

Flint Neighborhoods United

Saturday June 6 2020, 9:30-11:30am

Question: what are you doing to help eliminate blight in your community?

- Been using a garbage picker to go around helping pick up trash off the block (doubles as exercise)
- We must view blight as a systemic issue directly related to racism; there are systems that have generated blight and abandonment by rewarding the relocation of wealth and economic activity and development away from existing communities
  - Land Bank formed to eliminate blight; that money is running out but we still have a huge problem with vacant and abandoned structures
  - Introducing legislation that will 1) set up national network to provide support to landbank organizations; 2) allocate significant financial resources delivered to those community-based organizations so that we can deal with blight at the scale appropriate to the problem
  - When we used the Hardest Hit funds, we knew it was significant but not sufficient
  - Federal government needs to play a bigger role in responding to this injustice; outcome of racial avoidance and economic abandonment
  - State could allow county governments that operate land banks to take an assessment out of delinquent
  - facilitate federal partnerships to address issues surrounding blight
  - Focus on commercial properties —> leaving abandoned buildings just sitting there is a product of socioeconomic and racial bias; seems to be acceptable to some policy makers that “that’s just the conditions we live in”
  - How can we lend public support?
    - Long list of advocacy organizations, mostly national but have local affiliates —> connect with Congressman Kildee’s office
    - Look at national and statewide networks and try to get your colleagues in other communities who would benefit from this bill to speak to their congresspeople and ask them to look at the Kildee-Ferguson bill
- **Q:** Has the city considered developing green teams? Essentially, green teams are hired "crews" in need of help reentering the workforce that are deployed & dedicated to corridors (usually commercial).
  - After 2008 recession, part of the federally-supported recovery efforts provided funding for those kinds of programs but then the money dried up
- **Q:** In an effort to make changes away from systemic racism, what local and state laws should we look to redact, change or implement?
  - Start in a particular moment where there are so many issues around police and policing
  - Beginning of economic inequity - start kids off at different starting lines
  - Let’s take the action we need to take now, reform around prison system and policing, but also look at structural issues

Clean-ups and taking care of flower barrels

Kearsley Park - cleaning out trash barrels; park clean-up happening in Circle Drive NA

Proud that City of Flint and its citizen have been a beacon of light during “this whole George Floyd situation” shown the world how a peaceful protest can be peaceful

Remodelling a house

Kearsley Park Neighborhood Association; Kearsley Park Muskrat caught people mud-bogging the other day

Completing last few days of library move out of Kearsley Street; then have to have a certificate before reopening; then some special procedures for COVID; doing our best to get things running up at Courtland Center

**Q:** Who is responsible for mowing the green spaces that dot the city in various areas such as the Y space where Commonwealth and Windemere veer apart.

- City has mowing contractors who they have contracts with to mow those parks and public gateways; some of them are supposed to be mowed by their contractors and some are not
- Old list of properties that are supposed to be maintained by contractors; contact Nancy Edwards for cross-referencing lists

Neithercut Community Association - we ran into senior citizens living by themselves who appear to have dementia but we can't find a relative to help; a member of the Neithercut Community Association has been going over to help these ladies, many of whom are retired school teachers: we're not relatives, but we know that they're there - any advice?

- Valley Area Agency on Aging - that is an umbrella organization
- People are not going to have the initiative to do this on their own because they don't realize anything is wrong [and we are not relatives]
- "Give VAAA a call yourself" / Call Debra Morgan

Mayor Neeley:

- Encourage all of you leaders - we're only halfway through this pandemic and as the state reemerges, we have to do what we can to educate people to make sure they do the best social distancing, wearing masks, and washing their hands
- Benefits for small business, contact City for concierge-type services
- We have a social movement going on in our country, people are gathering in spaces and places and not practicing social distancing
- City Hall is shut down to protect workers and residents and to slow the spread; Clerk's Office is still open, remotely: (810) 766-7418

**Q:** Address downtown parking issues as everything reopens?

- A: Downtown landscape is changing, including sanitation stations; outdoor seating venues for downtown restaurants while patron loads are being reduced; we are very proactive inside the City of Flint, we saved lives, no doubt about it, inside the City of Flint

**Q:** 11-year old daughter has been organizing against youth violence; we need to get youth more involved with this in the City of Flint; we don't want our youth to leave and just leave Flint behind; how can we get youth more involved with what's going on in the City of Flint and advocacy?

- West Flint Community Watch: what's the status of the blight department for the city at this moment in time?
  - We collected four more tons of garbage than we did last year; I know the community is frustrated
  - Blight doesn't grow from concrete, there's somebody out there dumping in the City of Flint and we need to be very angry at those individuals; we need to be very observant of who is dumping in our community
  - Blight is 12 months a year
  - Just secured some funding for Blight Fighters

Michael Freeman, Executive Land Bank

- Lots of experiencing with land banking in county and state
- Priorities and challenges
- Started our as community organizing in 1994 with AmeriCorps, worked with Central Park Neighborhood, the interchange, grand traverse north and south, and carriage down

