



Council Communication No. 97-341

SYNOPSIS –

The Housing Improvement and Neighborhood Revitalization Program proposed by the consulting firm of Stockard and Engler, Inc. was approved in February 1990 by the Des Moines City Council and the Polk County Board of Supervisors. Since 1990, twelve neighborhoods have been chosen for inclusion in the intensive neighborhood planning and implementation process. On July 22, 1996, by Roll Call 96-2650, the City Council voted to reclassify Woodland Heights and Union Park as charter neighborhoods. Following the neighborhood selection process that was approved by City Council by Roll Call 97-1044 on March 24, 1997, applications were sent to all recognized neighborhoods and eight neighborhoods submitted applications for designation. Staff presented their recommendation to the NAB on June 18, and the NAB recommends that the following neighborhoods– Fairgrounds Neighbors for Community Improvement, North of Grand Neighborhood Association, and Sherman Hill Association– be designated by the Neighborhood Advisory Board. The NAB is forwarding their recommendation to the City Council for approval.

FISCAL IMPACT –

N/A.

RECOMMENDATION –

Approval.

BACKGROUND –

The Housing Improvement and Neighborhood Revitalization Program, proposed by the consulting firm of Stockard and Engler, Inc., was approved in February 1990 by the Des Moines City Council and the Polk County Board of Supervisors. As recommended in this revitalization program, the County and the City have combined with Des Moines business leaders to form a public/private partnership that addresses critical housing issues within the metropolitan area. Since 1990, twelve neighborhoods have been chosen for inclusion in the intensive neighborhood planning and implementation process. The program has provided for residential rehabilitation, commercial revitalization, and public infrastructure improvements which are funded through the Neighborhood Finance Corporation, the City of Des Moines Capital Improvement Program, and the U.S. Department of Housing Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant Program.

The neighborhood planning process relies on resident groups to identify the critical neighborhood issues in their area. Technical assistance and planning coordination is provided by a planning team headed by staff from the City of Des Moines Community Development Department. The planning team works in conjunction with the neighborhood group to develop appropriate goals and a feasible action plan. These neighborhood action plans then become the basic components that activate the implementation of the revitalization program.

The Community Development Department recommended that two neighborhoods be phased out of the Revitalization Program. These neighborhoods– Woodland Heights and Union Park– have experienced success in revitalization and are no longer in need of a major commitment of public and private resources. This recommendation was approved by the NAB on July 3, 1996 and by City Council on July 22, 1996 by Roll Call No. 96-2650.

In accordance with the neighborhood selection process that was approved by the NAB at their March 5, 1997, meeting and by the City Council on March 24, 1997 by Roll Call No. 97-1044, City staff contacted all recognized neighborhoods. The application process required each neighborhood to submit a packet of information by May 15, 1997. The following eight neighborhoods responded: Fairground Neighborhoods for Community Improvement, Gray' s Woods Neighborhood Association, King-Irving Park Neighborhood Association, Laurel Hill Neighborhood Association, Martin Luther King Jr. Park Neighborhood Association, New Vision in Focus Neighborhood Family Estates, North of Grand Neighborhood Association, and Sherman Hill Association. On June 11, the eight neighborhoods applying for designation made 30-minute presentations to the NAB consisting of a 15-minute presentation by the neighborhood and 10 minutes to answer questions from NAB members.

After a period of evaluation which included neighborhood surveys and data analysis, City staff made recommendations on which neighborhoods should be included in the neighborhood revitalization program. As a first step in the evaluation process, neighborhoods received scores based on the following criteria: housing conditions, percent of owner occupancy, median assessed property value, population, median income, zoning code violations, infrastructure needs, and crime rate. These scores were used to classify the eight neighborhoods as stable, transitional, or distressed. Fairgrounds, Gray' s Woods, ML King Park, North of Grand, and Sherman Hill were classified as transitional positive. King-Irving, Laurel Hill, and New Vision were classified as transitional negative. The staff recommendations were presented to the NAB on June 18, 1997.

The staff recommendations were presented to the NAB on June 18, 1997. This recommendation supports a NAB policy of using a balanced approach to assist all types of neighborhoods, and recognizes that limited public resources exist. The three neighborhoods that were classified as transitional negative have demonstrated their concern for their neighborhoods and a desire to see them improved, but a successful revitalization effort will require greater financial resources and staff support than are available at this time. Laurel Hill, New Vision in Focus Neighborhood Family Estates, and King-Irving Park Neighborhood Association are encouraged to resubmit their application for the next round of selection. At that time, the Revitalization Program will be ready to select one new transitional negative neighborhood.

All of the neighborhoods that were classified as transitional positive have potential and show what can be accomplished with strong neighborhood organizations. All of the five transitional positive neighborhoods have unique characteristics and represent different challenges for the Revitalization Program. In making a recommendation, staff considers the needs of the neighborhood and the available resources such as the NFC Program, the CIP budget, staff resources, and the availability of other funding sources. Another phase of the staff review includes other factors that can affect revitalization efforts such as:

- Visibility of the neighborhood;
- Major public and private investments made over the last 5-10 years;
- Potential spin off development that may occur if a revitalization program was undertaken;
- Strength, longevity and viability of the neighborhood organization; and
- Geographic dispersal.

