

A joint special meeting of the Lake Wales City Commission and the Lake Wales Housing Authority was held on March 19, 2008 at 6:30 p.m. in the employee lunchroom at the Municipal Administration Building. The meeting was called to order by Mayor Lee A. Wheeler, III.

**CITY COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:** Jack Van Sickle; Terrye Y. Howell; Jean K. Scott; Kathy Manry; Lee A. Wheeler, III, Mayor

**CITY COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:** None

**CITY REPRESENTATIVES PRESENT:** Anthony G. Otte, City Manager; Albert C. Galloway, Jr., City Attorney; Jacquie Hawkins, Deputy City Clerk

**HOUSING AUTHORITY COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:** Deming Cowles, Chairman; Booker Young; Rebecca Seymour; Sadie Anderson; Helen Walters

**HOUSING AUTHORITY COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:** None

**HOUSING AUTHORITY REPRESENTATIVES PRESENT:** Al Kirkland, Executive Director

**ATTENDEES VIA PHONE CONFERENCE:** Barry Hersch, Financial Consultant; Jim Carver, Representative of Bessolo Design Group

**Agenda Item 1. Call to Order**

Mayor Wheeler said that the Housing Authority is an instrument of the Federal Government, regulated and answerable to the Federal Government and its mission mirrors that of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. He read the Housing Authority Mission Statement and said that the City wished to partner with the Housing Authority because they shared a common goal and that together the two boards can explore ways to enhance housing opportunities. The City was aware of the extraordinary difficulties caused by the hurricanes and the destruction of Sunrise housing complex, which significantly reduced the number of available housing units to families in need. He said that certain facts have come to his attention to suggest that the mission of the Authority is not being met to the fullest extent possible in achieving this goal. The purpose of the meeting was for both groups to explore opportunities for working together to bring needed affordable housing to Lake Wales.

Commissioner Cowles said that 30% of Lake Wales residents are at or below poverty level and yet there have only been 140 low cost housing units available for the past 35 years. He did not believe the Housing Authority was living up to its mission, though not because it had not tried to do so. He said that they now were on a course to correct the management issues, to clean up Grove Manor, and clear a path for affordable Housing.

Al Kirkland, Jr. objected to the agenda stating that he had not received it before the meeting. Commissioner Young also objected for the same reason and wanted a continuance. Chairman Cowles said that there was nothing on the agenda that had not been discussed in full at previous Housing Authority meetings, and it had also been discussed that they would talk to the City about these items. Mr. Kirkland responded that he had not brought needed documents to the meeting because he had not known what would be discussed. Chairman Cowles said there was no reason why he could not tell the others what they have been working on for over a year. Commissioner Walters said that she had not received the agenda either and only knew that they were to discuss the Bessolo Report. Mr. Otte suggested that they amend the agenda to have only the Bessolo Report and the Sunrise site, and put the rest on a future agenda. Mr. Cowles listed the other topics the Housing Authority Commission would have no problem discussing.

**Agenda Item 2. Discussion of the Report on Conditions at Grove Manor**

Commissioner Cowles called Jim Carver who had been selected through a lengthy process from four candidates. He explained that they had been looking for someone who could renovate Grove Manor, plus work on the construction of the Sunrise project. The compilation of the Bessolo Report was the first task, which was to list the things that needed to be fixed at Grove Manor and to calculate the cost. Mr. Carver went over the report item by item, which included the following:

- Exterior and Interior Architectural: replace 547 screens; clean the exterior masonry walls on 71 buildings; inspect for termites; renovate 158 bathrooms; finish or refinish 460 interior doors; and replace gas ranges and refrigerators in 10 units annually until all are finished.
- Plumbing: provide a location for clothes washers within the unit or provide a centrally located Laundromat, replace tub/shower faucets and shower heads, and remove and replace gas water heaters at 5 units per year.
- Electrical: (the broken electrical meter base with exposed live conductors has been fixed); provide new disconnects/meter centers for each building immediately; provide new vandal proof telephone and cable TV service boxes, wiring and grounding, provide new ground fault indicators in front of all 140 dwelling units; provide existing bedroom circuits with AFCI protection; provide new vandal proof compact florescent lights, weatherproof fixtures for front and rear porches; provide receptacles with ground fault feed in kitchen units; provide existing receptacle locations with Ground Fault Indicator Breakers in bathrooms; and provide new loadcenters and circuit breakers for all dwelling units.

