

Tuesday - September 27, 1994 - 7:00 p.m.

Civic Center Banquet Room

Regular Meeting

Present: Mayor Russell Martin, Presiding; Vice-Mayor Chris Peterson; Councilwoman Barbara Field, Councilman Gary McClure, Councilwoman Leni Sitnick, Councilman Joseph Carr Swicegood and Councilman Herbert J. Watts; City Attorney William F. Slawter; Interim City Manager William B. Farris; and Associate City Manager/City Clerk William F. Wolcott Jr.

Absent: None

Councilwoman Sitnick gave the invocation.

PUBLIC HEARING RELATIVE TO A PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECT OF THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE AT THE CORNER OF VIRGINIA AND BROTHERTON AVENUES

Mayor Martin opened the public hearing at 7:12 p.m. He stated that the Council would not be taking any action at this meeting. After the public hearing Council will take into consideration all the comments made and put the item back onto their agenda in the very near future.

City Clerk Wolcott presented the notice to the public setting the time and date of the public hearing.

Mr. David Jones, Executive Director of the Housing Authority of the City of Asheville, presented Council a packet of information detailing what has been taking place from the beginning of the project until this public hearing. He said Project 19 was 50 units scattered through all four geographical areas of the City. The Brotherton site is about 28 units - one and two bedroom units. They are duplexes, quadraplexes, one eight unit and two eight units comprising of 28 units on this 5.6 acre tract. He noted that maps are available if the public wished to look at the design. Part of these units will be for the handicapped, and part will be for families who need one and two bedrooms - there are no three or four bedroom units there. Due to density of the area, they have taken all of the three and four bedroom units to other sites. This site would accommodate 88 units under the City's zoning ordinance, however, the Housing Authority is proposing to put 28 units on the site.

He addressed the issue about the Housing Authority being secretive about this site. In order to address the secrecy issue, he said the project started on May 14, 1992, with the submittal of HOPE I Home Ownership Application. He then read an additional 46 entries specifically noting a letter from HUD to the Mayor dated 8/31/93 regarding scattered sites; a letter from the Mayor to HUD dated 9/2/93 acknowledging receipt of this memo and committing to this project; and a letter from HUD approving this project for Asheville dated 1/12/94. He said they have met with representatives of the community to talk about what could be done in order that the project be more compatible with what the intentions of the community might be. They were unable to meet any resolution. He stated that the Housing Authority wants to do something in keeping with the neighborhood and they are still open for that at this point.

Upon inquiry of Vice-Mayor Peterson, Mr. Jones stated that on December 23, 1993, the Housing Authority bought the property in question.

The following persons spoke in support of the project for various reasons including, but not limited to, a good place to be warm, a place for homeless to live, apartments for the handicapped and retired and the basic need for low income housing in Asheville:

Beth Maczka, 7 Garden Terrace and Executive Director of the Affordable Housing Coalition

Dale Vern, resident of Pisgah View Apartments

Mary Robertson, officer of the Asheville Housing Residents

Council, officer and resident of Aston Park Towers and Chairperson of the Americans with Disabilities for Buncombe County

Noreen Woody, President of the Woodridge Residents Association

Douglas Graham, Architect for the Housing Authority

(presented blueprints of two proposed options and

briefly explained design of units)

Barbara Robertson, resident of Erskine Street Apartments

Cora Batten

Lawrence Gilliam, 10 Gilliam Place, employee of the Housing

Authority, first and only black Scoutmaster to serve

at the Trinity Church in West Asheville

Elizabeth Bocklet, 87 Forest Hill Drive

Jerilyn McMillan, resident of the Montford District and

volunteer for Helpmate

Asheville High student

Caroline Braun, resident of the ABCCM Shelter

Shanda Watkins, representing a specialty agency

working with youth in the community

John Hayes

William Wynn

Scott Dedman, resident of Montford and Executive Director of

Mountain Housing Opportunities

Lalonie Mosley

Walter Currie, Attorney for the Housing Authority

Bert Sonner, 263 Forest Hill Drive, Associate Director of

the Self-Help Credit Union, member of the Board of Realtors and own a real estate company in Asheville

A resident of the Hillcrest Housing Project

Kimberly Weston, 57 Austin Avenue

Susan Walton, 144 Chatham Road and employee of the Housing

Authority

The following persons spoke in opposition of the project, not objecting to affordable, low-income housing, but this specific Brotherton location. Their reasons include, but are not limited to, no management of the existing apartments operated by the Housing Authority, the number of housing projects that already exist in West Asheville, current traffic problems on Virginia Avenue, no comprehensive impact study, the aged water system with low water flow, no public transportation within reasonable reach, narrow road in which children walk to school, escalation of crime, the density of the property, the measurable external depreciation caused by the location of the low income housing project, the need for upgrade of the infrastructure and no sidewalks.

