

BNIP NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING
Wednesday, October 29, 2014
6:00 p.m.

MEETING MINUTES

A neighborhood meeting was held on Wednesday, October 29, 2014 at 6:00 p.m. at the All Saints Church, Parish Hall, on the corner of Scott and Beeber Streets.

Kim Wheeler, Lycoming County, began the meeting, stating that this meeting is the seventh neighborhood meeting since last April and that we will continue to hold neighborhood meetings to keep a dialogue open. A show of hands indicated that there were a few new people attending today's meeting. Ms. Wheeler introduced the partners and the neighbors introduced themselves.

Ms. Wheeler mentioned that the Memorial Homes project is well underway and that later in the meeting, Phase Two, the townhome portion of the project, will be discussed. Ms. Wheeler stated that Lycoming County recently received notification that it will be receiving 2.1 million dollars of PHFA PHARE funds to continue to invest in the neighborhood. The funds are Act 13 funds from the gas drilling activity in Lycoming County. \$300,000 additional dollars have been allocated for the Brodart neighborhood. The neighborhood is 52% homeowner units and 48% rental units. \$100,000 will be allocated to the existing Homes-In-Need program and \$200,000 will be allocated to a new program to assist rental properties. Ms. Wheeler stated that it is fortunate to have an opportunity to address the rental properties. The program will require a 15% match from the property owner. More details will be provided at the January 2015 meeting. A list was circulated for those participants who are interested in the rental rehabilitation program.

Jeff Dawson, STEP, Inc., provided a status report on the Homes-In-Need program. The tenth job has just been completed. One more project is ready to start and 14 are in progress. Applications are available by contacting STEP, Inc. Mr. Dawson encouraged people to drive around the neighborhood to view the projects. The program is designed to address both interior and exterior code deficiencies with the house. An attached garage is eligible. A detached garage could also be eligible, but the focus is on the primary structure. STEP, Inc. cannot always address every code issue. STEP, Inc. does not solicit for applications. The homeowner has to request an application. Bill Kelly, Lycoming County, stated that neighbors who have gone through the program can be ambassadors of the information. An attendee asked about the length of the process. Mr. Dawson replied that 14 applications are ready, but that work may not begin until spring. The response has been tremendous and they are very busy. Jonathan Williamson, City Council member, asked how many auditors review the applications. Mr. Dawson replied that there are three staff members reviewing application audits. Mr. Dawson stated that STEP, Inc. cannot just supply materials to the homeowner. Ms. Wheeler asked if anyone who had gone through the program would like to speak about it. Diane Leidhecker, 1557 Scott St., is very pleased with work. She had siding and a roof installed. She now takes pride in her home much more than before. The entire process took approximately ten months.

Tina McDowell, Habitat for Humanity, described the "Brush with Kindness" program. Habitat is currently accepting applications for smaller exterior work such as landscaping and yard work.

Habitat has had problems finding painters. Four properties are scheduled for spring and Habitat is looking for a full schedule. Applications are available and Ms. McDowell advised that the application income guidelines are not correct. The income guidelines should be ignored. It was explained that the application is specific to Habitat and does not reflect the PHARE Program income guidelines. It is possible that tree work can be done, but Habitat would need to review the situation. Habitat does work on both homeowner and rental properties. The Habitat income guidelines are for those people who live in the property. Diane Leidhecker participated in the “Brush with Kindness” program and was very pleased with the work that was done.

Mr. Grado reviewed the public streetscape improvements taking place in the neighborhood. The funding includes \$200,000 of Act 13 dollars and \$300,000 of Community Development Block Grant dollars. This amount is being match with \$500,000 of DCED dollars for a total of \$1 million dollars of Phase I. Work will include Oliver St. and Beeber St. and the streetscape around Memorial Homes and will include street lighting.

Ms. Wheeler referenced the neighborhood workshop in July 2013 in which neighbors identified the priority points. The intersection at Oliver St. and West Fourth St. is a mini “confusion corner” and pedestrian and vehicular access was identified as the number one priority. Mr. Grado stated that the neighborhood needs to be connected with Memorial Park. The City received additional funds for Memorial Pool through the First Community Foundation. The Streets and Parks department is renovating the bath house and the Memorial Pool renovation is underway. The City will continue to try to secure more funding from corporations for the pool renovation. The guardrail along Beeber St. will be eliminated, but that will be Phase II. Phase II will focus on pedestrian access. The missing link is connecting the pool to the neighborhood and providing the proper access from neighborhood.