Commissioner Scott mentioned that there was very little blown insulation in those apartments and that people did not use their air-conditioning because their bills would be \$200 to \$300 a month. Commissioner Seymour said they also needed to check the stoves because the one she saw was rusted and looked terrible. It was mentioned that they needed to check for smoke detectors and possibly putting in carbon monoxide detectors.

Mayor Wheeler asked if the units were safe for occupancy or were residents at risk of electrocution. He was told that they were not at any immediate risk. Commissioner Cowles asked if owners of privately owned buildings would be required to fix these electric issues immediately and he was told no, unless it was a newly constructed building. Mr. Otte added that if at least 50% of the building value was damaged, then they would have to rebuild to the new code requirements.

Mr. Otte asked about the recommended fiberglass panel tubs. Mr. Carver said that installing them would be easier on the tenants as it would not tie up the bathrooms as long as tiling would. Commissioner Cowles asked if using the fiberglass would reduce the mold and mildew problem and he was told it would, and that any existing mildew or mold would be treated before the fiberglass was installed.

Mayor Wheeler went over the report from City Building Official, Cliff Smith, which was distributed among the members. His concerns were the following: the clothes dryers needed to be moved inside, toilets needed to be replaced, smoke detectors needed to be installed, mechanical ventilation needed to be put in the bathrooms, and insulation added.

**Agenda Item 3. Discussion of Plans for Site Improvements, Including Additional Units at Grove Manor**

Commissioner Cowles said that the Housing Authority Commissioners had made a list of site issues, which included the following: landscaping, an education center, painting the buildings, recreational needs, dumpsters, streets, noise, speeding, streetscaping, and the addition of 10 to 15 new units. After they decided what they wanted addressed, they hired an architect and engineer firm Bessolo Design Group, to come up with a plan. The next step would be to set up a timeline. Then the Housing Authority Board would like to meet with residents to gather their ideas and make sure they did not miss something important.

**Agenda Item 4. Discussion of the Payment of Funds owed to the City by the Housing Authority and the Use of those Funds for the Planting of Palm Trees on Seminole Avenue in Grove Manor**

Mayor Wheeler asked what funds were available for the projects. Mr. Kirkland said that the project would cost over one million dollars and explained the Capital Fund Program, which pays over a 15 to 20 year period. Mr. Kirkland said he did not want residents to have to wait that long for repairs. He explained another source of funding through tax credits. To answer the Mayor's question, Mr. Kirkland said they had two million dollars on hand.

Mr. Hersch, by telephone, explained that it would be better to get low income tax credits to build new units because it would not be as time consuming. He explained in detail the process and said that for every dollar spent you would get \$7.31 in credits, which could be sold to developers for probably 85 cents to the dollar. He said that it was too late to apply this year as the deadline was the end of the month. He was asked how long it would take to prepare the application, and Mr. Hersch said between 100 and 150 hours, and then they would have 20 months after it was approved to do the work. Commissioner Cowles asked if tax-credits would work for both Sunrise and Grove Manor, and he was told it would. Commissioner Manry asked if they could apply for both Sunrise and Grove Manor at the same time and Mr. Hersch said they could. He explained that when you applied, you were given a rating number and the lowest numbers were funded. He explained the complicated process and Code section 42 and its relevance to the project. He said that he would send some information to Chairman Cowles early next week.

Mayor Wheeler asked, if all went the way they wanted with the application, how long it would take to "turn dirt." Mr. Hersch said that if we filed in March it would take about three months for the preliminary scores with time for us to correct deficiencies. Then, a preliminary allocation certificate would be received by June. The credit underwriting process would take about 25 days. By early September they would be ready to start and would have 15 months to complete the project. To answer the Mayor's question, it would take four to five months to "turn dirt."

Chairman Cowles asked Mr. Hersch about the grocery store requirement on the existing site and was told that would not be a requirement for a Housing Authority. Chairman Cowles asked if Mr. Hersch could come to Lake Wales during the next couple of months to attend a meeting and Mr. Hersch said he could.

**Agenda Item 5. Status of the Re-Development of Sunrise**

Mayor Wheeler asked what had been done on the Sunrise project in the almost 4 years since the hurricanes that destroyed it. Mr. Kirkland said that they did a market study and are expecting approval by late April, early May. They looked into building on another plot with the possibility of selling the existing location for funding, or arrange a land swap. He said they did not have to restrict themselves to tax credits because there were other funding possibilities available that they were checking into. He added that developers and banks had shown an interest in the project.