Kay Kort, resident of Enka Village

Margaret Ballew, 261 Virginia Avenue

Richard Nantelle, President of the West Asheville Community League and resident at 44 Virginia Avenue

-3-

Tommy Sellers, resident of East Asheville, owner of property in West Asheville for 14 years, President of the West Asheville Business Association

William Cogburn, 25 Drake Street

Becky Putnam, 17 Brotherton Avenue

Joe Chandler, President of the East End/Valley Street Association

Bill Hodges, representative of West Asheville Census Tract 10 Neighborhood Association

Dick Rice, 15 Brotherton Avenue

Jonathan Guest, resident of West Asheville

Charles Wilson, resident of West Asheville

Nicasio Martinez, resident of Leicester

Craig Justice, attorney representing the West Asheville

Community League (also presented Council with information relative to water supply, traffic counts, etc.)

Harold DeBruhl, real estate appraiser and real estate consultant with offices at 428 Haywood Road (presented Council with his report)

Oliver Downes, 135 Virginia Avenue

A resident of 43 New Jersey Avenue

Malrey Moseley, 216 Virginia Avenue

Allen Cogburn, 205 Virginia Avenue

Pam Deaton, 174 Hudson Street

Resident of Beaumont Street

Carl Chesick, 251 Virginia Avenue

Mike Wilson, Garden Circle in West Asheville

Carlos Montgomery, 242 Virginia Avenue

Mr. Nantelle, President of the West Asheville Community League, stated that his community has always warmly welcomed anyone willing to be a responsible and respectable part of it and they shall continue in that direction. However, insinuations have been made that their opposition to this project has been anti-civil rights and even racially motivated. They will not tolerate nor allow their voice to be steered or misguided in such a demeaning direction.

Mr. Tommy Sellers, President of the West Asheville Business Association, said that his Association unanimously opposes another large complex of public housing in West Asheville.

Ms. Beth Maczka, Executive Director of the Affordable Housing Coalition, presented to Council a unanimously endorsed resolution adopted by the Affordable Housing Coalition resolving that the Coalition supports affordable housing development and that the Coalition particularly opposes holding affordable housing developments to a higher standard than non-low income housing and commercial developments.

Mr. Jonathan Guest made an inquiry about a HUD policy that imposed penalties against people who spoke out against public housing projects. Not only did Ms. Maczka from the Affordable Housing Coalition and Mr. Bob Smith from the Community Relations Council assure him that their organizations backed no such policy, but Councilman McClure presented a copy of Nations Weekly which stated that HUD no longer backs that policy and that the public should not fear speaking up.

Councilwoman Sitnick questioned if Ms. Maczka had received answers to questions she raised during the Asheville-Buncombe Water Authority meeting that day. Ms. Maczka said that she had not but the Authority is looking into them.

Mr. Bill McElreath, representative of an engineering firm contracting with the Housing Authority to provide the electrical, mechanical and plumbing design for the units said that numerous questions have been raised about the availability of water at this site. He was asked by Mr. Jones if there was an engineering solution to the problem and he replied that there was. The most obvious

solution is to upgrade the water system. However, an alternative which has also been discussed would be to provide a sprinkler system in the multi-unit buildings. This is only one engineering solution, but feels there are others. When Councilwoman Sitnick asked Mr. McElreath if he would provide the Council with those solutions and the costs associated with them, he said he would.

Mr. John Broadbooks, landscape architect and consultant to the

Housing Authority, briefly explained that the project basically meets all the ordinance requirements for the development and they are ready to comply with any modifications the City Council deems appropriate.