After considering all of the information, staff recommends that Fairground Neighbors for Community Improvement and North of Grand Neighborhood Association should be selected as the newest participants in the Designated Neighborhood Program. Staff also recommends that the Sherman Hill Association be considered for some limited planning and NFC financing.

1. The Fairground Neighborhood is characterized by moderate-sized homes on moderate-sized lots. To date, this neighborhood has not been the recipient of any targeted federal funding programs. It is a working class neighborhood with an older, reasonably well-maintained housing stock that needs updating. The housing conditions reported by the Assessor's Office shows that the majority of the structures are in normal or better condition, and only four percent are in poor condition. The median income is 80 percent of the City median and is the third highest of the eight applicants for selection. This is the type of neighborhood that can receive maximum benefit from NFC programs.

This neighborhood is a visible part of the East University Corridor and has a substantial amount of traffic along Dean Avenue and Grand Avenue. As the Fairgrounds facility is expanded to provide year-round activities, the Fairgrounds Neighborhood will continue to create an impression of the City of Des Moines for thousands of visitors each year. The East University Beautification Project will invest a significant amount of private and public funds to improve the appearance of this well traveled commercial corridor. The area will also benefit from the improvements to the ACCENT Neighborhood with their Urban Renewal Plan and tax increment financing (TIF) money as well as projects in the Capitol East Area. The Iowa State Bank has a unique program that promises to reinvest monies deposited with them in the Fairgrounds area. This neighborhood will also have new planning issues due to the impact of the proposed Agricultural Zone.

The Fairground Neighbors for Community Improvement was recognized in July 1996, and they have been very active. Evidence of that activity is the high number of zoning cases which are the result of a concentrated effort on the part of the organization to target zoning violations and problem properties. The neighborhood also had over 20 representatives of their association at the NAB presentation on June 11 and states that they have over 171 members. Selecting this neighborhood will support revitalization efforts in the Capitol East and ACCENT

Neighborhoods as well as planning projects on the east side of Des Moines.

2. The North of Grand Neighborhood had the lowest score of the eight applicants and was only two points short of being classified as a stable neighborhood. The neighborhood has housing opportunities ranging from apartments to quality starter homes to larger homes. The overall housing is characterized by variations on the bungalow or foursquare style, and sections of this neighborhood were identified as potential historic districts in the Bungalow/Foursquare Study. There was a low percentage of owner-occupied units, but this figure is slightly misleading because of the large apartment buildings along Grand and Ingersoll. The housing conditions were better than the City average, and the median income was very close to the median for the City. This area appeals to many middle to upper middle class residents who could choose to move to new areas being developed in the suburbs, but have chosen to stay in a more traditional neighborhood. Most of these homes need some updating to continue meeting the needs of the residents and retain their marketability.

The neighborhood is highly visible to traffic along Grand, Ingersoll, 31st Street, 35th Street, and 42nd Street. This neighborhood continues to have new development and private investment with projects such as the townhomes at 41st and Ingersoll, proposed condominiums along Grand, and several commercial projects along Ingersoll. The Ingersoll Corridor is one of a few successful neighborhood business areas in the City and continues to draw people who enjoy shopping along a tree-lined, pedestrian district.

The North of Grand Neighborhood Association is also a relatively new neighborhood organization that has been very active. They played a strong role in the development and approval of the new Neighborhood Pedestrian Corridor zoning that has been approved for Ingersoll Avenue. Their efforts have shown a strong commitment to supporting existing businesses while protecting the adjacent residential areas. Selecting North of Grand will support revitalization efforts in Woodland Heights and will provide a balance of a west-side neighborhood with an east-side neighborhood. This neighborhood will benefit from some planning assistance and a short-term implementation period to work on a few selected problems. NFC programs should be structured in such a way that they can meet the needs of updating certain properties, but do not duplicate financing programs that are already available from traditional private lenders.

3. Sherman Hill is another neighborhood that requires limited planning assistance, but will receive maximum benefit from NFC programs that target density reduction and non-traditional lending. The Sherman Hill Association worked with private consultants to create a plan that was approved by the City Council and continues to be active in revitalization efforts. Planning efforts would consist of evaluating and updating the plan and amending the City's Comprehensive Land Use Plan. The neighborhood will benefit from a few target projects and new curbs on a few streets. It will be possible to create a positive impact on the neighborhood with relatively little demand on available resources.

The above recommendations designate three neighborhoods which is a modification to the City's current policy. However, it is staff's opinion that the three selected neighborhoods and resource needs represent a unique mix and can be met by the City's Neighborhood

Revitalization Program.

On June 18, 1997, the NAB voted to follow the staff recommendations and select the following three neighborhoods: Fairgrounds Neighbors for Community Improvement, North of Grand Neighborhood Association, and Sherman Hill Association.

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