint or through rental inspections that occur every three years, unless a history of violations demands more frequent inspections. In order to require more frequent inspections, staffing would need to be increased. We currently have 918 permitted rental units. The inspection fee for a single family home is \$150 and it increases for buildings with multiple units.

Recommendation: Require annual inspections of all rental units. If a unit passes inspection with no discrepancies noted, the inspector could recommend that it not be reinspected for two years. However, the annual inspection fee would still apply. If multiple discrepancies are noted, semiannual inspections and fees could be required, at the discretion of the inspector. This would require hiring an additional full-time employee but pay and benefits would be covered by the increased fees.

Parking:

Parking in yards and on lawns is a continuing problem. This is currently a JPB issue and their cooperation would be needed unless the city adopts its own ordinance against it.

Recommendation: The city should require a list of names, vehicle license plates, and designated parking areas for all rental units and the JPB and city Code Enforcement Officer should be granted authority to issue Administrative Fines and/or ability to tow unauthorized or improperly parked vehicles. Off street parking could not exceed the number of permitted occupants for rental units.

Student parking on the streets around the BSU campus causes problems for all residents. Where rental units do not have available off street parking, those vehicles add to the congestion on the streets.

Recommendation: Implement a permit parking system for the blocks around the BSU campus. The parking fee should be coordinated with BSU so it corresponds with their parking permit fees. BSU may be asked to lower their fee, if needed. This would entice non-residents to use campus lots and not off campus parking.

Other Issues:

Some cities are charging a fee to convert any single family dwelling to a rental unit.

Recommendation: Establish a conversion fee of at least \$1,000. Additionally, offer an incentive, equal to the conversion fee, to anyone converting a rental back to single family. This incentive could be subsidized with other city funds, if this is a priority.

Landlords are subdividing rooms in their rentals to allow for the maximum occupancy.

Recommendation: Limit rental occupancy to the number of bedrooms in the original structure.

One of Bonestroo's core recommendations was to establish Neighborhood Associations. These associations would promote aesthetically pleasing neighborhoods and monitor neighborhood activities.

Recommendation: Phase II of the QNI had the Headwaters Regional Development Commission (HRDC) engaged in extending the QNI outcomes to all of Bemidji. Even if the council is not ready for that step, the HRDC could be engaged to facilitate the Neighborhood Associations. Such an effort would require extensive staff involvement and follow up; something current city staff can assist with but are not trained for.

Housing more than the authorized number of tenants is a common problem. Although this would be hard to police without the Neighborhood Associations, when such infractions are found both tenants and landlords should be held accountable.

Recommendation: Establish administrative fines for first time violations and suspend rental licenses for any additional violations.

Dilapidated properties are a concern of all city residents. Whether rentals or owner occupied, many homes are not being properly maintained, affecting neighboring property values and aesthetics.

Recommendation: Establish a Property Maintenance Code. However, this would likely not be effective without a means for property owners to afford needed maintenance. The city could explore ways to establish such a fund and/or loan fund to accommodate the needs of the community.

Some properties are known as "party" properties disrupting the peace of the neighborhood.

Recommendation: Ensure that landlords are notified immediately of police calls to their properties with rental license suspensions and or revocation for two or more calls within a specified period of time.

There are processes involved with all of these recommendations. However, staff need the council's direction as to which of these actions they want staff to pursue. We will also await committee recommendations on whether or not the JPB is interested in extending a rental ordinance to the entire JPB area.