

## COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DATE: April 17, 2008

CALLED TO ORDER: 5:34 p.m.

ADJOURNED: 6:06 p.m.

### ATTENDANCE

#### ATTENDING MEMBERS

Kent Smith, Chair  
Susie Day  
Brian Mahern  
Michael McQuillen  
Doris Minton-McNeill  
Christine Scales

#### ABSENT

Paul Bateman

## AGENDA

### Absentee Landlord Presentation

Josephine Rogers, Executive Director, Martindale Brightwood Community Development Corporation

Charles Tony Knight, Martindale Brightwood Weed and Seed

Sondra Connor, Peace Learning Center

## Community Affairs Committee

The Community Affairs Committee of the City-County Council met on Thursday, April 17, 2008. Chair Kent Smith called the meeting to order at 5:34 p.m. with the following members present: Susie Day, Brian Mahern, Michael McQuillen, Doris Minton-McNeill, and Christine Scales. Absent was Paul Bateman.

### Absentee Landlord Presentation

Josephine Rogers, Executive Director, Martindale Brightwood Community Development Corporation (CDC)

Charles Tony Knight, Martindale Brightwood Weed and Seed

Ms. Rogers stated that Martindale Brightwood CDC has been in existence for 15 years and is located on the near Eastside of Indianapolis, with the boundaries being 30<sup>th</sup> Street to the North, Sherman Drive to the East, the Monon Trail to the West, and Massachusetts Avenue to the South. She said that the CDC has a Board of Directors with 17 members. Ms. Rogers stated that the mission of Martindale Brightwood CDC is to provide community economic development in the area for the benefit of the residents in Martindale Brightwood. She stated that Martindale Brightwood provides a number of programs that are funded by Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the City, such as, homeowner repair and rehabilitation projects, providing individual developmental accounts for the Martindale Brightwood residents, and working with the City on the Keystone Enterprise project, where there are several tenants already located. She said that there are over 7,000 residents in Martindale Brightwood based on the 2000 Census. Ms. Rogers stated that Martindale Brightwood is trying to maintain the residents and also develop a good housing stock. She said that they are working on ways to keep the senior citizen residents in their homes by providing a few things like, homeowner repair and wheelchair accessible ramps.

Ms. Rogers stated that if a person drove through Martindale Brightwood they may be hard pressed to find a drugstore, grocery store or retail shops. She said that Martindale Brightwood residents have to drive far to get to those services. At the direction of the board and staff, a goal is to try and bring some of those shops back to the neighborhood. Ms. Rogers stated vacant and abandoned houses are a serious problem in Martindale Brightwood. She said that there are over 370 vacant homes in Martindale Brightwood that bring crime, narcotics and a variety of issues to the neighborhood. Ms. Rogers stated that Martindale Brightwood is trying to acquire those vacant properties at a nominal cost to revamp them and put them back on the market for individuals who want to move into Martindale Brightwood or some of the residents and their families who already live in the area.

Mr. Knight stated that the absentee landlord problem is an enormous obstacle for dealing with vacant homes and homes that are occupied by tenants that are doing illegal activities. Mr. Knight stated that it should be required for landlords to provide current contact information in case someone needs to get a hold of them regarding their properties.

Ms. Rogers stated that not being able to contact the landlord is a stumbling block as Martindale Brightwood tries to rehab the properties in the area. She said that there are some things they cannot do alone at the neighborhood level, they need the help of City officials.

Chair Smith stated that there is another committee that is addressing that particular issue more directly, but this committee wanted to give the neighborhoods a voice to take action in their communities. Chair Smith asked Mr. Knight to explain Weed and Seed. Mr. Knight stated that the United States Justice Department gives a five-year grant of \$200,000 to neighborhoods to help "weed out the bad elements and seed in the good." He said that these funds go towards different programs and projects for the children in those neighborhoods. Ms. Rogers stated that there are also summer day camps for the children.

Councillor Scales asked what role the Marion County Health Department has played in working with Martindale Brightwood regarding the vacant and abandoned homes. Ms. Rogers stated that the Health Department gives out citations at the properties. She said that it is hard for them to find out who owns those vacant or abandoned homes. Councillor Scales asked if Ms. Rogers could explain what the Keystone Enterprise Project entails. Ms. Rogers stated that the project is located right off of I-70 and Keystone. She said that this project started years ago with the City and Martindale Brightwood CDC was brought into the picture later. The development has a number of commercial businesses located there to spur economic development and employ individuals from the neighborhood for those businesses.

Councillor Minton-McNeill applauded the Martindale Brightwood CDC for all of their hard work and asked if they were a part of Greater Indianapolis Neighborhood Initiative (GINI). Ms. Rogers stated that she is familiar with them, but Martindale Brightwood is not a part of them. She said that Martindale Brightwood wants to do some things to model what GINI has done in the neighborhoods.

Councillor McQuillen asked if there were any surveillance cameras located in the Martindale Brightwood area. Ms. Rogers stated that she does not believe that there are many in the neighborhood.

#### Choose Peace Presentation

Sondra Connor, advocate for Peace

Ms. Connor stated that she was inspired a couple years ago to create some simple ways to relay a simple message, which is "Choose Peace." She said that the idea behind this was to give individuals something tangible and visible so that they can be more conscious of the choices that they make. She said that there are postcards, stickers and magnets available so that people can see that they do have a choice. Ms. Connor stated that she started this as a fundraiser and the director of the Peace Learning Center decided that this should be made a community-wide effort.

Community Affairs Committee

April 17, 2008

Page 4

Chair Smith asked Ms. Connor to explain the Peace Learning Center. Ms. Connor stated the Peace Learning Center is a non-profit organization that works with different school systems to provide seminars and workshops for children and adults in making good choices and avoiding conflicts. She said that these are tools that all of us can use to survive in this society.

Chair Smith thanked the individual presenters for coming and looks forward to hearing more from them.

With no further business pending, and upon motion duly made, the Community Affairs Committee of the City County Council was adjourned at 6:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kent Smith, Chair  
Community Affairs Committee

KS/law