

**CITY OF ROCK ISLAND
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION
January 10, 2022 - 5:30 p.m.**

**City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3rd Floor
1528 Third Avenue, Rock Island, IL**

1/10/2022 - Minutes

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Thoms called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

THIS MEETING WILL BE CONDUCTED BY AUDIO AND VIDEO CONFERENCE WITHOUT A PHYSICALLY PRESENT QUORUM OF THE ROCK ISLAND CITY COUNCIL DUE TO THE DISASTER DECLARATION ISSUED BY GOVERNOR PRITZKER.

ROLL CALL

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

Present: Alderperson Moses Robinson (virtual), Alderperson Randy Hurt, Alderperson Jenni Swanson, Alderperson Dylan Parker, Alderperson Mark Poulos, and Mayor Mike Thoms. Absent: Alderperson Judith Gilbert.

City Staff: Interim City Manager John Gripp, City Clerk Samantha Gange, and other City staff.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Thoms asked if anyone in the public wished to speak. No residents volunteered to speak in person or virtually.

WEST END ASSESSMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS PRESENTATION

Martin Luther King Jr. Center Director Jerry Jones gave a brief history of what had taken place with the West End Assessment completed by Enterprise Community Partners, which was previously presented to Council in September 2021. He noted that there was not enough time to delve into the findings of the report, and at the urging of Council, he wished to provide more information about findings as well as detail the next steps in the process. He acknowledged Ms. Jordan Pearlstein (Director of Equitable Recovery and Revitalization at Enterprise Community Partners) via remote connection.

Ms. Pearlstein introduced herself and noted that she worked in partnership with the MLK Center, the Community and Economic Development Department, and several community leaders in the West End to complete the assessment. She provided a refresher of information on the results from the assessment, noting that the purpose of the project was to assess the needs and opportunities in the West End in order to improve the lives and livelihoods of residents. She noted that the initial approach to the assessment was revised in order to prioritize the voices of West End residents. She mentioned certain factors affecting the project shift such as the pandemic and the racial reckoning movement of 2020.

Ms. Pearlstein said the assumption that West End residents had not been able to share their thoughts was incorrect, but rather that they had done so and did not see change happening in the community. As a result, she said going back to the residents may have led to greater frustration and distrust with the process. She said that led to a shift in the project to focus on recommendations from the findings and community conveners.

Ms. Pearlstein discussed the findings of the assessment, separating them into the categories of assets and disparities. Assets include the programs and investments from the City, the renovations of Douglas Park, social capital, and trusted community leaders and organizations. Disparities included a lack of safe, affordable housing, the high rate of disconnected youth, lower home values, low economic security, limited access to healthy food and other needed amenities, underperforming schools, and poor infrastructure. She noted that the disparities remained numerous, complex, and interrelated, pointing to significant differences between the West End and surrounding areas in the City, as well as differences between white and non-white residents.

Ms. Pearlstein explained that part of the assessment was to better understand why the disparities occur despite the investment by the City and philanthropic partners. She discussed the barriers revealed by the study, which include constrained resources, communication and access issues, insufficient focus on equity, siloed efforts, and low civic capital. She then listed certain windows of opportunity, including an influx of public and philanthropic funding, school district improvements, increase in the minimum wage, and the Rise United program from United Way.

Ms. Pearlstein discussed the tenets of the West End assessment, including the guiding vision statement, values, and goal of the study. She then touched on cross-cutting keys to success, which are considered as part of any goals, objectives, or strategies to be implemented. These include making sure the work was equity-centered, designed for multiple impacts, had cross-sector collaboration, addressed the long-term impacts, and was healing-centered with culturally and linguistically competent approaches.

Ms. Pearlstein discussed the original recommended objectives and strategies to inspire action. The first objective is strengthening the civic capital in the West End. She noted the five strategies under that objective. The second objective is building West End residents' assets and incomes. She noted the six strategies under that objective. The third objective is increasing housing stability and quality and community control of land and housing. She noted the three strategies under that objective. The fourth objective is increasing the economic vitality of the West End. She noted the five strategies under that objective. The fifth and final objective is improving the infrastructure and visual design of the West End. She noted the three strategies under that objective.

Ms. Pearlstein discussed the proposed next steps in the assessment. The first is to develop a plan and infrastructure for implementation for the long haul. She discussed strategies for how to implement this plan, including the establishment and support of a cross-sector implementation team and developing a stakeholder engagement and communications plan. She noted that the plan should define measurable goals, performance metrics, and indicators in order to track

progress and have accountability.

Ms. Pearlstein remarked on the second proposed step in the assessment, which is preparing a neighborhood revitalization strategy. This would include partnership with the City's Community and Economic Development Department in order to prepare a Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy. This would be either an amendment to the department's existing 2019-2023 Consolidated Plan or part of the 2024-2028 Consolidated Plan.