**Agenda Item 6. Discussion of a Process for Appointment of Members of the Housing Authority Board**

Chuck Galloway, City Attorney explained to the Housing Authority Board the procedure for appointing members, which is that the Mayor appoints a member and the Commission approves or does not approve the appointment. Mayor Wheeler said that he would be looking for applicants with experience in construction, and finance as well as social knowledge. Mr. Kirkland said the terms are staggered, beginning in July, with a 4-year, three consecutive term limit.

**Agenda Item 7. Other**

Mayor Wheeler asked Finance Director Sylvia Edwards how much money the Housing Authority still owed the City for past payments in lieu of taxes. Ms. Edwards said \$911.95. Chairman Cowles asked Mr. Kirkland to write out the check.

COMMISSION COMMENTS

Mayor Wheeler said that there were homeless people in Lake Wales and that with the resources that were available we needed to provide them with affordable housing.

Chairman Cowles said that the problems at Grove Manor needed to be addressed, including the need for slowing traffic on Seminole, moving the dumpsters to the back of the buildings, planting trees along the road, and lighting issues. He asked if the City would be able to help with labor.

Mr. Otte said that the Housing Authority had requested palm trees to be planted along Seminole and that the City could look into using some of the tree-fund money obtained from developers who had to tear down trees. He said that palm trees cost about \$200 each and were 12-foot trees.

Commissioner Seymour asked why they would plant palm trees instead of shade trees and Mr. Otte explained that palm trees were what had been requested by the Housing Authority because children would want to climb the shade trees. He added that cabbage palms were hurricane resistant.

Chairman Cowles asked about purchasing plants from Roosevelt Academy. He said that before we actually planted the cabbage palms the Commissioners needed to be sure that cabbage palms were what were wanted. Mr. Otte said that before anything was planted, the Housing Authority needed to address the problem of people parking on the grass.

Commissioner Manry asked if the Housing Authority had a grant writer and they did not. Mr. Otte suggested that Mr. Kirkland talk with Andy Easton, the City's contracted grant-writer. It was also brought up that the County library had a large section on grants that would be helpful.

Commissioner Howell said that before the City would be willing to help the Housing Authority, they needed to put forth a good-faith effort of what they planned to do with the property they already had, that being Grove Manor. She said that the City helped with the speed issue on Seminole Ave. and ended up wasting a lot of money because the Housing Authority did not enforce the rules. Things needed to be done about residents driving on the grass, about the loud music still going on late at night and other things that have gone on for years. As far as she could tell, nothing has improved and until the Housing Authority shows that it is able to take care of these type matters, she did not think the City should help.

There was a discussion about the location of Housing Authority meetings. It was determined that the room was too small to encourage Grove Manor residents to participate and that very few residents came to the meetings. Suggestions were made about possible locations that were larger. Linda Kimbrough said that when her son was on the Housing Authority Board they met at the James P. Austin Community Center right across the street from Grove Manor, in a much larger room, and yet very few showed up. She did not believe it had anything to do with the size of the room. She said she saw signs all over the place for the present meeting and yet only a handful of residents showed up. She added that you could give someone a silver spoon, but you could not make them eat with it, and that people had to learn to take responsibility for their own lives. She said she had been involved with help groups, but only a few of the people stuck to what they needed to do to improve their situations.

Chairman Cowles said that they needed to keep trying by working with residents. Commissioner Anderson said that the meetings are announced in the newspapers, but many people at the Manor do not subscribe to the newspapers. She suggested having meetings announced on local radio stations and put fliers out.

A gentleman from the audience said that people do not tend to come to meetings unless there is an issue pertinent to them. If the Housing Authority puts relevant issues out there, the people will come. He suggested getting people involved with the landscape process, having them help to plant the flowers etc.

Chairman Cowles said that the Board has been discussing ways to make the meetings more resident friendly by placing the communication portion to the front of the meeting, by not requiring them to sign before speaking, and by speeding along the agenda items so the meetings don't drag on. He suggested

that they may have to go door to door and speak with residents individually to find out about their concerns. He suggested starting a newsletter to be distributed among residents and said that residents needed to be educated before the codes could be enforced.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

  
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Mayor/Commissioner

ATTEST:

  
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City Clerk