

CITY OF ROCK ISLAND
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION
MARCH 27, 2023 – 5:30 p.m.

3/27/23 – Minutes

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Thoms asked City Clerk Samantha Gange to call the roll.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Thoms asked City Clerk Samantha Gange to call the roll.

Present: Alderpersons Randy Hurt, Judith Gilbert, Dylan Parker (virtual), Mark Poulos, Bill Healy, and Mayor Mike Thoms.

Absent: Moses Robinson.

Staff: City Manager Todd Thompson, City Attorney Dave Morrison, City Clerk Samantha Gange, and other City staff.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Thoms asked if there was anyone in the audience or virtually that wished to comment. No residents volunteered to speak.

SUNSET PARK CAMPGROUND PRESENTATION

Parks and Recreation Director John Gripp addressed Council regarding the potential for a campground at Sunset Park. He discussed options for potential campground sites. The southern location of the park may be open to tent camping, the east side has potential with a parking lot and an old ballfield, and property on Skafidas Parkway is also a possibility. He said there are five different types of sites. The first, or back in, is the most common and most efficient use of space with more campers. A pull through site is considered desirable by RV owners, but uses the most space. Pull in sites allow motorhomes to look out of the front of the vehicle at river views. Tent sites are located off walking trails, and cabin sites are for those who do not have RVs and do not wish to tent camp.

Mr. Gripp said these are all potential ideas that could be done with a campground, and potential revenues could help offset expenses involving Sunset Marina. He noted all of the industry professionals

he spoke with regarding this potential project recommended performing a feasibility study. This would consist of a site visit, market analysis, conceptual design, and a financial plan, which includes developing a fee structure. He said the feasibility study cost would range from \$20,000 to \$50,000, but a Request For Proposal (RFP) would be necessary.

Alderson Hurt asked if there is median range estimate for the cost of the study. Mr. Gripp replied said two out of the five he met with were impressive, and averaged a cost of \$29,000. Alderson Robinson asked Mr. Gripp what his recommendation would be. Mr. Gripp said if the City plans to invest in the marina and make it a destination, attracting people via a campground would be helpful. Alderson Hurt said his observation is that local campgrounds are full most of the time, and such a thing in the City could make the marina a destination spot. Alderson Robinson said this idea will help the City utilize the river and nearby space.

Mr. Gripp said the usual flooding in the area is typical of other campgrounds that are near water, and is also currently done at Sunset Marina. He noted the industry professionals he spoke with were impressed with the City's access to the highway system and location. Alderson Healy said he sees the potential campground area as an underutilized asset. City Manager Thompson noted that revenues exceeded expenses on an annual basis at the campground located in the city he previously worked for, but that does not speak to initial investments. He added he has heard from a campground company employee that the Rock Island location is desirable due to proximity to the river and bike path.

City Attorney Morrison noted to Mr. Gripp that the campgrounds he passes on the bike path to Port Byron, IL are consistently full. Mayor Thoms said if the study shows that a campground is not the right thing to do, at least there will be an answer for citizens. Alderson Robinson said there are also other areas close to the river that can be developed into campground areas, including recently-acquired land.

Alderson Gilbert asked Mr. Thompson asked if the \$24,000 allocated on the agenda for a Sunset Marina marketing analysis was coming from the marina's \$1 million funding pot, and if any potential campground analysis would also come from that. Mr. Thompson replied that the agenda item is an amount that could be taken from that \$1 million pot, or from undesignated American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, but the campground study would specifically be coming from ARPA funds.

ILLINOIS QUAD CITIES LAND BANK PRESENTATION

Community and Economic Development Department Director Miles Brainard addressed Council regarding an update to the Illinois Quad Cities Land Bank and a general discussion of housing. He summarized the attributes, benefits, and purposes of a land bank. He said land banks are created in an attempt to address blighted properties. He noted that the land bank group has moved slowly with the intention of being fiscally responsible, including the formation of a 10-year pro forma budget and setting goals.

Mr. Brainard referenced the 2022 measure approved by Council that allocated \$36,571 annually to the land bank, for which Moline is fronting. There are three options to repay that, including applying to the Illinois Housing Development Authority's (IHDA) Land Bank Capacity Program for operations funding, finding funds within the existing budget, and also utilizing ARPA funds.

Mr. Brainard discussed staff recommendations for the next steps in the process. He said the first step is to use ARPA dollars as the most logical option to fund the program. There is already \$500,000 in ARPA funds allocated to housing development, some of which should go towards housing stabilization. The City's portion of the land bank's operating costs for three years would be \$109,713, which is staff's recommendation. The second step in the process is to develop a strategic housing plan in the City prior to spending the funds, which would include low-impact or temporary incentives that do not affect long-term improvements.