Ms. Pearlstein and Mr. Jones entertained questions from Council. Alderperson Hurt asked if the outlined areas in the presentation were a true depiction of the assessment area. Mr. Jones responded affirmatively. Alderperson Hurt said he was approached by members of the Nonprofit Consortium on 11th Street (NPC 11) group that were unaware of the assessment, and asked who determined the geographical region for the assessment. Mr. Jones replied that it was based on census tracts, and the funding source wished to ensure that the assessment did not become too broad. Alderperson Hurt noted that certain residents of what would be considered the West End were not aware, and feel left out of the conversation. Mr. Jones said boundaries did need to be drawn, but they are not so hard drawn as if there would be no ancillary effect. He added that using census data lent objectivity to the boundary-setting, and as a founding member of NPC 11, he noted that due to the pandemic, meeting as a group has not taken place for over a year.

Alderperson Robinson also responded by asking for a focus to remain on the West End, as it has traditionally been identified as a certain portion of Rock Island. He concurred with Mr. Jones that there would be an ancillary effect on areas outside of the set boundary. He noted that the area is likely one of the worst areas in the City in terms of low-income housing, the food desert, income levels, and the number of refugees. He said the purpose of the project was to identify what needs are at the forefront within the area, and that the findings of the initial assessment show that the same issues that existed in 1970 exist today as well, which have never been addressed. He added that residents in the West End area feel like they have been dismissed by the City for many years.

Alderperson Hurt remarked that there should have been more inclusion of 2nd Ward residents who would also consider themselves members of the West End. He offered that the assessment should include more 2nd Ward residents further south. Alderperson Robinson responded that there would be a spill-over effect, and that the data showed where the needs were. He noted that during their recent campaigns, he and Thurgood Brooks spoke with the entire City to gather data. Mr. Jones noted that one of the instructions received from funding sources is that a defined geographic area was needed. He added that census tracts were used to be objective, which proved beneficial. He said the work done would not be exclusionary, and in fact has had actual residents contribute to the survey. Alderperson Robinson added that the conversations and meetings that were held to help develop the program involved residents from all over the City, and the desired outcomes include improving the entire City and not only the 1st Ward. Alderperson Hurt gave an example and asked if certain criteria were necessary to participate in certain housing programs. Mr. Jones replied that the next steps in the assessment have yet to be defined, but there have been no discussions involving limiting it to just the West End.

Alderperson Hurt remarked on the presentation's assets, saying he found it odd that the MLK Center was not listed. He said it should be included as an asset, as it is a major one. Mr. Jones noted that it could be classified under the category of City of Rock Island programs and investments. Ms. Pearlstein added that the MLK Center was listed under the category of trusted community leaders and organizations. Alderperson Robinson added that the MLK Center is limited on what can be done at this time, as it has no room for additional programming. He said that fact drove some responses gathered for the project, but the Center does not have the capacity.

Aldersonperson Hurt asked about strategy 2.4 of the presentation regarding a pilot guaranteed income program. Based on his research, he asked what Mr. Jones' vision for that program would be, how it would be run, and how it would be funded. Mr. Jones replied that none of the programs have been selected for implementation, and thus he did not have a vision at the moment. Ms. Pearlstein added that there would need to be more work done to better answer Aldersonperson Hurt's questions.

Aldersonperson Hurt asked about strategy 2.6 of the presentation regarding incentivizing child saving accounts, and whether there was an example to follow from other communities. Ms. Pearlstein replied that there are other communities that have done that, and explained best practices from those examples. Aldersonperson Robinson noted the Metropolitan Youth Program, in which incentives are given for good grades, and positive saving habits are taught.

Aldersonperson Parker said the focus of the study is not on the 5th Ward, but he is ok with that. He noted that there are limited resources, and Council should be mindful of the City's history in prioritizing a revitalization focus. He said he looked forward to watching the assessment move forward.

Aldersonperson Robinson asked Mr. Jones to provide a background on the origins of the assessment. Mr. Jones said when the John Deere Foundation initially approached them, they provided a broad scope of opportunities for investment. The foundation said the approach needed to be laser-focused and something that could create a lasting and important impact in the City, as well as ensuring that the voices heard would be the voices most impacted. Mayor Thoms added that the John Deere Foundation continued to be enthusiastic after having the initial assessment results presented to them.

Aldersonperson Hurt asked upon approval of the continuation of the assessment, when could Council expect an update on the progress. Mr. Jones replied that the contract with Enterprise would define the timeline, but they were looking at a one-year limit depending on when the contract is signed. Ms. Pearlstein concurred, and pointed out that some strategies presented are designed to be pilots, and some are focused on policy changes that may have impacts throughout the City. Interim City Manager John Gripp asked for confirmation that the twelve-month time period would be used to design the plan. Mr. Jones responded affirmatively, and that during that time if the City could implement small efforts to gain trust in the community, that would be helpful. Aldersonperson Swanson asked that the group look at funding sources during that time period. Mr. Jones noted that the subject of funding weighs heavily on everything moving forward. Ms. Pearlstein added that other financial institutions can and should play an important role in the process.

MOTION TO ADJOURN.

MOTION:

Aldersonperson Parker moved to adjourn; Aldersonperson Poulos seconded.

VOTE:

Motion passed on a 5-0-1 roll call vote. Aye: Swanson, Parker, Poulos, Robinson, and Hurt. Nay: None. Absent: Gilbert.

The meeting adjourned at 6:24 p.m.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Josh Adams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

Josh Adams, Deputy City Clerk