- Worked with 5 neighborhoods doing community organizing
- My work experience is based on my life experience; bought a house in Carriage Town in 1994
- My family's been here since the 1850s and I'm dedicated to change
- Got my passion for community development working as an AmeriCorps member
- Ethic of service; learns to appreciate their community and giving back
- I returned working on real estate development projects; working with local initiatives to support corporations
- Worked on Metawanenee Housing; was able to help Salem Housing
- From a developer's piece, they could have just built a multi-unit building to maximize revenue but they worked with the neighborhood to build single family homes and duplexes, something that fit into the fabric of the neighborhood, gave Salem Housing revenue; showed that we need to do development that is neighborhood driven
- Because I am a neighborhood resident, I want to see development that makes my neighborhood stronger
- You shouldn't be developed upon, but a partner in development
- Worked at City of Detroit, helped restructure housing and revitalization department; Detroit has had many issues related to grant-making, federal restructuring, was there for 3 years helping restructure the department; during the 3 years I was there they met their spend goals; met that requirement with HUD
- Much like Flint, Detroiters want to see what you're doing in neighborhoods
- **Q:** How do you plan to get properties back into the hands of City Residents?
  - Right now, problem is that we own 27.5% of the City of Flint; thing is that we don't go out and seek this property; in fact local units of gov't have rights of first refusal; we are getting properties that no one wants or is going to take; someone has to assemble it and put it together; we can do things community wants, like pocket parks or gardens; was better than the auction system through which the neighborhoods lost all control
- **Q:** Right now, without any identification on the properties, people don't know who owns them - if Land Bank would identify their properties, residents could know if someone is dumping
  - A: It's self-evident; also concern that when we advertised properties as landbank properties people were using them as havens for drug and human trafficking, dumping, etc.
  - We're trying to update our database in real time; right now, when there's something suspicious happening in a property, they're contacting Land Bank to sign a waiver to allow law enforcement to go in
  - Suggestion: Rather than posting Landbank, perhaps they could just post NO Trespassing without any further information.
- **Q:** How do you see the Landbank in regards to social justice? Relationship between social justice and blight?
  - The big issue in the City of Flint is that blight is everywhere, disproportionately high in the predominantly
  - We have to look at empowering communities to deal with the blight, knowing we don't have all the answers or all the resources (10:48)
  - 15,133 properties in the city of Flint, for us just to do a monthly mow it would cost us \$7M; our total budget is 1.7M; which is why we do clean and green
  - Being as responsible as we can be with all of these properties, we have to work with the City and with Community Residents
  - We need help from community residents to notify us when there's dumping and blighted properties we have to take care of

- Everybody should be empowered through our programs and what we're trying to do in neighborhoods as well
- **Q:** Removing redlining Flint is marked with, dealing with high rates for insurance and financing - computer system at city hall and county government: a lot of people have lost their homes while paying their taxes, the thing that recognizes that the company that handles the back end of the website for processing; the issue is that if somebody doesn't pay their taxes, the computer system may not be looking at the information correctly, and may not be transmitted accurately between City and State? That system needs to be audited to see if that indeed is a problem.
  - **A:** Every time we think we've gotten in front of redlining; people find craftier ways; we need policy change to make sure people in City are not unfairly treated
  - **A:** regarding technology; Land Bank is a quasi-governmental entity but we're at arm's length from the county and city so we don't have access to the software
- Lots of requests for Michael to attend neighborhood meetings; work with and speak to Genesee County Landlords Association at their August meeting
  - Want to make sure people are not being set up for failure
- **Q:** Have been maintaining a property for 22 years; tried to purchase the property since 2018, been bouncing back and forth with the city.
- Goal is to be accessible and transparent, want to communicate with people and find out what's going on, can't lead this organization without input from everybody
- Phone: (810) 257- 3088, ext. 521
- mfreeman@thelandbank.org

#### Traffic Taming Task Force

- 52 cars a day in the last 22 days, means our children are at risk and any pedestrian is at risk
- Windiate Park, park has been adopted by a family over there since 2014
  - Trying to get more families and more people in the neighborhood to use parks, need help from the City to promote safety
- Crim has received a Safe Routes to Parks Grant as well as a few other grants, Traffic Taming Task Force has done a lot of work to improve safety in neighborhoods; group meets regularly first Monday of each month

#### Gary

- 58525 cases, 5616 deaths, 38088 recoveries
- Suspending restrictions on youth obtaining work permits
- Governor appointed Sean Egan as workplace safety director to oversee COVID-19 opening
- More regions and economic sectors have been opened as of June 10, on June 15 salons, barbershops and salons will open
- Additional food assistance programs
- Plan for police reform to address racial equity calling for police culture where Michigan residents are treated with dignity and respect under the law
- Appointed 25 leaders to return to school advisory council to work closely with Governor in reopening schools
- Recently extended executive order allowing administrative hearings by phone
- Rolled back EOs on hospital visitation restrictions
- Requested extension of Michigan National Guard to combat COVID-19, which was approved by the federal government until August 21st

- **Q:** Re National Guard, can they disinfect public spaces? We have a community tool shed that is closed. Working to make sure tools are sanitized every time they go out. Is it possible to have a national guard person over there to help with that?
- **Q:** how can people join that panel for school reopening?
- **A:** panel has already been solidified, had over 2000 applicants, 25 members of the council are already in place, it's a temporary council