Aldersperson Poulos asked if the proposed strategic plan would be completed by staff or a third party. Mr. Brainard replied that would be third party by putting out an RFP for a professional with more expertise. He noted many communities lack staff that has expertise in the area of new housing development. Aldersperson Healy asked for an estimate of cost for the discussed RFP. Mr. Brainard replied it would depend on the scope of the decided plan, and if the cost was more than expected, the plan could be reevaluated.

Aldersperson Gilbert asked why the proposed land bank amount was not included in the department budget for 2023. Mr. Brainard said at the time of budget development, the department had not yet finished exploring options, and confirmed that Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds were not eligible for the expense. Aldersperson Gilbert said the \$500,000 ARPA fund amount was intended for infill and market-rate housing, and \$250,000 in ARPA funds allocated for housing rehabilitation. She asked why the latter funding would not be used. Mr. Brainard said Council could choose that if desired, and noted that staff is not able to produce in-house strategic plans similar to what has been done in the past. Mr. Thompson said completing items in-house when possible is preferable, but there is not always the expertise available on staff. Aldersperson Gilbert said she did not want to use any funds already allocated for market-rate housing.

Mayor Thoms said the City has not emphasized putting effort towards market-rate housing in recent years, and opined it is time for that to become a focus. Aldersperson Parker said \$500,000 for market-rate housing incentives would not go far. He added it is not unreasonable to suggest using a portion of the market-rate housing funds for a strategic housing plan. He asked Mr. Brainard how he envisioned the land bank remaining financially sustainable after the initial three-year startup period. Mr. Brainard said it would be dependent on certain sources of income, such as the sale of properties and the pursuit of grants and contributions from municipalities.

Aldersperson Parker asked if there had been discussion regarding the establishment of a local property transfer fee. Mr. Brainard said it has not been explored in depth, as it is a longer-term conversation, but he is unsure about how local councils would receive it. Aldersperson Gilbert asked if the land bank would perform the rehabilitation of properties as well as solving title issues. Mr. Brainard replied the land bank representatives for Moline and Rock Island have determined that rehab is currently not a priority, but East Moline is more focused on help for demolitions as a non-home rule community. Currently, the properties are maintained while in holding before turning them over.

Aldersperson Robinson asked how the City would prevent management companies from acquiring the properties at a discount and taking advantage of rental rates. Mr. Brainard said it is something that could be stipulated as part of any redevelopment agreement, but is not sure if it should be. Aldersperson Poulos asked what the City is doing to keep track of absentee landlords. Mr. Brainard said staff is working on is improving the rental inspection program through the new building official. Aldersperson

Poulos asked if there was a process in which information on landlords and maintenance of said properties could be filtered down to Council members. Mr. Brainard replied he and Mr. Thompson would discuss it.

Aldersperson Parker said the main reason he is in support of this proposal is the refinement of the rental rehabilitation program and development of a strategic housing plan. Mr. Morrison said a problem with property enforcement is that some property owners are often not aware of the situations, as they are not local and parcel out property management duties. Mr. Brainard added that cities like Rock Island are often preyed upon through mechanisms such as LLC protection of properties. Mr. Morrison said many enforcement issues are out of the City's control.

Aldersperson Swanson asked if a restriction could be placed that would require property owners to live within a certain distance from the City. Mr. Brainard said there is a current stipulation requiring rental property owners to employ local property managers. He asked Council if there was a consensus that a strategic housing plan was a good idea. The Council agreed it was. Aldersperson Hurt asked if other local municipalities had done the same or similar plans. Mr. Brainard said they have not, but have considered it. He reiterated that the strategic housing plan in question is for the City and not the land bank, and there are merits to joining with other communities. He added that each of the land bank municipalities have distinctive housing needs and issues.

Aldersperson Gilbert asked how old the City's Impediments to Fair Housing Study was. Mr. Brainard said that is redone every five years, and a new one is in process. He asked Council members to communicate with himself and Mr. Thompson regarding funding for the proposed recommendations.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

MOTION:

Aldersperson Hurt moved to adjourn; Aldersperson Hurt seconded.

VOTE:

Motion passed on a 7-0-0 roll call vote. Aye: Parker, Poulos, Healy, Robinson, Hurt, Gilbert, and Swanson. Nay: None. Absent: None.

The meeting adjourned at 6:27 p.m.

Josh Adams

Josh Adams, Deputy City Clerk