



Minutes

City of DeKalb Human Relations Commission June 7, 2022

The Human Relations Commission (HRC) held a regular meeting on June 7, 2022 in the Second Floor Training Room at the DeKalb Police Department.

A. Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 6:08 pm. The following members of the HRC were present: Joe Gastiger (Chair), Nadine Franklin, Lisa King and Andre Powell.

Other City officials/staff present:

- City Manager Bill Nicklas
- Scott Zak, Management Analyst and Staff Liaison to the HRC

B. Approval of Agenda – Additions/Deletions

Ms. King said she would have an announcement under New Business.

Chair Gastiger asked for a motion to approve the agenda. It was motioned by Ms. King and seconded by Ms. Franklin. The agenda was approved by unanimous voice vote.

C. Approval of Minutes – April 5, 2022 Regular Meeting

Chair Gastiger asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. King motioned, seconded by Ms. Franklin. The minutes were approved by unanimous voice vote.

D. Public Participation –

Resident Mark Charvat said license plate readers (LPRs) were discussed several times by the Commission but the LPR policy never went to the City Council and he felt it should.

Mr. Charvat said gas prices are high and the City is generating additional revenue through a 2.75 percent sales tax on non-food items. He said the gas tax should be temporarily eliminated since it is regressive or there should be a discussion on how the additional revenue is spent.

Chair Gastiger said the Commission will take the suggestion under advisement and that it might be a topic the Finance Advisory Committee wants to take up.



City Manager Nicklas explained the LPR policy is an operational policy of the Police Department and that operational policies do not have to go before the City Council. He said the Police Department has been approved to access the databases used by the LPRs and they are now operational.

Ms. Franklin read a letter from Joe Mitchell, pastor of New Hope Missionary Baptist Church. He said the community is excited about the demolitions of the 912 Edgebrook Drive apartment building, Campus Cinemas building and Hunter Hillcrest shopping center and that the vacancies represent hope, opportunity and a brighter future. He said chatter around the Annie Glidden North (AGN) neighborhood and its residents is a stereotyping and misrepresentation often grounded in racism that will take years of labor and engagement of the AGN residents to change. He said the voices of AGN residents are often overlooked and devalued. He said the AGN Revitalization Plan sets a goal to work towards. He said the redevelopment of the Hunter Hillcrest property should not just make a developer rich but meet the needs of those living in the neighborhood. Pastor Mitchell said he is concerned the development will become a colonization opportunity by individuals suffering from white savior syndrome and that he is concerned that those who do not live or operate in the community will tell those who do what they need. He said the residents should not be overlooked, that there is no such thing as collecting too much information from the people and that government leaders may need to go into the neighborhood and engage the residents.

Ms. King moved up her announcement to this portion of the agenda. She said the Mental Health Advisory Board is conducting a survey and would like every organization and its members to complete it and pass it on to others. She said the survey will help DeKalb County improve mental health services.

Returning to Pastor Mitchell's comments, Chair Gastiger said he wants to be mindful of white savior syndrome but does not want to start from square one, noting efforts were made to gather community input by the task force that developed the Annie Glidden North Revitalization Plan. He said he wants to be mindful of the community input already received while continuing discussions with the community.

Chair Gastiger distributed the core goals of the AGN Revitalization Plan. They include developing cohesion between the neighborhood and the rest of the City, providing residents with a foundation to thrive economically as long-term members of the community, increasing access to healthy food and addressing deficiencies in social services.

Ms. King asked why the goal to grow the local tax base with new residents does not include existing residents. Chair Gastiger said he did not know why but believes many of the goals fall under the Commission's purview.

Ms. King said revitalizing the AGN should be seen as a Citywide investment. Chair Gastiger notes the DeKalb Park District built a splash pad in Welsh Park to help make the neighborhood a destination, so there have been efforts to incorporate the whole City. Ms. Franklin said opening a Trader Joe's in the AGN would draw more people. Mr. Powell noted you first need to have someone who wants to build a Trader Joe's. City Nicklas said Trader Joe's has been on the City's radar for ten years but there is not enough population here, noting the City has 40,000 residents while the chain's Batavia location has 1.5 million people within 25 miles.

E. Old Business



F. New Business

1. Progress Report on Redevelopment in the AGN Neighborhood

City Manager Nicklas presented a brief history of the City's contributions to the AGN redevelopment. He says through demolitions, the City has created space for positive developments but the community will discuss what the specific uses will be starting with direction from the City Council.

Mr. Nicklas said four building initiatives had to be done after it was determined the area with the most decrepit properties and crime was the core of the neighborhood.

The City went to court and took ownership of the 912 Edgebrook apartment building. Nicklas said it had to be demolished and the resulting green space has been beneficial.

Mr. Nicklas said the Hunter Hillcrest shopping center was known to be decrepit but the City did not yet have a foothold in that area. That came when the City was able to arrange a land swap for property adjacent to Campus Cinemas. From there, an agreement was reached to demolish the movie theater.

For Hunter Hillcrest, a settlement was reached where the City could make an offer to purchase four of Hunter Properties' largest complexes. The City took ownership of Hunter Hillcrest, which has been razed, and the property will be seeded once the crushed concrete at the site is cleared. Mr. Nicklas said Hunter is claiming to own a spite strip on the east end of the Hunter Hillcrest property, but he said County records show it is the City's property. In total, Mr. Nicklas said the City has invested \$4.8 million in the AGN neighborhood over three-and-a-half years.

Chair Gastiger said he hopes the discussions on the future of the Hunter Hillcrest property go into the AGN neighborhood. Mr. Nicklas said the project will need to be sustainable since it is unlikely there will be federal money for support. He said that means the project will need to be profitable, and for the project to be profitable, it will need to be something that draws people into the neighborhood.

Mr. Powell questioned whether crime needs to be addressed first. Mr. Nicklas said following the sale of Hunter Tri-Frat, Hunter Ridgebrook and Lincoln Tower, police calls have gone down, more people are paying rent and families are feeling better.

Ms. King discussed successful neighborhood revitalizations in Chicago and suggested talking with those who have done this elsewhere. Mr. Nicklas said the City has done this, talking with groups from Chicago, including nonprofits. He said an option for Hunter Hillcrest is creating a short list of uses and then putting out a request for proposals, which can always be redone if the responses are not acceptable. He said the hard part is over and now is the point to work together and talk frankly while also making a decision.

Ms. King said a postcard survey with the top possible uses for the property may be a good idea for soliciting input. Chair Gastiger said he did not want to discount what other groups have done, including a recent meeting by Opportunity DeKalb with around 70 attendees. Mr. Powell said building



relationships may be necessary to solicit input since postcards may be thrown out. Ms. King added that new residents have moved to the neighborhood since the AGN plan was created, so you do not want to leave those people out.

Ms. King said she would like to see a Farmers' Market or other events in the neighborhood. Mr. Powell said a new building will be needed to grow the community.

G. Adjournment

Chair Gastiger asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Powell made the motion, seconded by Ms. King. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote. The meeting was declared adjourned at 7:37 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for July 5, 2022.

Scott Zak, Management Liaison & HRC Liaison

Minutes approved by the Human Relations Commission on August 2, 2022.