

MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING

A Report of the
Special Moratorium Committee

January 21, 2014

The specific charge of the committee, formed by Ordinance in August 2013, was to **“study Multi-family housing issues...for the purpose of reviewing the multi-family housing inventory status and what recommendations may or may not need to be made moving forward in regards to multi-family zoning and development in the City of Jonesboro.”**

THE MEMBERSHIP

- Committee members were selected to give varying perspectives
- Representation included those pro & con on the subject; comprised of representatives from real estate (commercial & residential), construction, landlords association, development, design, community activism, planning commissioners, medical, education and professional service.
- Four members were either current or former members of the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission; and there were **three current** and two former members of the Jonesboro City Council.
- Ex-officio members included members of the administration and department heads.

THE PROCESS

- Committee members brought perspective & biases with them to the process, accumulated over lifetimes of personal and/or professional involvement with various issues related to multi-family housing.
- Education process was designed to spend at least **90-120 days hearing from professionals and organizations** to give each member an equal footing in terms of exposure to a cross section of multi-family issues.
- Over the course of the process, we heard from various entities and professionals, including, but not limited to, representatives of: Planning Department, MPO, Code Enforcement, Quality of Life, Building Inspection, Police, Fire, Arkansas Fair Housing Commission, Jonesboro Urban Renewal Housing Association, the Nettleton, Jonesboro and Westside School Districts, the current Metropolitan Area Planning Commission, Engineering Department, Land Use Committee, and J-QUAD Planning Consultants.

THE PROCESS

- We spent several months seeing presentations, asking questions, and evaluating information.
- We studied maps, reviewed law and evaluated the results of the J-QUAD Multi-Family Housing Study commissioned by the City Council.
- As with any process of this magnitude, there were specific pieces of information that were met with some degree of skepticism (ex: 2% active vacancy rate); in the end, however, it was the aggregate of information we received that steered the committee's recommendations, not a single statistic or piece of data.
- After the process of information gathering and evaluation were completed, the committee set about to **systematically make recommendations** to the administration in response to our charge via the Ordinance and to respond to both the physical and market conditions we discovered as part of our due diligence.

THE PROCESS

- We approached this task systematically, starting with a core set of recommendations that could be built upon to address the wide range of issues we were faced with.
- The recommendation process evolved in a series of individual votes on each specific recommendation over a period of three separate meetings, culminating with **a unanimous committee vote** at the last meeting to approve the document before you containing the recommendation en masse. (The vote was 9-0 with the Chair abstaining and one active member absent due to illness).
- The recommendations were given to the Mayor on January 16, 2014.
- It is anticipated that the City Council will consider these recommendations, and in concert with the administration distribute them to the appropriate Council Sub-Committees and departments for further study, public meetings, etc.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Any multi-family development with **4 or more units in a single development** or location be considered as a **commercial business** by the City of Jonesboro.

- As a commercial business, they would be required to **annually obtain a privilege license**; with categorization, fee schedules, and other decisions to be determined by the appropriate department and/or city council committee.

They would be required with the privilege license application to **identify an in-market contact**, complete with address and telephone number.

- As a commercial business, they would **no longer be eligible for residential sanitation services** provided by the City of Jonesboro.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- In regards to property management, once an owner or entity **has an inventory of 36 multi-family units in Jonesboro**, they would be required to identify on file with the City of Jonesboro a designated in-market property manager (**this could be the owner if they so choose**).

- This property manager would be able to **act with certain authority on behalf of the owner**, and to accept service on the owner's behalf.

- Additionally, **any single complex with 100 units or more would be required to have an on-site manager living on the property**. This person would also be designated as the property manager, and would be able to act with certain authority on behalf of the owner, and to accept service on the owner's behalf.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- We recommend that the administration consider **adopting a property maintenance code**. While the specific would be identified by the appropriate department/council committee, we do recommend that those **regulations be extracted from the ICC International Property Maintenance Code**.
- We recommend that the administration form a separate committee to begin the study of impact fees for future development. **We feel the issue of impact fees is not limited to multi-family development only**, but the study should be comprehensive across all categories of development.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- We recommend that **greater interactivity and communication be developed with the city's school systems** to aid them in their ability to plan, understand, prepare for and contribute commentary regarding multi-family development within their districts.
- Specifically, we recommend that Superintendents of the Districts inside the city limits be given representation for themselves or their designee on the **Comprehensive Land Use and Master Street Plan Committees**.
- We further recommend that a policy be adopted where developers are mandated to notify affected districts by **Certified or Registered Mail** to the Superintendent of any multi-family rezoning application and to show proof of that notification as part of their application process. We also recommend this certified notification extend to developers of currently zoned multi-family property upon submittal of a site plan for approval that will add multi-family units to their existing development.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- We also recommend that upon the adoption of a property maintenance code, that **training be made available to any interested SRO's or other designees** of the school district in learning how to look for code violations when doing on-site visits to multi-family developments; and to clearly demonstrate a communication channel to report any noted violations to the proper department.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- In regards to land use planning, we feel that **a properly maintained land use plan can be the single greatest tool** for Planning Commissioners, School Districts, Board of Zoning & Adjustment and City Council members.
- We recommend that you consider reviewing the current guidelines and charges to the existing Land Use and Master Street Plan committees; and work to **shorten the life expectancy of those documents to no longer than 2 years**, with adequate review meetings and processes to keep both documents as "living" documents reflective of a changing market.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- One of the specific charges given to the committee was consideration of existing inventory.
- Through our research, we identified some **82 parcels of property** already zoned to accommodate multi-family development, representing **a potential for 2,018 individual units**.
- After receiving research conducted by the city planning department, it was determined that **886.27 of those units (representing approximately 47% of the entire projected inventory)** were associated **within the flood plain** either partially or fully.
- It was also learned that **76 of the 82 parcels (93%)** were rezoned **over 15 years ago**; with **67 of those (82%)** having been rezoned **28 years ago as a result of the mass annexation**.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- We feel that these issues lower expectations that the bulk of these zoned properties will actually be developed; and given the previous recommendations for addressing what most felt were the most pressing issues regarding improving the impact that multi-family housing has on our community; that **no action to universally limit future rezoning is necessary**.

