

**CITY OF ROCK ISLAND
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION
July 13, 2020 - 5:30 p.m.**

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

7/13/2020 - Minutes

VACANT PROPERTY AND RENTAL REGISTRATION

Planning and Redevelopment Administrator Miles Brainard said the subject of creating a registry for vacant and rental properties has been in the works for some time. He said problems that have arisen are properties that are not well-maintained, foreclosed and vacant properties, the time-consuming nature of identifying and registering properties, and trying to both register and enforce compliance.

Mr. Brainard said Staff put out a RFP for help with the registration process so the focus could be on enforcement. He said the sole respondent to the RFP was ProChamps, the leading company for this type of task. He said in a partnership with ProChamps, they take care of registration work by hunting down data and fee collection, leaving Staff available for enforcement. He introduced Stan Urban of ProChamps to discuss how their program works and how to onboard with them.

Mr. Urban introduced himself and thanked the Mayor and Council for offering the opportunity. He said they secure and provide all names, addresses, phone numbers, and emails to the property owners and managers who are hired to maintain the property, and any asset managers. He said they do not interfere with server space in handling this information, and there is no charge to acquire it. He said the company charges the banks and the property owners, not the City. He said the City would need to pass an ordinance that states any foreclosure or vacant property must be registered with ProChamps. He said they collect all fees, retain a portion, then remit the majority back to the City, and as properties are identified and registered for the first time, the City would see new revenues. Mr. Urban said the ownership changes hands often, and so they need to stay on top of the properties on a semi-annual basis. He said the recommended registration fee is \$300 semi-annually.

Mr. Urban opened up the presentation for questions. Alderman Parker asked if the City would need to define what a vacant building is should an ordinance be proposed, and Mr. Brainard confirmed yes. Alderman Parker asked how different types of vacancies would be handled under the registration proposal. Mr. Urban said at this point no rental properties are considered vacant, and after some time they will come back to rentals after they have proven how to identify foreclosed or vacant properties. He said it is up to the board to decide what is considered vacant. Mr. Urban said 90 days or more is considered vacant property in Illinois, and that it is up to Council and Staff how enforcement is to be handled. Mr. Brainard said Staff is currently working on an ordinance that will detail more about definitions and enforcement.

Alderman Parker asked if this defined certain requirements for vacant or foreclosed properties. Mr. Brainard said those are currently already covered by property maintenance requirements, but the proposal would help Staff with enforcement of those requirements. Mr. Urban said if someone receives a foreclosure letter, ProChamps is not notified, only when the banks notify them. Alderman Parker asked if any legal issues have arisen with cities in Illinois. Mr. Urban said no one has been challenged. Alderman Spurgetis asked if a resident contacted him regarding a vacant property in their neighborhood, what should he do with that information. Mr. Urban said

they had an obligation to discuss a vacant property, and they submit that to a designated point person with the City, where the decision is made to proceed or dismiss. Alderman Spurgetis asked again whom he should contact within the City, and Mr. Brainard said the Inspection Division.

Mr. Brainard said there would be two ProChamps staff members assigned to the City to coordinate with Staff. He said there will be an interface for both Staff and the public to register their own properties. Alderman Hurt asked why there would be a lapse of time after entering the agreement for rentals. Mr. Brainard said Staff was working to create a second ordinance that would address rental property registration, and would be presented in two to three months. He said the two agreements with ProChamps, one for foreclosed and vacant properties, and the other for rental properties. Mr. Urban said ProChamps wants to prove themselves with foreclosure and vacancies before starting rentals. Alderman Hurt said it was a small window of time to prove themselves. Alderman Clark asked when the ordinance would come to Council. Mr. Brainard said it would be the next Council meeting. Mr. Urban said that the services would be provided within 48 to 72 hours once the ordinance had been passed. Alderman Geenen asked if there should be a public hearing. City Manager Randy Tweet said it needs to be passed in public, but no public hearing was needed. Alderman Parker asked if \$300 was enough to get property owners to not sit on properties for tax write-offs. Mr. Urban said some communities have tried charging more, but they have run the risk of being challenged in the courts. He thanked Council for their time and consideration.

DISTRICT DISCUSSION

Police Chief Jeff VenHuizen said he would be presenting information on the timeline of events in the District over the past few weekends. He said bars opened on a limited basis starting May 29th and 30th, and then again on June 5th and 6th with no significant problems. He said the first significant issue occurred on the weekend of June 13th and 14th with an aggravated domestic battery arrest and a crowd. He said the following Monday Mayor Thoms approached all of the bars asking about voluntary compliance and closing at 1:00 a.m. He said the weekend of June 26th and 27th had a significant incident involving an attempted arrest of a federal fugitive and ensuing crowd issues. He said the weekend of July 3rd-5th had a disturbance that began inside the Black Sheep Tavern.