Mr. Charlie Williams, representative of the Asheville Fire Department, passed out information relative to fire flow for the proposed project. He said that on June 24, 1994, he reviewed the project and approved it subject to the on site hydrant shown on the plans being capable of providing a minimum of 1000 gpm at 20 psi residual pressure. On August 26, 1994, Fire Marshall Wayne Hamilton Fire Marshal reported that a flow test conducted on August 23, 1994, revealed inadequate flow and pressure for the project and that improvements must be made which result in the required flow specified above. However, as an alternative, the project may be sprinklered and water line improvements made to deliver 500 gpm at 20 psi residual. He explained the reason for the difference in the requirements for sprinklered and non-sprinklered structures.

Councilwoman Sitnick wanted to say first is that she is saddened by the fact that many of you feel that this has become a referendum on affordable housing. Personally she has worked and fought for social justice and affordable housing and the poor and the disenfranchised for 25 years of her adult life. She assured this public meeting that this Mayor and this Council are committed and dedicated to providing the things that the most burdened amongst us need. When we first took office, one of the first groups that the Mayor requested to meet with was the Affordable Housing Coalition so that we could hear those needs from them. What she'd like to do is to read some questions into the record, not for response this evening to keep you here any longer, but she would like to read them into the record because she thinks it's important and she would like answers to them if we could provide a copy of these meetings in writing to the question section to the appropriate people she would be grateful.

To respond to some of the questions and concerns raised this evening:

- 1) Are we taking care of the units in existence now?
- 2) Are we going to lose \$3 Million from HUD and do we have that in writing somewhere to explain the reasons for that?
- 3) Is the cost of each unit \$74,000, as one of the speakers said earlier, and is that with or without the land?
- 4) Would zoning have allowed 25 single family homes on the 5.5 acres?
- 5) On July 6, Mr. Jones told Council that there was a 2% vacancy rate in existing housing. She wanted to know how many units was that and was that the current rate today?
- 6) How many sites were looked at?
- 7) Were there any buildable tax lots that were considered?
- 8) Is there anymore rehabilitation potential in this one-to-one battle that apparently HUD did not insist on, but was asked for. And, I applaud that from

the Housing Authority. We need to replace home ownership units with rental units.

9) Have we maximized our existing housing stock?

10) Could we buy those 28 homes, that one of the speakers referred to earlier, for less money than the units are costing? And, if we could, could the money that's left over be used to provide low interest loans to those folks who are buying those homes so that rather than put people into more rental units in housing projects, we really put them into affordable housing so that we can provide the kind of pride and self-esteem that was referred to several times.

11) Have we looked at all of the lots that houses have been demolished on or should be demolished on?

12) Could we buy units for less than we build? That's the main question.

13) Have we tried mixing public housing with market housing as Boston did, apparently to great success.

14) Is it true that in some cases these units cost more than the neighborhood houses do?

15) The United States has spent millions of our tax dollars on public housing and in some cases we have created Cabrini Greens, like in Chicago, and in other cases we've done much better. But have we looked into all of the creative ideas? Have creative solutions been stifled? Especially solutions that would be unique and appropriate to Asheville.

16) Have we challenged HUD, an agency not free from scandal and waste, she added.

17) Public housing shouldn't be a long-term solution. It should be an asset, not a liability. And have we, as the speaker earlier mentioned, screened properly, enforced properly?

For me personally, what we need to do is take the de-humanizing factors out of our policies and not put good people into living conditions that remind them everyday they're different. She lived in public housing for a year as a child and she can tell you she felt real different. People matter and she heard that from both sides of this issue tonight. They need dignity and they need self-esteem and they need to feel self-worth. They need hope with their reform and that's the human factor that ought to be part of providing affordable housing. It's a national shame that even one person in our country is homeless or hungry. She assures you this is a gut-wrenching situation for her and for the rest of Council and we have all searched our souls on this. We don't want to delete one penny from providing what is needed here. We just want to provide the kind of housing that's proper and appropriate. And that really, truly does weave people back into the fabric of society and doesn't put them in ghettos that makes them feel different every day.

Mayor Martin closed the public hearing at 9:34 p.m.

Mayor Martin then adjourned the meeting.

---

CITY CLERK MAYOR

---