

ESCAMBIA-PENSACOLA AFFORDABLE HOUSING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

September 06, 2022

The Escambia-Pensacola Affordable Housing Advisory Committee (AHAC) held a regularly scheduled meeting in the Hagler-Mason Conference Room, 2nd Floor of Pensacola City Hall, 222 West Main Street, Pensacola, Florida on September 6, 2022 at 9:00 AM.

Committee members present: Ed Brown, Laura Gilmore, Pensacola City Council President Ann Hill, Deborah Mays, Maya Moss, Paul Ritz, and Crystal Scott

Committee members absent: Brenton Goodman, Patricia Mackovic, and Escambia County Commissioner Lumon May

Staff members present: Timothy Evans, Escambia County Neighborhood Enterprise Division (NED); Clara Long, Director of Escambia County Neighborhood and Human Services; Marcie Whitaker, Director of City of Pensacola Housing Department, Tracy Pickens, City of Pensacola Housing Department

Call to Order, Welcome, and Roll Call

Chairwoman Crystal Scott called the meeting to order at 9:00 am. She asked for those present at the meeting table to introduce themselves, after which she stated that there was sufficient attendance to establish a quorum. Ms. Scott then stated that two of those members absent from the meeting, Commissioner May and Brenton Goodman, had requested an excused absence. Paul Ritz made a motion to recognize the absences as excused. Ann Hill seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Ms. Scott then asked regarding the publication of the meeting notice. Marcie Whitaker confirmed that the meeting had been posted on the City of Pensacola website calendar. Likewise, Tim Evans confirmed that the meeting had been published on the County's online calendar as well as in the Escambia Sun Press local paper. Moving down the agenda, Ms. Scott asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meetings. Paul Ritz made a motion to approve the minutes of the August 2nd meeting as submitted, seconded by Ann Hill. The motion passed unanimously. Mr. Ritz then made a motion to approve the notes of the meeting of August 17th (which lacked a quorum) as submitted. This motion was also seconded by Ann Hill and passed unanimously.

Before moving straight to the Guest Speaker for the morning, Ms. Scott took a few moments of privilege to tell the Committee of her previous week's attendance at the annual conference of the Florida Housing Coalition in Orlando. She said that the conference highlights showed that there was quite a bit of innovative housing work being done throughout the state.

Guest Speaker

Ms. Scott introduced the speaker, Mr. Percy Goodman, Executive Director of Community Enterprise Investments, Inc. (CEII). Mr. Goodman opened his presentation by giving the background on his organization. He stated that CEII has been working for betterment within the community since its establishment in 1974. In its early days it organized as a Community Development Corporation, or CDC.

Their organization has three main programs to serve the community. Firstly, they work as a Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) to promote the development of affordable housing – both for rental as well as homeownership opportunities. On the rental side, the agency owns and manages 83 affordable rental units across the community, most priced for households earning less than 50% of the area's median income. On the homeownership side they work as a developer, partnering with local contractors and the Escambia County Housing Finance Authority to build new units, most recently completing an ADA compliant home for a local household needing specialized affordable housing.

Second, the organization operates a small business loan program, which began locally but has expanded to now serve a broad region of the southeast United States. The organization has partnered with the Small Business Administration on managing a microenterprise loan program. Mr. Goodman related to the Committee that he began his relationship with CEII as a loan officer in the lending program.

The third major program of CEII is individual financial and credit counseling, working as a HUD certified counseling organization. He stated that the agency offers in-person counseling opportunities as well as an on-line option for those who may find that more to their liking.

Following his prepared comments Mr. Goodman took time to respond to questions from the Committee. One member asked what he looked forward to in the coming months and years for his program. He answered that he was very hopeful that CEII could continue to build more affordable housing units for the community, both for rental as well as for ownership, as he believes that to be a significant need. Another Committee member asked Mr. Goodman what, from his perspective, would be the most incentivizing for developers to build more affordable housing. He replied that a small developer's fee was all the incentive he needed. He stated that his organization was primarily focused on smaller developments – single family homes and duplexes for the most part as opposed to larger apartment complexes. He said he was aware that the developers who were considering larger scale developments, needing larger parcels of land, faced greater challenges.

Ms. Scott thanked Mr. Goodman for his time in sharing the work of CEII with the Committee.

Old Business

Moving to the next item on the agenda Ms. Scott asked for input from the Committee as to what might be a focus for their incentive recommendations to the respective governmental units. Marcie Whitaker suggested that the Committee review the handout which set forth the specific responsibilities of the AHAC according to Florida Statute (Sec. 420.9076 (4)). According to the statute, the two most important incentives are the required two that must be adopted as a threshold for receiving funding: A.) expedited permitting; and, I.) establishing a process by which a local government considers, before adoption, policies, procedures, ordinances, regulations, or plan provisions that increase the cost of housing.

As the Committee has previously reviewed the County's Incentive plan on these points, Ms. Whitaker presented the City's Expedited Permitting Policy (included with the handout). Following the City's presentation Mr. Evans reiterated that the County's permitting process generally runs quickly and smoothly, as presented by the last guest speaker from the County's Development Services Department.

Some discussion followed regarding incentive I., seeking input before adoption of policies, regulations or provisions that may increase the cost of housing development. Ms. Whitaker stated that before the City approved the 'recent' CRA district design overlay that there were several community meetings held and significant input received from the building industry. She remarked that some of the reasoning behind the overlay district was intended to benefit affordable housing by seeking to remove the stigma of infill homes which were out of character with their surrounding neighborhoods.

Likewise, Mr. Evans again restated the comments of Mr. Jones from the County that the efforts to overhaul the Land Development Code in 2017 was primarily to create a more uniform basis from which to work, as opposed to a piece-meal regulatory environment.

The Committee acknowledged that efforts had been made to provide a 'level playing field' for both affordable and market-rate developers, however their desire was to find a way to be more pro-active in incentivizing affordable development, whether through policy or property. This led to a discussion on how to make County or City owned properties more accessible to affordable housing developers. Clara Long, the County Director of Neighborhood and Human Services replied that in the past year the County has identified a total of ten (10) lots for affordable development. She stated that an RFP for builders willing to build affordable units with the County should be coming out within the next few months.

This began a brief discussion regarding the process involved in tax delinquent properties being escheated to the County. As no one present felt knowledgeable enough to address the question it was agreed to have a representative from the County legal department as a speaker for a future meeting.

Public Comment

As the available hour had passed, Ms. Scott asked if there was anyone present from the public wishing to make a comment for the record. Connie Bookman, co-chair of the Homelessness Reduction Task Force rose and encouraged the AHAC to support local development of deeply affordable rental housing.

Announcements/written communications

The next meeting of the AHAC, another 'bonus' meeting, will be September 20, 2022 at 9:00 am in the Hagler Mason Conference Room of Pensacola City Hall.

Adjournment:

There being no further business or discussion, the meeting adjourned at 10:21 am.

Submitted by Timothy Evans