Chief VenHuizen presented information covering a twenty year span that showed spikes in calls for service after 1:00 a.m. He said the important thing to gather from the graphs is that after 3:00 a.m. calls for service exceed those after 1:00 a.m, and incidents in the district generally require almost all officers to respond. He said there are significant concerns about the safety of the officers and the demands being placed upon them, as crowd dynamics have changed. Mayor Thoms added that after July 4th weekend, barricades were added and check-in gates were installed, which did change the atmosphere in the District.

Alderman Hurt thanked the Chief for doing such a good job. He asked him what the expense was to man the check-in gates. Chief VenHuizen said it takes four officers and one supervisor on overtime pay to do so. Mayor Thoms thanked the bar owners for working will with each other and having good communication. Alderman Hurt asked if there was also one officer available for the City when the car-ramming incident took place. Chief VenHuizen said he assumed so because of calls for additional assistance from other agencies. Alderman Parker asked if either of the local bar owners in attendance would want to speak on the issues.

Kyle Peters, owner of Daiquiri Factory, thanked the Mayor and City Manager for working towards a solution. He said there is a common goal in creating a vibrant downtown area. He said the

problems seem to come from groups that loiter and do not have a place to go. Mr. Peters said he only asked to not make the current mandatory closing time permanent, as it is a significant financial impact to his business. Terry Tilka, owner of Rock Island Brewing Company, said he thinks a lot of adult decisions have been made trying to make it better. He said there were a lot of people who had fake IDs, no IDs, or bottles that were taken away at the gates, so it seems to have served a purpose. He said in the last hour and a half, hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent in the community, benefitting bars, restaurants, food vendors, and Uber drivers. He said it is going to be difficult going forward, but he is willing to take the chance and spend money. He said he pays out of pocket for fences and more labor, and appreciates help from the City. Mayor Thoms thanked Mr. Peters and Mr. Tilka for their leadership and working with the other owners. Mr. Tilka said a lot of the owners have stepped up and helped, including the food vendors, and others have not. He said the main problems that took place after the fences were put up were in dark parking lots.

Alderman Hurt asked when the vendors closed down the previous weekend. Mr. Peters said they were closed by 1:30 and cleaned up by 2:00. Alderman Poulos thanked Mr. Peters and Mr. Tilka for collaborating with the Police Department. Mayor Thoms thanked them for speaking and asked to talk about the whole District and not just the entertainment, since the District is much larger than just the area with the bars. Alderman Hurt said that discussion would need more than the remaining time for the study session. Alderman Parker said the downtown area has not been sustainable for years, and the cyclical issues never get resolved, including infrastructure. He said the problems are a natural result of a place that does not appear to have been cared for, and making decisions based on a brief timeline is tunnel vision. He said his recommendation is to discuss how to make the downtown sustainable and what types of revenue streams can be generated. He said he has asked for a formal security plan for the District. He asked Mr. Tweet what can be done, and how to take some of the ideas and implement them. Mr. Tweet said DARI was going to present at the study session, but they did not want to bring anything forward until things calm down. He said there will be a discussion regarding privatization as soon as the next study session. Alderman Parker discussed changing the streetscape, as it attracts the same problem.

Alderwoman Swanson says she is in favor of privatization of security and would like to pursue the conversation. She said that as the Ward 4 representative, she did not want to spend her representation fund on the District because that is not her focus. She said because of the issues in the District, it is important to have the discussion. Alderman Spurgetis agreed with Alderwoman Swanson that using representation funds should be used for Ward activities, and money for the District can be found elsewhere. He said he would like to wait for DARI suggestions before weighing in further. Alderman Geenen had nothing to add. Alderman Clark said he is in favor of privatization, as DARI may have better ideas. He said he is willing to provide representation funds. Alderman Poulos said he would not be opposed to using representation funds because of the unique situation with the budget. He said he would like to hear more about privatization. Alderman Hurt said he would like to find a different source than representation funds at this time. Mr. Tweet said that using representation funds was only a suggestion. Alderman Hurt said the City needs to keep the District safe and not on the news, as people will not want to go.

Chief VenHuizen said he came out with a strong position, but he supports business owners and wants to see what ideas come from discussing privatization and the potential benefits. He said that if new measures do not work, he can go back to the data and see the peak of activity and demand on Police services. He said the dynamics have changed as far as the mentality and hostility of crowds, and if the situation continues, there will have to be changes. Mayor Thoms said he appreciated the sentiment towards business owners, and he recognized the challenges of the Police Department. Mr. Tweet said the next topic should be postponed until the next study session. Alderman Parker wanted to discuss bouncers and what the City requires of bar owners as it pertains to security. Mr. Tilka said they are required to have trained and licensed greeters

that can assist the Police Department. Alderman Parker read part of the City code that details requirements of bar owners and security. Chief VenHuizen gave an explanation of the aggravating factors to that code, and what currently is required of a doorman. Mr. Tilka said he does not allow his doorman to break up fights in parking lots except to assist the Police Department.

Mayor Thoms ended the study session and thanked everyone for their input.

Linda Mohr, City Clerk