Ms. Wheeler introduced Jeff Eaton from Arbor Housing. Mr. Eaton stated that Arbor Housing has just marked its 45th anniversary and has worked in many communities over that time. It is rare to have as much collaboration and involvement of the public as this project does and it makes the process much nicer. Dan Gallagher, Arbor Housing, mentioned that there are construction meetings for Memorial Homes every other week. The framing of the exterior of the building has been done as well as the kitchen cabinets and plumbing on the third floor. Prep work is taking place on the second floor and the first floor will be the last area to be completed. Utility connections are good. Electrical work, landscaping and blacktop need to be done. Additional landscaping may occur in the spring. Occupancy is scheduled for the first week in December. The building is green and energy efficient and meets the PHFA standards and test requirements. There is extra insulation and the building is sealed tightly.

Diana Kritzmann, Director of Property Management for Arbor Housing, stated that all tenants must meet PHFA income requirements. Applicants are screened with a credit check and a criminal background check. Landlord references are also required and a third party verification is used. The screening process takes six to eight weeks. All units are wheelchair enterable. There are no age restrictions. The rents are for one to two bedroom and the rents are based on 60% of the median income. There is a full-time onsite manager. A maintenance phone number will be on a sign in front of the property. There is an 800 phone number and an emergency phone number. If an applicant is rejected, there is a 14 day window to respond to begin a

grievance procedure. If there is a person with a criminal background, approval may depend on the crime. No sex offenders or violent offenders will be considered. The approval process is very strict. The screening process started with 60 applicants and is now down to 26 approved applicants. If applicants have a Section 8 voucher, those applicants must be treated like any other applicant and cannot be discriminated against based on using a Section 8 voucher. Most tenants have a source of income. Following the marketing plan and beginning in September 2014, outreach letters regarding the availability of apartments were sent to 10 agencies. There was also an advertisement in the Williamsport Sun-Gazette. Getting the word out has not been an issue. Mr. Williamson stated that it is good to have public partners and neighbors participating in the programs and good to see that neighbors have questions and concerns. A ribbon cutting will be scheduled after the holidays that will include visits to the units. The development includes multiple group spaces with many amenities.

Mr. Eaton stated that the original design plan for the second phase of development at Memorial Homes development was to build 32 townhouses. This next phase is currently under discussion between the City and County, but Mr. Eaton would like to know what the neighbors are interested in for the next phase. Mr. Eaton stated that the market needs must equal the price point of the house. Starter homes and “roots” homes are a good mix that complements the neighborhood reinvestment in the community. The price would be approximately \$125,000. A neighbor commented that townhomes are more transitional. A neighbor inquired as to why a person would pay \$125,000 for a home in the neighborhood. Ms. Wheeler stated that all of the other programs and public dollars uplift the entire neighborhood and raise the home values in the area. Mayor Campana stated that Memorial Park increases the value of the properties surrounding it. Ms. Wheeler mentioned the other amenities in the neighborhood including access to the park, pool, bus route and Route 15. Mr. Eaton mentioned that Arbor Housing intends to pledge money to Memorial Pool. Mr. Ochs asked whether rents are continuing to increase because of the gas industry. Ms. Wheeler stated that rental prices have come down, but that there is still a critical housing need for young professionals, seniors, and low income. A neighbor stated that people may buy their elderly parents a townhome in the area because the area is close to the bus line and other amenities. It is especially appealing if the bedrooms and bathrooms are on the first floor for seniors. \$110,000 is not that much money for a house. Mr. Ochs asked how many applications are from people from Williamsport. Ms. Kritzmann replied that 98% of the applications are from Williamsport. Ms. Wheeler stated these people could be leaving substandard housing or leaving a situation with overcrowded conditions.

Additional suggestions for Phase II Memorial Homes provided by those in attendance were: to construct some individual homes to mimic existing housing stock in addition to townhouses and also to consider units that will promote homeownership.

Ms. Wheeler said to contact one of the project partners if there are questions and Mr. Eaton thanked the participants for their comments.

The meeting ended at 7:40 p.m.